

NEWS IN BRIEF

The UK Renewable Fuel Agency (RFA) has for the first time published data on the supply of biofuels under the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation.¹ The RFA requires suppliers to submit monthly reports on sustainability and other issues and they clearly show that the UK market is dominated by imports. In May/June only 29 per cent of biofuels met the “environmental standards” that had been developed by the RFA.

1. <http://www.renewablefuelsagency.org/reportsandpublications/RTFOreports.cfm>

In a decision that has surprised NGOs and governments alike, a Dutch judge ruled that local authorities are allowed to demand timber with an FSC-label in public tenders. The case was brought by a non-certified Dutch timber company against the local council of Boskoop which requires FSC-certified timber in all its projects. The judge ruled that the council’s requirement was not unreasonable and that the local authority did not need to accept alternative equivalents to FSC. The reason given was that it is easy for building companies to get an FSC certificate.

Indigenous leaders questioned the World Bank’s climate change approach at the 16 September 2008 Global Forest Leaders Forum on Forests and Climate Change, hosted by the World Bank. They insisted that indigenous peoples living in forested regions of the world must be included in climate change negotiations that shape policies pertaining to their forests. Not only will schemes to save forests fail if indigenous peoples are ignored, they will also be the first to suffer from the impending ecosystem collapse that industrial societies are creating.

Proposal to control illegal timber postponed again

A coalition of European NGOs including FERN, Friends of the Earth, WWF, Greenpeace and Global Witness have written to President of the European Commission, Mr Barroso to express their deep concern about the postponement of a legislative proposal to control imports and use of illegally sourced timber in Europe.¹ It had been expected that the regulation would have been published on 10 September 2008, but sources suggest that the Finnish timber lobby were unhappy with the proposal and urged the Commission to delay the process again. A large part of the timber industry is

however very supportive of legislation, including the European Hardwood Federation (UCBD). In a letter to Stavros Dimas, Commissioner for DG Environment,² they stated “This legislation could send an important signal to other non EU countries, that illegal logging and related trade is not acceptable within international markets”. It is therefore disappointing that President Barroso seems to have listened to some rogue elements in the timber industry and again postponed the legislative process.

1. Letter available at www.fern.org
2. Available from saskia@fern.org

Ongoing struggles in Liberia

A coalition of Liberian NGOs has published a briefing outlining their concerns with the current forest law reform process.¹ In it they describe the Government of Liberia’s 2006 decision to reform the forest sector as the beginning of a decisive break with the notorious past. They go on to say however that there are now indications that the reform process is failing and the forest sector is gradually slipping back into old ways of doing business. In order to break this downward spiral, the NGOs call on the Forestry Development Authority to stop the process of issuing

timber licenses and reflect on lessons learnt from ongoing efforts to reopen the logging industry. The NGOs fear that otherwise the country is headed for another cycle of widespread illegal logging. One of the first steps forward could be for the government to echo Ghana’s process of negotiating a VPA with the EU. Unfortunately, although the government expressed its interest in December 2007 the steps necessary to make this a reality have yet to be taken.

1. Available at http://www.loggingoff.info/media/articles/article_642.pdf

The true cost of monoculture tree plantations

On 21 September 2008, groups around the globe will hold actions to demonstrate the negative environmental, social and economic impacts that large-scale monoculture tree plantations have on local communities.¹ As part of this, the World Rainforest Movement will present a foresters statement to the UN FAO on 22 September, signed by over 100 forestry professionals from 15 countries, explaining that plantations are not forests. The current FAO definition of a forest does not make any distinction between a natural forest or a monoculture tree plantation, thereby providing misleading data on deforestation and forest degradation.

In a response to the climate crisis, EU institutions wrongly tend to support the increase of large-scale tree plantations for the production of treethanol (biofuels from trees.) FERN believes that rather than focusing on biofuel from wood, the EU should seriously look into the use of European wood biomass for electricity generation and heating. A discussion paper on this will be available from the FERN website next week. More information on the EU’s position on biofuels is also available from the FERN website.²

1. Information on these impacts can be accessed at www.wrm.org.uy
2. http://www.fern.org/media/documents/document_4245_4246.pdf