

E-news update May 29 2006

In this issue:

POLICY

1.1. UN conference agrees agenda for negotiations on new emission reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol

ENERGY AND EMISSIONS

- 2.1. EU Commission to sign away billions on nuclear
- 2.2. Nitrogen Limitation Restricts CO2 Absorption by Trees
- 2.3. EBRD and EIB Launch Greenhouse Gas Fund

CLIMATE IMPACTS

3.1. Subtropic Warming Could Mean Bigger Deserts – Study

CONFERENCES

- 4.1. Russia and the Carbon Market
- 4.2. IPCC WGIII Meeting with NGOs - September 2006
- 4.3. „Potential of and major barriers to large-scale integration of renewable electricity and co-generation into energy supplies in the EU New Member States"

PUBLICATIONS

5.1. ExxonMobil's Corporate Governance on Climate Change

ANNOUNCEMENT

6.1. New Greenhouse Gas Inventory Experts Network

POLICY

1.1. UN conference agrees agenda for negotiations on new emission reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol

26 May 2006, UNFCCC press release

A first round of UN climate negotiations for the period following the end of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol has successfully concluded in Bonn, Germany.

"We have set an ambitious agenda which focuses on a sound process leading towards science-based emission reduction targets on the part of industrialized countries within the next few years" said Michael Zammit Cutajar, Chair of the "Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol". "There is a strong sense of urgency and there's clear consensus that there should be no gap after 2012, when the first commitment period ends", he added.

The Kyoto Protocol requires 36 industrialized Parties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions below levels specified for each of them in the Protocol. Overall, this should amount to reductions of at least 5% below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012.

Richard Kinley, acting head of the United Nations Climate Change Secretariat said: "Developing countries, which will be hit hardest by climate change, are pushing for rapid agreement on deeper emission cuts. This is the message we have also been hearing from business leaders meeting here in Bonn, who have underlined the importance of a speedy process from their perspective. Obviously, the carbon market needs clear signals."

The issue of new technologies and private sector also featured prominently in the first round of the "Dialogue on long-term cooperative action", open to all 189 Parties to the Convention, which were held earlier during the Bonn meeting.

"Industrialized countries have emphasised the importance of these negotiations being based on the latest scientific data and taking into account new technological solutions available today" said Gao Feng, UNFCCC Deputy Executive Secretary, Implementation. "Negotiations on the next phase of the Kyoto Protocol and discussions in the 'Dialogue on long-term cooperative action' are mutually reinforcing in shaping international action to combat climate change", he added.

Halldor Thorgeirsson, UNFCCC Deputy Executive Secretary, Scientific and Technological Advice, pointed towards the progress that had been made in the Convention's subsidiary bodies during the May meeting. "Representatives have been excited by the prospects offered by new technologies such as carbon capture and storage", he said. "Countries agreed to take forward the work on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries."

The next rounds of negotiations under Kyoto Protocol and talks under the Convention will take place at a United Nations Climate Change Conference from 6 to 17 November in Nairobi, Kenya.

ENERGY AND EMISSIONS

2.1. EU Commission to sign away billions on nuclear fusion - Friends of the Earth deplore wasted funds and push for renewable alternatives

23 May 2006, Friends of the Earth Europe

Friends of the Earth Europe today deplored the signing away of €3.6 billion by the European Commission. The money is to be wasted on the next generation of nuclear fusion reactor, in the founding agreement for the International Thermal Experiment Reactor (ITER).

This commitment by the EU will be made even though there is no evidence that nuclear fusion will ever provide a commercially viable energy source. The agreement will also be signed by Canada, China, India, Republic of Korea, Russia and the USA.

Silva Hermann, energy campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe said, "Nuclear fusion may never be economically or technically practical. It is a new technique that has been a few decades away from reality for nearly 50 years. This goal of commercial viability has become a moving target and we have no guarantee that it will ever actually be reached. Even fusion's most ardent supporter, French President Jacques Chirac, admits that it won't be available commercially until the end of this century.

In signing this agreement today, the European Commission has got its priorities wrong. Investment in energy efficiency and renewables is the only reliable way to guarantee energy security. Giving billions of Euros to a single nuclear project that is so far from reality is ill judged and irresponsible," Hermann added.

"Even if fusion does come through as an option, it will still carry risks of proliferation and radioactive contamination. Friends of the Earth Europe calls on the European Commission to withdraw from the fusion project.

Funding should instead be channelled into EU research and development programmes to develop sustainable and environmentally-friendly energy technologies, like solar, wind and biomass," she noted.

Despite the involvement of seven international parties in the project, the EU will fund over one third of the total construction and operating costs of the ITER, through Euratom.

In order to pay for its share of the reactor, the Commission has proposed to double the annual funding of nuclear fusion in the proposed Framework Programme for research and Development.

Losing out to nuclear fusion in the budget shake-up is the fund for other energy research and development. This pot of money for energy could have been spent on Research and Development for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

Nuclear fusion is a new technique in development that involves the release of a large amount of energy when two atoms are merged together. (In contrast, in current nuclear power stations, energy is released by splitting atoms in a process called fission). In total the EU Commission proposes to allocate two thirds of its energy budget to nuclear technology "including fission and fusion. This proposal is yet to be approved by the European Council and the European Parliament and Friends of the Earth Europe is calling on these institutions to reject the Euratom budget proposal.

2.2. Nitrogen Limitation Restricts CO2 Absorption by Trees
from Science for Environment Policy

Global atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2) concentrations are expected to increase in the next decades, thus enhancing surface temperatures significantly. Forests are considered to be CO2 sinks as trees consume carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. It had previously been suggested that rising concentrations of CO2 would improve plant growth and, consequently, the amount of carbon dioxide

that plants can absorb. Yet, the biosphere response to elevated CO₂ concentration is not well understood and so some uncertainties remain in the prediction of future CO₂ concentrations. For example, it is unknown if CO₂-induced stimulation of plant growth will be maintained or inhibited by limited nitrogen availability. Nitrogen levels, also essential for plant growth, are not rising as fast as those of carbon dioxide. This means there is a limit to how fast plants can grow, and therefore how much carbon dioxide they can absorb.

A recent study has assessed plants' ability to grow and flourish in nitrogen-depleted soil, which, scientists believe, will become more common as atmospheric carbon dioxide levels rise. In this six-year study, the longest of its kind, scientists grew 16 different grassland plants in 296 field plots. Previous studies had been conducted with a single, or very few, plant species. The scientists provided a broad test of carbon dioxide and nitrogen interactions by exposing the plots to both ambient and elevated carbon dioxide levels, and varying levels of nitrogen.

According to the results, rising atmospheric CO₂ levels will affect the availability of soil N and the deposition of atmospheric N, which in turn is likely to restrict the plant biomass accumulation of atmospheric CO₂. Insufficient amounts of nitrogen gas will limit plant growth regardless of how much extra carbon dioxide is available. Scientists also found that even when nitrogen was not the limiting factor, other nutrients that were in short supply had the same restrictive effect.

Therefore, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels may rise even faster than anticipated, because ecosystems may not be able to store as much carbon as had been predicted.

Overall, the current study shows that soil N supply is probably an important constraint on global terrestrial responses to elevated CO₂. The predictions of global N and C dynamics should take into consideration the role of terrestrial ecosystems as current and future carbon sinks, as well as the impacts of global change factors such as anthropogenic fertilisation with C and N.

Source: Reich P. B. et al. (2006) « Nitrogen limitation constrains sustainability of ecosystem response to CO₂ », Nature 440: 922-925.

2.3. EBRD and EIB Launch Greenhouse Gas Fund

23 May 2006, Planet Ark

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) have launched a carbon fund for rich nations to invest in clean energy projects in Central and Eastern Europe.

Rich states will be able to put the resulting greenhouse gas emission cuts -- in units called carbon credits -- towards their own pollution targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

The joint initiative, which resembles similar funds overseen by the World Bank, will be open to shareholder nations of the EBRD and EIB -- including European Union member states and others.

Luxembourg was the first to pledge backing but it did not disclose how much money it would contribute.

The EBRD and EIB promote sustainable economic development in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, and will be able to co-invest in the projects. "The EBRD and EIB together have a unique knowledge of the region, as well as a private project financing expertise in a region which has the potential to become one of the largest exporters of carbon credits due to its current high energy and carbon intensity," the EBRD said in a statement issued late on Sunday.

CLIMATE IMPACTS

3.1. Subtropic Warming Could Mean Bigger Deserts – Study

26 May 2006, Planet Ark

Earth's atmosphere is warming faster over the subtropics than anywhere else, which could mean bigger deserts and more drought from Africa to Australia to the Middle East, researchers said on Thursday.

The fast-heating area girdles the globe at about 30 degrees north and south latitude, crossing the southern United States, southern China and north Africa in the Northern Hemisphere, and southern Australia, South Africa and southern South America in the Southern Hemisphere.

Based on 25 years of satellite data, researchers at the University of Washington also determined that the jet streams -- a pattern of westerly winds that help drive weather in both hemispheres -- have shifted about 70 miles (112.7 km) toward their respective poles.

This is important because the jet streams mark the northern and southern boundaries of the tropic climate zones, said John Wallace, an atmospheric scientist and co-author of a research paper in this week's Science journal. The jet streams' shift toward the poles means the zones are expanding. The research is not predictive, but does show a long-term trend, Wallace said by telephone.

"If (this jet-stream shift) is going to stop and it just ends up being 70 miles (112.7 km), that's not a big deal," he said. "But if it were to continue at the same rate over the next century, then that would amount to a couple of hundred miles (kilometres) and that would start to have significant effects."

Encroaching on the temperate zone

The dry subtropical climate regions, which contain some of the world's major deserts, could encroach into temperate regions, Wallace said. Areas such as the Mediterranean, southern Europe and the northern part of the Middle East could have a tendency toward more drought, Wallace said.

The same might happen in southern Australia and South Africa, he said.

The study does not address whether this warming is due to the greenhouse effect or some other factor. It is different from previous models, which saw the fastest warming in the tropics, rather than the subtropics.

The greenhouse effect is seen as a major cause for global warming, in which so-called greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, swaddle the Earth like a blanket, keeping the sun's warmth.

Some greenhouse warming is natural, but many scientists believe that accelerated warming over the last century was caused by human activities including coal-burning power plants and the use of other fossil fuels.

Faster subtropical warming in the lower atmosphere, which moves the jet streams, could push storm tracks toward the poles, possibly reducing winter precipitation in places like southern Europe, including the Alps, and southern Australia, the scientists said in a statement.

Story by Deborah Zabarenko.

CONFERENCES

4.1. Russia and the Carbon Market

Point Carbon and NCSF invite you to take part in the "Russia and the Carbon Market" Conference that will take place on 28-29 June 2006 in Moscow, at Radisson SAS Slavyanskaya Hotel.

The updated conference programme is now available in English and Russian at Point Carbon and NCSF websites. To learn more on the conference and exhibition opportunities, as well as register online, please visit <http://www.pointcarbon.com/Events/article13423-369.html>.

Visa details at <http://www.pointcarbon.com/Events/article15392.html>.

4.2. IPCC WGIII Meeting with NGOs - September 2006

The IPCC Working Group III meeting with NGOs is taking place in Paris in September 2006.

The IPCC has provided space for 20 NGOs to attend this meeting with authors of working group III (Mitigation) as well as participants from research institutes and expert scientists from intergovernmental organisations.

The IPCC has provided funding (flight, accommodation and daily allowance) for 6 participants from developing countries. They request the funding be distributed equally amongst the regions.

Could you please express your interest in attending this event by latest Monday 29 May.

The IPCC meeting will be an important opportunity to input into the Second Order Draft of the IPCC AR4.

Further information below:

IPCC AR4 Meeting Working Group III: Mitigation of Climate Change; 6-8 September 2006, Paris, France.

Who will be attending: the participants include IEA (+ implementing agreements), ENGOs (environmental NGOs), IGOs (intergovernmental organisations) and International Research Institutions. The meeting will be limited to a maximum of 80 participants.

Intent of meeting: The intent of the meeting is to hold a consultation on the Second Order Draft (SOD) of the WGIII similar to the consultation on the First Order Draft (FOD) that took place with industry representatives in Capetown in January this year.

Purpose and tasks: The meeting will require participants to spend some time going through (parts of)

Disclaimer: We do not guarantee for the accuracy, reliability or content of information. For help or questions, contact: info@focus-ngo.org.