

EU Forest Watch

Informing NGOs, MEPs, Member States, the European Commission and the media

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FSC must improve its performance

An unlikely alliance of the timber trade and NGOs, including FERN, have called upon the FSC to make changes to its system in order to maintain – or to regain – its credibility. In a joint statement¹ presented to FSC members at a side event at the FSC General Assembly in Cape Town (3 - 7 November 2008), they outlined the changes required. Both the companies and NGOs pointed out that inadequate performance of some certification bodies lies at the heart of the problem when they certify forests and chains of custody that are not in full compliance with existing FSC standards. The statement follows a series of meetings between timber companies and NGOs; together they commissioned a report that compiles lessons gleaned from other certification schemes. The FSC was also criticised in a statement by the World Rainforest Movement, signed by more than 3,500 individuals, demanding that the FSC halts the certification of large-scale monoculture tree plantations, which it incorrectly designates as “forests”.² The concerns addressed by the NGO-industry statement were shared by many others at the FSC General Assembly; it is therefore hoped that the FSC secretariat and board will take rapid steps to improve the system in line with the recommendations, which should also reverse the trend of certifying environmentally and socially harmful large-scale monoculture tree plantations.

1. “Regaining Credibility and Rebuilding Support,” www.fern.org

2. See www.wrm.org.uy

Biofuel bonus

Negotiations for a proposed renewable energy directive to include a binding target for biofuels got underway in November 2008 between Member States, the European Parliament and the Commission. Under discussion is a 2014 review of progress toward achieving the EU target for renewables in EU energy use, with a view to raising this to 20 percent by 2020. The draft text also requires greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions savings of 35 percent for biofuels compared to conventional fuels, to increase to 50 percent in 2017. On the basis of data provided by the EU’s Joint Research Centre, GHG emissions-savings default values for biofuels have been updated in the draft; the underlying research has not yet been made public.

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Council prepares for Poznan

In preparation for the UNFCCC meeting in Poznan (1-12 December 2008), the Environment Council met on 20 October 2008. The Council Conclusions¹ reiterate the EU’s commitment to 30 percent GHG emissions reduction by 2020, and to industrialised countries’ 80-95 percent reduction by 2050, as well as its support for the Kyoto Protocol and a new global climate agreement. The Council sees energy efficiency as the most effective way to reduce emissions and calls for an increase in the use of renewables, yet the conclusions fall short of suggesting halting subsidies to fossil fuel extraction and increasing subsidies to renewable energy and energy-saving technologies. Global

subsidies to fossil fuel extraction amount to 200 billion USD per year compared to slightly more than 30 billion USD per year to renewable energy (including nuclear energy).² Concerning forests, the Council is willing “under appropriate conditions” to consider how to harness public financing and set up carbon markets with respect to forestry practices, including afforestation, reforestation, reduction of deforestation and forest degradation. Although a more cautious formulation may have been more in line with the Commission’s recent Communication,³ the Council wisely does not heed Parliament’s precipitous call for the inclusion of forest credits in the EU

Emissions Trading Scheme.⁴ The Council insists on concluding a forest-climate deal in Copenhagen and wants to make substantial progress toward this in Poznan. It is hopeful that the Council notes the limitations of carbon-trading and calls for significant public investment up to and beyond 2012. To maintain progress, the Council must continue to recognise deforestation as a market failure that cannot be rectified by market forces.

1. See www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/envir/103492.pdf

2. “Axe fossil-fuel handouts, says Browne,” *Financial Times*, 3 November 2008

3. <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/deforestation.htm>

4. See *Forest Watch* 131



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Photo: Jutta Kill

NEWS IN BRIEF

PNG: Logging Rights Revoked: Environmental groups in Papua New Guinea have won an important, two-year legal battle against the Malaysian logging giant Rimbunan Hijau. Striking a blow against corruption and intimidation, the Supreme Court quashed the illegal grant of logging rights: Rimbunan must stop logging an 800,000-hectare concession of pristine rainforest. For more information, visit Malaysiakini (www.malaysiakini.com) and the PNG Ecoforestry Forum (www.eco-forestry.org.pg; contact teff@global.net.pg).

Governance – a missing link in the REDD debate: In October 2008, the World Resources Institute, Instituto Centro de Vida and IMAZON undertook a “Governance of Forests Initiative” intended to raise the profile of basic governance issues in the numerous REDD mechanisms currently under construction. At present “forest-climate” debates focus on definitions, measuring techniques and financial expectations; basic requirements of good governance are hardly on the agenda. By early 2009, this initiative will elaborate a framework of criteria to assess and improve forest governance, focussing on the key components of governance – law, policy, institutions. To ensure their credibility and positive consequences for forests and forest-dependent communities, new mechanisms must fully integrate governance issues from the outset.

FERN’s new publications: To provide much-needed background analysis for the forest-climate debate, FERN has issued three new publications: an overview of different countries’ REDD proposals to be discussed at the UNFCCC COP in Poznan; a detailed analysis of the most relevant country proposals to date; and a study of plans developed by nine countries and adopted by the World Bank to increase finance for the development of national REDD strategies. The reports indicate that REDD schemes risk becoming a perverse incentive to countries with high deforestation rates and that, with few exceptions, countries do not acknowledge that recognition of forest peoples’ rights must be a prerequisite for any REDD. See www.fern.org.

ASEAN inches toward human rights organ

In November 2007, the Member States of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) established a Charter¹ for the organisation mandating, among other things, the creation of a human rights body. In October 2008, after ratification by all Member States, the provisions of the Charter became legally binding, including the requirement for a human rights body.

Since the Charter was established, a High Level Panel convened by the Member States has been drafting a document to create what is likely to be an ASEAN human rights commission. Although no official agreement yet exists as to the form or mandate of the body, part of the discussion swirling around the governments and civil society in ASEAN

nations concerns the possible linking of this new body to future discussions about the establishment of an ASEAN human rights court.

High hopes surround the creation of an ASEAN human rights court that could eventually offer a voice and some form of redress to peoples harmed by the actions, or silent complicity, of their own governments – for instance, traditional peoples displaced by large commercial operations, including logging. While the creation of a court is still distant, the creation of an ASEAN human rights body would be in itself a landmark achievement. What form this body takes is the subject of much scrutiny.

1. www.aseansec.org/21085.htm

Clearer guidelines needed for Natura 2000

In September 2008, news broke that Lukoil, the largest oil company in Russia, made an agreement with local Polish authorities to build underground containers for petrol and gas at the fringes of the Białowieża Primeval Forest. Transport here will seriously affect the area and the risks for the entire ecosystem, and specifically soil contamination, present a clear threat to this Natura 2000 site. This case underscores the inadequate adaptation of EU conservation mechanisms to the realm of the new Member States whose

institutions are still too weak to balance conflicting interests effectively. Much clearer guidelines on appropriate conservation management and compatibility of different uses with Natura 2000 conservation objectives are clearly needed; this cannot be left to Member States to interpret. More funds must be allocated to Natura 2000 and specific financial mechanisms to improve conservation standards in biologically important forests should also be discussed.

Biofuel bonus continued

The changes in default values facilitate the European biofuels industry achieving these goals passively, as the emissions-saving values for many crops have increased significantly, e.g. from 35 to 52 percent for sugar beet ethanol. Parliament’s Environment Committee deleted the controversial default values from the text, preferring to require that actual emission savings be reported. The plenary vote in the Parliament is foreseen for early December 2008. FERN supports the NGOs call to suspend all biofuels targets.

Forest Agenda

18 November: FLEGT-VPA meeting about Republic of Congo, Brussels.

19-20 November: FERN bio-energy meeting, Brussels.

1-12 December: Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, Poznan, Poland.