

E-news update 16 March 2009

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CLIMATE

1.1. Finance ministers dodge responsibility in climate cash decision

10 March 2009, FOEE

European Finance Ministers failed to lay hard cash on the table today to support decarbonising economies in developing countries and to compensate for coping with the consequences of climate change [1]. Carbon offsetting schemes, such as the Clean Development Mechanism, have been put forward as mechanisms to tackle climate change and encourage financial flows to the global South. Friends of the Earth Europe believes that they are a loophole for industrialised countries to avoid making necessary emission cuts at home.

Finance ministers meeting today at the Economic and Financial Affairs Council in Brussels have dodged responsibility for providing developing countries with the funds they will need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and respond to the already existing impacts of climate change. Taking into account the historical responsibility of the EU countries for producing emissions, and their capacity to pay, the EU's fair share of the bill is of at least Euro 35 billion per year.

Esther Bollendorff, climate campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe, said: "At a time when we are facing the most severe economic crisis of the last 50 years, the EU cannot afford to make poorly thought out and selfish financial choices, bailing out the car industry and bankrupt bankers. The EU has a moral and historical obligation to help the developing world tackle climate change, a problem that Europeans helped to create. The EU has to pay its fair share – estimated to be at least Euro 35 billion per year"

Finance ministers have also endorsed the role of the Clean Development Mechanism as an important tool to deliver substantial financial flows from the EU to developing countries, and as a way to engage developing countries in the carbon trading market. The Clean Development Mechanism has however led to well-documented negative impacts on communities and the environment in the global South [2]. "The Clean Development Mechanism is inherently unfair and is based on the failure of industrialised countries to achieve necessary emissions reduction targets at home," said Bollendorff. She added: "EU leaders have to acknowledge that the ability to buy credits abroad will not provide any incentive for European economies to develop the technologies needed for much steeper emission cuts."

Friends of the Earth Europe ask that the EU commit to 40% cuts in domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 2020[3]. The current target of 20% gives no significant chance to stay below a 2 degree temperature increase and includes unacceptably high levels of external credits.

Link:

http://www.foeeurope.org/press/2009/Mar10_finance_ministers_dodge_responsibility_on_climate_cash.html

1.2. Sweden sets climate goals example for EU

12 March 2009, WWF

The new climate and clean energy package proposed by Sweden should serve as an example for all EU countries ahead of crucial global warming negotiations, WWF says. If followed by other industrialised nations the deal could lead towards a low carbon future and help combat climate change.

Sweden is just preparing to take over the EU's rotating presidency and it is likely to play a major role during important international meetings culminating in the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, in December, where leaders from about 190 countries will try to agree a global deal to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

Sweden's Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren said that his country now aims by 2020 for renewable energy to comprise 50 percent of all energy produced, for the Swedish car fleet to be independent of fossil fuels 10 years later and for the country to be carbon neutral by 2050.

"We think it is fantastic that the government recognises the important role that eco-efficiency plays in improving the economy," Lasse Gustavsson, Secretary general of WWF in Sweden said.

"If the Swedish government can convince other industrial countries to adopt Sweden's ambitious climate package, the world would be better suited for combating destructive climate change," he said.

Sweden, which now plans to slash its greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent from its 1990 levels within the next 11 years, was asked to cut CO2 output by just 17 percent.

The government said it would stay committed to the proposed goals and that they were independent of whether or not a global climate agreement is achieved.

It wants to reach these goals through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), Carlrgren said.

Unfortunately, according to WWF, CDM is currently an ineffective system in desperate need of reform.

WWF's concern is that unless serious reforms of the CDM system are enacted, there is a risk that the 40 percent goal will be watered down to a mere 27 percent.

"We would prefer to see a greater portion of these reductions made within Sweden's own borders," Mr Gustavsson said.

Link: http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/policy/wwf_europe_environment/?158741/WWF-Sweden-sets-climate-goals-example-for-EU

1.3. Copenhagen summit urges immediate action on climate change

12 March 2009, Nature News

Climate experts who met this week in Denmark have warned that the overall prognosis on climate change is worse than previous estimates have suggested.

More than 2,000 delegates - including climatologists, social scientists and economists - from 80 nations gathered for the International Scientific Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen from 10–12 March. Their goal was to provide a scientific update to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) 2007 assessment on global warming.

The latest results made for bleak listening at times. Scientists cautioned that some of the impacts of global warming, such as sea level rise and loss of summer sea ice in the Arctic, are happening much sooner and more severely than scientists had estimated just two years ago. "What we are seeing now is that some aspects are worse than expected," says Stefan Rahmstorf, head of Earth System Analysis at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany and a plenary speaker at the congress.

Addressing congress delegates this morning, economist Nicholas Stern said that policymakers now need to consider the consequences of temperature rises of 6°C or more. Stern, who conducted a review in 2006 of the economic effects of climate change on behalf of the British government, was not alone in expressing a growing sense of urgency to policymakers.

On 10 March, climatologist Konrad Steffen of the University of Colorado at Boulder said that sea levels could rise as much as 1 metre by 2100, according to new analyses of ice loss from Greenland. The top estimate from the IPCC's 2007 report was a rise of 0.59 metres by the end of the century.

The information presented this week in Copenhagen will form the basis of a 30-page document, to be published in early June. Though the document will be peer reviewed, it will not have the rigor or the authority of the IPCC assessments. The IPCC's fourth assessment report in 2007 evaluated peer-reviewed research that was published before 2006, a process that involved more than 2,500 experts and over 130 nations.

"The IPCC process is slow and it tries to go for a consensus view. The output from this conference will hopefully be a majority view but it's unlikely to be a consensus view," says Jason Lowe, Head of Mitigation Advice at the UK Met Office. "The real value in the updated assessment is how current it will be."

In December this year, parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will descend on Copenhagen to wrangle over the details of a new global climate deal — a potential successor to the Kyoto Protocol. Although the outcome of this week's conference will not officially inform the UNFCCC meeting in December, it will help "decision makers understand the extent of change and the urgent need to make a decision about how to respond", says Katharine Richardson, congress chair and biological oceanographer at the University of Copenhagen.

More at: http://www.nature.com/news/2009/090312/full/news.2009.165.html?s=news_rss

1.4. UN's Ban Says U.S. To Work For 2009 Climate Deal

13 March 2009, Reuters

The Obama administration will work with the United Nations to reach a climate change deal acceptable to the world community by the end of 2009, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on Thursday.

Speaking to reporters after a two-day trip to Washington earlier this week, Ban said he and the new American leader agreed completely on the urgency of tackling the problem of global warming.

"President Obama and I share a fundamental commitment -- 2009 must be the year of climate change. That means reaching a comprehensive agreement in Copenhagen by year's end," the U.N. chief said at a monthly news conference.

"With U.S. leadership, in partnership with the United Nations, we can and will reach a climate change deal that all nations can embrace," he added.

The U.N. hopes to have a new global treaty on climate change in place at a conference in Copenhagen in December. Some experts warn that the world will face more droughts, floods and rising seas if global warming is not addressed soon.

Ban will attend the G20 leaders' summit in London next month amid fears that the issue could be pushed far down the agenda by the global economic crisis and the need to restore faith in shattered financial markets.

The U.N. chief had planned to invite Obama and other leaders to New York this month for what was dubbed a "mini summit" on climate change, hoping that the U.S. president would use the occasion to announce a reversal on the issue.

Former U.S. President George W. Bush was criticized in much of the developed world for rejecting the U.N. Kyoto Protocol, which set binding targets for reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.

The mini summit was shelved because of the unlikelihood that the U.S. president would attend and the realization that the issue would be raised by the G20 in London, according to diplomats and U.N. officials. Ban also said on Thursday that he would urge the G20 nations to honor their commitments to help the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries and push ahead with investments in environmentally friendly initiatives.

"President Obama and I further agreed that 'green' investments must be a major part of any global stimulus plan," he said. "If we are going to spend such tremendous sums of money, let us be smart about it." British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who is hosting the April 2 summit, supports the idea, according to Ban. Britain also has dismissed objections from countries like Russia who want the summit to focus exclusively on the financial crisis.

"We must not allow the financial turmoil to distract us from meeting the challenges of climate change and development," said a British government document obtained by Reuters on Wednesday.

Link: <http://planetark.org/enviro-news/item/52009>

ENERGY

2.1. EU must not cool its commitment to efficient appliances

12 March 2009, FOEE

Environmental organisations are urging Europe not to agree weak energy efficiency measures and confusing changes to energy labels for key appliances this week.

Experts from European Union member states will vote on 'green' standards for household appliances like televisions and fridges and how to update or introduce new energy labelling of these products. The Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment and Friends of the Earth Europe call on European decision-makers to stop caving in to industry pressure and strengthen the proposals so that Europe can meet its environmental and climate change targets.

The Eco-design policy aims to ensure that products sold in the EU use the best available technologies to reduce energy consumption. It represents one of the best opportunities for Europe to fight climate change and drastically cut its greenhouse gas emissions.

The EU aims to become 20% more energy efficient by 2020. According to the Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment and Friends of the Earth Europe, ambitious eco-design rules have the potential to cut Europe's CO2 emissions by 450 million tons per year by 2020 – equivalent to the emissions of all European cars!

Increased efficiency of products to be voted on this month, including electric motors (11 March), fridges (13 March), televisions (17 March), dishwashers (30 March) and washing machines (31 March) could account for a 100 million ton CO2 saving annually.

However, Magda Stoczkiwicz, director of Friends of the Earth Europe commented: "The draft texts so far lack the ambition to deliver the reductions needed and are being weakened by industry lobbying. Rules relating to televisions, fridges and motors, and the timeline for their implementation, are particularly weak." Manufacturers are also attempting to kill the successful 'A-G' energy labelling scheme, which would be bad news for consumers and the environment in terms of saving energy and money.

On March 12th environmental organisations will launch the website www.coolproducts.eu to keep European consumers informed about developments in energy efficient appliances.

An Avaaz petition signed by 116,829 citizens from across Europe will be delivered to negotiators calling on them to adopt efficiency standards strong enough to achieve half of the EU's current emissions reduction targets for 2020.

Link:

http://www.foeeurope.org/press/2009/Mar09_EU_must_not_cool_its_commitment_to_efficient_appliances.html

WATER

3.1. Action needed to avoid world water crisis, UN says

12 March 2009, Reuters

The world needs to act urgently to avoid a global water crisis due to increased population, rising living standards, dietary changes and more biofuels production, the United Nations warned on Thursday.

By 2030, nearly half of the world's people will be living in areas of acute water shortage, said a report jointly produced by more than two dozen U.N. bodies and issued ahead of a major conference on water to be held in Istanbul next week.

The report, "Water in a Changing World," made "clear that urgent action is needed if we are to avoid a global water crisis," said a foreword by Koichiro Matsuura, head of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

"Despite the vital importance of water to all aspects of human life, the sector has been plagued by a chronic lack of political support, poor governance and underinvestment."

"As a result, hundreds of millions of people around the world remain trapped in poverty and ill health and exposed to the risk of water-related disasters, environmental degradation and even political instability and conflict," Matsuura said.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has repeatedly identified water shortage as a major underlying cause of the conflict in Darfur, western Sudan, which began with a rebellion against the central government six years ago. Water is also a major issue between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

The world's population of 6.6 billion is forecast to rise by 2.5 billion by 2050, with most of the growth in developing countries, many in regions where water is already scarce.

The growth rate means demand for fresh water is increasing by 64 billion cubic meters a year, the report said. Authors told a news conference that most of North Africa and the Middle East had already reached the limits of their water resources.

BIOFUELS RISK

Migration from the countryside to cities was also increasing water use, the 318-page report said, as was growing consumption of meat -- the production of which requires more water than vegetables -- in China and elsewhere.

The report added to recent U.N. warnings about the downsides of developing biofuels to replace heavily polluting hydrocarbons as an energy source, because of the water needed to grow crops like corn and sugar cane to produce ethanol.

Saying about 2,500 liters of water is needed to make 1 liter of biofuel, it said implementing all current national biofuel policies and plans would take 180 cubic kilometers of extra irrigation water and 30 million hectares of cropland.

"The impact could be large for some countries, including China and India, and for some regions of large countries, such as the United States," it said. "There could also be significant implications for water resources, with possible feedback into global grain markets."

When oil prices peaked at over \$140 a barrel last year, "the kneejerk reaction was 'well, we are going to grow our energy - biofuels.' But nobody took account of how much water it was going to require," William Cosgrove, coordinator of the report, told journalists.

On the positive side, the report pointed to successful water policies in Uganda and Turkey and said a U.N. goal of halving the population lacking access to safe drinking water by 2015 would be achieved except in sub-Saharan Africa.

But it said in many countries water policies failed to make any impact because key decisions affecting water were made in other sectors of the economy.

Government and business leaders needed to act now to boost investment in water infrastructure, it said, adding, "Unsustainable management and inequitable access to water resources cannot continue."

Link: <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSN12399772>

TRANSPORT

4.1. CEE Bankwatch and Greenpeace reaction to EIB loans to carmakers

12 March 2009, GREENPEACE

Brussels, Belgium — The European Investment Bank (EIB) has extended €3 billion in cheap loans to eight European carmakers for the development and production of cleaner vehicles.[1] Greenpeace and CEE Bankwatch Network call on the EIB to ensure that money goes to initiatives with a true impact on cutting carbon emissions from cars and not just to small-scale 'greenwash' projects.

EU carmakers are already bound by EU legislation to reduce the climate impact of cars.[2] The EIB has underlined that its role is not to bail out the struggling car industry.[3]

"We need to make sure that these loans go to projects which reduce carbon emissions and not to window dressing for the car industry. Carmakers should be held accountable and deliver on their promises to green their fleets. If they do not, EIB loans should be recalled," said Franziska Achterberg, Greenpeace EU transport policy campaigner.

Pippa Gallop, Research coordinator at Bankwatch, said: "It is hard to see which car companies are not in need of restructuring, with over-capacity estimated at about 20 percent. With the rapid approval of new car loans the EIB needs to make sure that the appraisal of the viability of the projects is not compromised."

Link: <http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/press-centre/press-releases2/cee-bankwatch-and-greenpeace-r>

4.2. External cost charging moves closer in Eurovignette review

12 March, 2009, T&E

The principle of charging heavy vehicles for the 'external costs' they cause has been approved by MEPs in their response to the Commission's proposed revision of the Eurovignette directive, but confusion still surrounds details of how member states can charge for the costs of congestion.

The Eurovignette revision is a landmark piece of legislation intended to remove some EU restrictions on charging for external costs, although MEPs backed a Commission proposal to maintain a ban on charging for climate change costs.

But the overall status of congestion charging under the draft legislation remains unclear after MEPs removed from an annex a definition of congestion costs and a proposed formula for calculating congestion charges.

