

E-news update February 12 2007

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CLIMATE

- 1.1. EU urges relaunch of global climate talks

5 February 2007, EurActiv

A worldwide agreement on climate change is now more urgently needed than ever, said Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas after the publication of a major UN-backed report blaming most of global warming on humans.

New scientific evidence on climate change is "alarming" and calls for "more action to limit greenhouse-gas emissions" worldwide, the EU said on 2 February.

"It is now more urgent than ever that the international community gets down to serious negotiations on a comprehensive new worldwide agreement to stop global warming," said Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas.

The call came in reaction to a new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published on 2 February 2007, which showed that global average temperature will likely rise by a further 1.8-4.0°C this century, after increasing by more than 0.7°C in the past 100 years.

"Even the low end of this range would take the temperature rise since pre-industrial times to above 2°C, the level at which there could be irreversible and possibly catastrophic consequences," the Commission said in a statement.

On 10 January, the EU executive put forward plans for a 'unilateral' 20% reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions by 2020 in a bid to reduce Europe's dependency on imported fuels and trigger a new 'industrial revolution' (EurActiv 11/01/07).

But it also warned that the EU, being responsible for only 14% of worldwide greenhouse-gas emissions, could not solve the problem alone.

"To stabilise global emissions of greenhouse gases, the next step must be for developed countries to cut their emissions to 30% below 1990 levels by 2020," Dimas added. "In particular, we expect the US as the world first emitter of greenhouse gases to take action."

Meanwhile, on 3 February, more than 40 countries signed a call for action to "promote growth that respects the environment" at a conference on global ecological governance organised by French President Jacques Chirac in Paris.

1.2. Global warming 'Live Aid' planned

9 February 2007, Financial Times

A day of concerts across the globe intended to exceed Live Aid in scale and ambition is to be held this summer to highlight the issue of climate change.

Organisers of the event, scheduled to take place on 7 July, hope to amass a worldwide television audience of two billion people in order to present the message about global warming.

The series of co-ordinated concerts in seven cities - London, Washington DC, Shanghai, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town and Kyoto - is expected to be announced today by the former American vice-president Al Gore, who is now a figurehead of the campaign against climate change.

Promoters of the event, which will be branded "SOS", yesterday promised that the line-up of artists - likely to include U2, Coldplay and the Scissor Sisters - will "dwarf" those amassed for Live Aid and its successor, Live8.

Venues for the London event are still being discussed but the shortlist includes Hyde Park and the new Wembley stadium.

Organisers hope that up to three million people will gather at the venues and other cities for the day of interlinked music performances and film and television events.

One promoter told the Financial Times that the event was to be modelled on Live Aid and Live8. However, the source said: "The talent involved is just exponentially bigger because the issue itself is bigger. Live Aid was about asking people to stump up money, this about effecting systemic change. The aim is not just to drive awareness but to get people to take action."

ENERGY

2.1. Greenhouse Gas Ocean Burial Okayed from Feb 10

12 February 2007, Planet Ark Reuters

International rules allowing burial of greenhouse gases beneath the seabed enter into force on Saturday in what will be a step toward fighting global warming, if storage costs are cut and leaks can be averted.

The new rules will permit industrialists to capture heat-trapping gases from big emitters such as coal-fired power plants or steel mills and entomb them offshore -- slowing warming while allowing continued use of fossil fuels.

"Storage of carbon dioxide under the seabed will be allowed from Feb. 10, 2007 under amendments to an international agreement governing the dumping of wastes at sea," the UN's International Maritime Organisation (IMO) said in a statement.

The new rules, agreed upon in November, amend the UN's London Convention on dumping at sea. Its text had been unclear about whether carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas emitted mainly by burning fossil fuels, counted as a pollutant.

The changes apply to oceans worldwide and could clear the way to more investment in future subsea carbon storage by governments and companies, despite criticism by environmentalists that there are few safeguards against leaks.

"This removes a lack of clarity and doubt for investors," said Tore Torp, carbon dioxide storage adviser at Norwegian oil group Statoil which opened the world's first commercial store of carbon dioxide in the North Sea in 1996.

A 2005 UN report, however, warned that such storage would only be widely applied if the penalty for emitting carbon dioxide to the atmosphere was US\$25-US\$30 a tonne -- far above current prices in a European Union market.

It said carbon burial could be one of the top contributors to slowing warming this century. And in Paris last week, top climate scientists warned that global warming could bring rising seas, more floods, storms and heatwaves by 2100.

Acid, leaks

Statoil's view has been that previous rules on ocean storage already allowed carbon burial. On land, national laws generally govern burial of carbon dioxide.

Greenpeace, which has branded subsea storage as illegal dumping in the past, said the revisions were too hasty.

"We think the London Convention has not taken objections seriously -- such as who will be responsible for leaks, who will oversee the storage, who will clean up," he said.

Carbon dioxide is not toxic but can lead to acidification of sea water, making it hard for creatures from shrimp to oysters to build shells. In heavy concentrations above ground it can displace air and so asphyxiate animals and plants.

The amendments pave the way for carbon storage in "sub-seabed geological formations" and say gases injected must consist "overwhelmingly" of carbon dioxide with no added waste.

Torp said there was uncertainty about what "overwhelmingly" meant -- emissions from a coal-fired power plant, for instance, might include some toxic sulphur dioxide.

Statoil has injected about nine million tonnes of carbon dioxide in rocks far below its Sleipner gas field in the past decade, with no signs of leaks, Torp said. Following Sleipner, two other big carbon storage sites are in operation in Canada and Algeria and more are planned.

2.2. Spain Aims to Cut Energy use by 1 Pct a Year – Report

12 February 2007, Planet Ark Reuters

Spain can cut its energy consumption by at least 1 percent a year with a series of efficiency measures proposed in a report due this week, newspaper El Pais reported on Sunday.

The government aims to raise electricity prices, ban coal-fired central heating from 2012, limit air conditioning and penalise the most fuel-hungry vehicles, it said.

Spain's greenhouse gas emissions in 2004 were 49 percent over 1990 levels -- the highest of any Kyoto backer -- and it has to cut that to a 15 percent increase by 2008-12, under its commitment to the international agreement to curb climate change named after the Japanese city where it was signed.

El Pais said the government wanted regional authorities to send inspectors to public and commercial buildings to make sure their thermostats were set at the most efficient temperature, and introduce efficiency standards for air conditioning equipment.

Sales of air conditioners have soared in recent years and power companies now have to cope with pronounced summer peaks in demand for electricity.

Other measures, such as energy efficiency standards and compulsory solar panels on all new buildings, are already largely in force.

The report is due to be discussed with regional governments on Tuesday, together with the Environment Ministry's latest assessment on the impact of climate change in Spain.

That document, leaked to El Pais on Saturday, uses the same data the ministry has published in the past. It could be made obsolete by new scientific data within a few months, the daily El Mundo said.

It forecasts the average temperature is likely to rise by 2 degrees Celsius between 2011 and 2040.

By the end of the century, depending on the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere, average temperatures could rise by 5 to 6 Celsius.

Inland areas would be worse hit than coastal ones, with temperatures in July rising as much as 7 Celsius, the leaked report shows. That is in line with forecasts the ministry has used in the past.

The report has differing forecasts for rain patterns.

One study says there will be little change, while another sees a 17 percent fall in the amount of rain falling by 2060.

Spain, and some other Mediterranean countries, are particularly at risk because much of the country is already hot and dry, and prone to desertification.

A ministry report last year shows more than 30 percent of Spain's land is already at high or very high risk of desertification.

In the Canary Islands and Valencia well over 50 percent of land is classified as high risk.

Global warming speeds this process by drying up soil moisture faster.

2.3. Over 145 environmental, development and social organisations call upon EU to abandon biofuel targets

8 February 2007, Joint Press Release from biofuelwatch and Corporate Europe Observatory

In the build up to the EU Conference of Energy Ministers next Monday February 12th that will discuss future EU energy strategy, over 145 European social and environmental organisations have sent out a strong call to the Council of the European Union, EU Commissioners and ministers to stop promoting rainforest destruction for biofuels. The groups believe that a moratorium on biofuel targets is needed to protect natural forests and local communities in the global south.

In an Open Letter to the EU institutions and citizens (full text available in English at website: <http://tinyurl.com/2vgtke>, and in Spanish at: <http://tinyurl.com/2hoov6>). The letter was launched and signed by 19 organisations and individuals. It is open to further signatures, and in one week, a further 130 organisations have signed. The regularly updated list of signatures can be found on www.biofuelwatch.org.uk.

Key points are:

The proposed targets will amongst other things promote crops with poor greenhouse gas balances, trigger deforestation and loss of biodiversity and exacerbate local land use conflicts.

Not only is deforestation itself a major cause of CO₂ emissions, but biodiesel from South East Asian palm oil (where most world palm oil currently originates), can be expected to cause between two and eight times as much CO₂ emissions from damage to peat as the CO₂ emissions from the fossil fuel diesel it replaces.

The EU Biofuels directive puts 20 Million hectares of rainforest in Indonesia at extreme risk. If destroyed, and its associated peat land is drained, this could release 50 Billion tonnes of carbon – the equivalent of 6 years of current levels of carbon emissions. When added to current extremely high levels of global fossil fuel emissions, it could take the planet over a climate tipping point.

Citizens of the producer countries, including Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Cameroon already suffer the consequences of the current expansion of the monoculture crops that are increasingly used for biofuel production, like palm oil, soya and sugar cane. These include increased destruction of biodiversity and rural livelihoods and further erosion of food security, with serious impacts on water, soil, and regional climate patterns. There are also human rights concerns including very poor working conditions and low wages, violent land conflicts, death and health crises due to the use of agrochemicals and deforestation.

Earlier this month, hundreds of Latin American NGOs, which are part of five networks, wrote an open letter to the EU in which they criticised the EU plans as presented by the commission: "It is most unlikely that Europe will ever achieve self-sufficiency in the production of biofuel from national production of energy crops and therefore it is very possible that this will be done at the expense of lands on which the food sovereignty of our countries depend".

The Indonesian NGO, Sawit Watch, which represents communities and workers affected by oil palm plantations, has sent their own open letter to European politicians, warning that Europe's Biofuel policy threatens to cause deforestation, more global warming, and further social conflict in Indonesia and that Europe must act to reduce, not boost the demand for palm oil.

EU ministers will discuss the EU energy package at their March 7th-8th meeting after which, the commission is expected to table a formal legislative proposal to increase the share of biofuels in transport to the minimum binding target of 10%.

Nina Holland from Corporate Europe Observatory says "we very much hope that ministers will listen to the concerns raised by Southern NGOs and to the strong evidence that our biofuel policy is making deforestation and global warming even worse. We hope that they will abandon the proposals before them and instead agree policies which will reduce Europe's energy demand promote truly renewable energy forms."

Biofuelwatch's Almuth Ernsting says "these biofuels targets are likely to make the climate crisis worse – they essentially export EU transport emissions to the South in the form of emissions from deforestation and intensive agriculture-they may literally take us to a climate tipping point and disaster".

Biofuelwatch's Andrew Boswell says: "Aggressive targets for biofuels in the EU do not help the people in the South. Such targets only benefit large industries that will displace small farmers and communities from their land to develop vast monoculture plantations. The local people displaced this way face conflicts over their land, loss of indigenous food supplies, and crises in health and housing. "

2.4. Europe set to weaken key climate target for newcars

7 February 2007, European Federation for Transport and Environment

The European Commission has proposed to weaken an eleven-year-old climate target for new cars just five days after the global scientific community warned policymakers to take serious and urgent action on climate change. The Commission plans to introduce a legally binding target for average CO₂ emissions from new cars of 130 grammes per kilometer, ten grammes more than the standing target of 120 g/km set in 1996.

The impact of the weakened target will be 100 million tonnes of additional CO2 emissions over the period 2012-2020, equivalent to twice the annual emissions of Sweden.

The proposal does, for the first time, say that carmakers will now face binding legislation to improve fuel efficiency. The announcement follows the failure by the car industry to cut carbon dioxide emissions from new cars at the rate needed to meet the voluntary target agreed in 1998.

Jos Dings, director of T&E said: "Today's announcement finally recognises, ten years late, that regulation is needed on CO2 emissions just as it is on safety and other forms of air pollution from cars."

The existing target for new cars set by the European Union in 1996 was for the average new car to emit 120 grammes of CO2 per kilometre by 2005, equivalent to 4.5 (diesel) or 5.0 (petrol) litres of fuel per 100km. The target date has already been delayed until 2010 and now until 2012. The Commission proposal to allow measures undertaken by other stakeholders to count towards the car industry target is the third weakening of the strategy.

Jos Dings comments: "Not only is the car industry failing on its voluntary commitment to cut CO2 emissions, the Commission now wants to reward this failure with a weaker fuel-efficiency target. It's a very disappointing response to calls last week by the IPCC for serious action on climate change."

Some eighteen million cars are sold in Europe every year. The average car has a lifespan of well over a decade meaning gas guzzlers sold this year will still be emitting high levels of CO2 for many years to come.

"Climate change is a long-term challenge and the car industry also needs a long term outlook. An 80 gramme target by 2020 would ensure that we double fuel efficiency within a decade. It's up to the European Parliament and heads of state to produce a longer term solution to this long term problem." said Dings.

John Hontelez, Secretary General of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), commented: "The German car industry, aided by the German government and a German commissioner, has apparently succeeded in weakening the proposal. The Commission has rewarded carmakers' refusal to make fuel efficiency a priority with a more lenient standard than is needed to stop the continuing growth of greenhouse gas emissions from cars in Europe. This undermines the Commission's resolve to lead, regionally and globally, on fighting climate change."

2.5. Uganda Tackles Power Crisis with Energy-Saving Bulbs

9 February 2007, Reuters

Uganda will distribute 800,000 energy-saving light bulbs to poor households in a bid to tackle a crippling power shortage and lower energy demand, an official said on Thursday.

Energy Efficiency Commissioner James Baanabe told Reuters German lamp manufacturer Osram had won the contract to supply the bulbs in the first phase of a campaign to reduce pressure on the east African country's scarce power resources.

"It will raise awareness about the need for energy efficiency," he said. "They will mainly be given to people who have not been able to afford them."

Uganda generates most of its energy from hydroelectric turbines on the Nile river, but rising demand plus a recent drop in the water levels of Lake Victoria, the Nile's source, have sparked power shortages and load shedding.

Officials say Uganda's dams produce around 140 MW at current lake levels, leaving a shortfall of around 160 MW.

Baanabe said taxes on energy efficient bulbs -- which included a 25 percent import duty and 18 percent VAT -- had been scrapped in Uganda's last budget, reducing their cost by nearly half.

He said energy saving bulbs would free up 30 megawatts (MW) of energy capacity if load shedding continues, but he added that savings would increase as power rationing eases.

"Each bulb uses one sixth of the power a normal bulb uses. We could even save about 50 MW, if load shedding stops."

Energy saving strategies are becoming a key weapon in the fight against global warming caused by burning fossil fuels.

Some experts blame surface evaporation linked to global warming for Lake Victoria's falling water levels.

"With our power crisis, we've been using (petroleum) generators," Baanabe said. "But instead of throwing out more carbon (into the atmosphere) we should be saving energy."

CONFERENCES

3.1. JI workshop

The third JI workshop organised by the UNFCCC secretariat will be held in Bonn (Germany) on 13-14 February 2007.

The technical workshop will provide an opportunity for interaction between the Joint Implementation Supervisory Committee (JISC) and designated focal points, as well as independent entities and other stakeholders.

Participants will exchange their experiences with a view to improving their understanding of each others' roles, the environment in which projects are developed and the overall potential for JI projects. The workshop will allow the JISC to take into account the various concerns and suggestions in its further development and operation of the verification procedure under the JISC.

Further information on the workshop is available under http://ji.unfccc.int/Workshop/February_2007/index.html.

3.2. Conference "What jobs in a low carbon European economy?"

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is delighted to invite you to the conference "What jobs in a low carbon European economy?" that will take place at the ITUH auditorium in Brussels, Belgium on 20 and 21 February 2007.

Please consult also www.etuc.org for the latest version of the conference programme (under the page "events").

3.3. Workshop National adaptation strategies

7 march 2007, Netherlands

The dutch ministry of VROM (Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment) will organise a workshop on 7 march 2007 from 9.30 till 16.30 in The Hague in the Netherlands. The main objective for this workshop is the exchange of experiences concerning building national strategies with a spatial dimension, the challenges which have to be met and the problems or dilemmas which are faced.

The workshop is meant for those -within or outside the EU- who are actively involved in building national adaptation strategies or closely related to this subject:

The programme for the workshop will as soon as possible be drawn up and sent to all interested persons.

More info: Marieke Soeters and Fincent van Woerden, Ministry of VROM, 0031-70-3394939 / 0031-70-3398005, marieke.soeters@minvrom.nl, fincent.vanwoerden@minvrom.nl

3.4. CDM/JI workshop

The German Environment Ministry is hosting a CDM/JI workshop at the TerraTec environment technology fair in Leipzig. The workshop will be held on 6 – 7 March.

Some of the main topics on the agenda will be the initial experience gained with Track 2 JI and the potential for linking the EU emissions trading system to emerging emissions trading systems in the USA. The ministry will also report on the current status regarding its CDM initiative. Further talks will cover energy efficiency in JI, the programmatic CDM and price signals on carbon markets.

The workshop is being organised by the Wuppertal Institute on behalf of the German Environment Ministry. For more information see: www.wupperinst.org/jiko -> Workshops

3.5. International Workshop on Numerical Modelling - Policy Interface (NMPI 2007)

Stuttgart, Germany, 12th - 13th of March 2007.

The workshop is expected to improve the dialogue between modellers (mostly physical scientists / engineers) and policy (mostly social scientists) in the water environment. The NMPI scientific committee believes improving the interface between policy analysis / development and modelling is a necessary step towards better policy formulation especially at the international level (not mention within the context of adaptation to the vagaries of climate change). Participants are invited from both the social sciences, environmental sciences and numerical modelling disciplines. The aim of the

