

EU • FOREST WATCH

..... **SPECIAL REPORT: CLIMATE CHANGE**

Brussels boiling over on carbon sinks issue

As citizens of southeast England clear up flood and storm damage and Swiss villagers contemplate their future after the recent landslides, climate negotiators in Brussels and beyond continue preparations for the sixth Conference of the Parties (COP6) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in The Hague.

Until now, the EU has been exercising a precautionary approach towards the use of 'carbon sinks' in the Kyoto Protocol, and has been pushing for a Protocol that is environmentally sound. Gaining credits for the natural ability of forests and soils to temporarily fix carbon could open up a huge loophole in the Protocol that would divert actions to address greenhouse gas emissions, and delay the urgent switch to renewable energy sources.

Since reductions in domestic greenhouse gas emissions are our only sound option to mitigate the dangerous impacts of climate change, it is vital for the success of the negotiations in The Hague that the EU does not concede to the US, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and

Canada. However, there is pressure from some member states to do exactly that.

Sweden is one of three EU member states (as well as France and Finland) who would like to see the 'opening up' of domestic sink activities under the Kyoto Protocol.

The Swedish Environment Minister, Kjell Larsson, gave unconvincing answers to NGO questions on Sweden's position on sinks at a meeting (on 11 October) with environment NGOs in preparation for the forthcoming Swedish Presidency of the EU.

Larsson admitted that the sinks issue could damage the Protocol and agreed that commercial forestry activities should have originally been left out of the Protocol, but offered little consolation to NGOs concerned about the inclusion of sinks in the Clean Development Mechanism.

Fern believes that EU Ministers need to present a strong stand against the inclusion of 'carbon sinks', based on sound science, good economics, and prudent politics. For more on carbon sinks visit Fern's website.

NGOs to contribute to special council session

NGOs welcomed the proposal from Mme Dominique Voynet, the French Environment Minister, suggesting that NGOs attend the special council session on climate change to be held on 7 November 2000. With European

NGOs playing an increasingly vital role in reminding negotiating Parties of the issues at stake, and translating the implications of potential decisions to the public, this willingness to work together is vital.

BRIEF YOURSELF

Fern's essential guide to COP6

Fern's website - for information, news and analysis: www.greennet.org.uk/fern/Climate/climate_change.htm

Sinking the Kyoto Protocol - Fern's background briefing to COP6. See Fern's website.

Tree Trouble - report from Friends of the Earth showing the impact of large-scale tree plantations. See Fern's website.

CO₂lonialism - report investigating tree plantations, carbon credits and land conflicts in Uganda: www.fivh.no/norwatch/

Carbon Upsets - Norwegian 'Carbon Plantations' in Tanzania. Norwatch: www.fivh.no/norwatch/

Mount Tamalpais Declaration against plantations in the CDM - Sign-on at www.wrm.org.uy

International Forum of Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change - First declaration on www.wrm.org.uy

The Dyson Effect: Carbon 'Offset' Forestry and the Privatisation of the Atmosphere - Cornerhouse Briefing 15 www.wrm.org.uy

Cheating the Kyoto Protocol: Loopholes and Environmental Effectiveness - Greenpeace International www.greenpeace.org

Birdlife International - Briefing for the Subsidiary Bodies to the Climate Change Convention: www.iisd.ca/climate/sb13/lyonfi00.html

Climate Voice - Sign up to the online petition at www.climatevoice.org

Gathering Steam - Report on the human cost of climate change at www.foe.co.uk

Fern will ask Hague delegates to refocus on climate issue

Fern's objective at COP6 will be to increase governmental awareness of the need for forest conservation and refocus governmental attention on emission reduction targets.

Forests and climate change are linked in two important ways. First, global warming could affect at least one third of existing forests, exacerbating forest loss and all its associated problems. Second, forests play an important role in the regulation of the earth's temperature and weather patterns by storing large quantities of carbon dioxide and water. Protecting what remains of the world's forests should be a top priority on government agendas.

The concept of carbon sinks addresses neither of these links adequately. Where sinks are already included in the Protocol, their use should be limited to truly verifiable credits and where they have not

been included yet¹, they should never be. As long as sinks allow countries with greenhouse gas reduction targets to escape their emission reduction obligations, there is no place for them in the Kyoto Protocol.

To halt climate change the world needs to act in two major areas: cutting fossil fuel emissions and forest conservation. For the former, the major issue is to promote the use of clean, renewable and low impact energy sources. The inclusion of forests and plantations in the Kyoto Protocol's flexible mechanisms, in particular the Clean Development Mechanism, will only serve to delay the switch to such energy sources.

For the latter, the major issue is to address the underlying causes of forest loss. These include consumption and production patterns especially in the North, lack of recognition of forest peoples' land and

land use rights, and over-estimation of timber values over other forest products. So far, the climate change debate has not addressed these at all.

Fern will be running a pre-COP6 workshop (jointly organised with Both Ends) for Southern and Northern NGOs to assess the impact of COP6 decisions on forests and forest peoples. On Monday 13 November a side event organised by a coalition of NGOs will provide climate change negotiators with evidence of the social and environmental impacts of large-scale tree plantations, which are increasing and are often established in the name of climate change mitigation.

For Fern's Briefing '*Sinking the Kyoto Protocol*' see Fern's website.

¹ In the Clean Development Mechanism and in Article 3.4/additional activities.

NGOs highlight threat to biodiversity from carbon sinks in urgent CBD letter

NGOs have urged the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to ensure that decisions taken at COP6 will not pose a threat to forest biological diversity or forest peoples. In their letter, NGOs stressed that decisions taken at COP6 should be consistent with those of the Convention on Biological Diversity, including those that acknowledge the importance of the rights of indigenous peoples.

The letter also pointed out that the reduction of forests to mere carbon stores fails to acknowledge the wider importance of forest biological diversity and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, and threatens to exacerbate forest loss.

In particular, the large-scale tree plantations that will be encouraged by widespread carbon sink projects will threaten biodiversity and communities as they often encroach on agricultural lands, replace and degrade native ecosystems, worsen

inequity in land ownership and undermine local conservation practices. Such plantations are already being promoted¹ in the name of climate change mitigation, even before COP6 has started.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to the conservation of biodiversity, and negotiators should consider the impacts on forest

biodiversity and indigenous peoples before forests are included widely under the Kyoto Protocol.

The December issue of *EU Forest Watch* will contain a special report on progress made within the Convention on Biological Diversity.

¹ *Tree Trouble* by Friends of the Earth International, WRM and Fern, available from Fern or FoEI. Also see case studies by Norwatch at www.fivh.no/norwatch

EU Forest Watch informs NGOs, MEPs and European Commission officials about the forest debate in Brussels. It is published by Fern, an NGO created by the World Rainforest Movement. Fern advocates changes in EU activities in order to achieve:

- conservation and sustainable management of forests,
- respect for the rights of forest peoples,
- greater transparency in EU aid to tropical forest countries.

For more information visit our website
<http://www.greenet.org.uk/fern>

Contacts

Chantal Marijnissen & Sofia Ryder
Fern, 20 Av des Celtes,
1040 Brussels, Belgium.
Tel: 32 2 742 24 36 / 733 36 53
Fax: 32 2 736 80 54
fern@arcadis.be

Saskia Ozinga & Jutta Kill
Fosseway Business Park,
1C Stratford Road
Moreton-in-Marsh
UK - GL56 9NQ
Tel: 44 1608 652 895
Fax: 44 1608 652 878
saskia@gn.apc.org