



Press Release

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Certifying biofuels: weaknesses in recognition and supervision of the system, say EU Auditors

Weaknesses in the system of certifying sustainable biofuels could undermine the basis of the EU's 2020 targets for renewable energy in transport, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors.

Under the Renewable Energy Directive, EU Member States can only use biofuels certified as sustainable to reach their 2020 target of sourcing ten per cent of the energy in transport from renewable sources. Most biofuels placed on the EU market are certified through voluntary schemes recognised by the European Commission. But the auditors concluded that the schemes suffer from weaknesses in the Commission's recognition procedure and in its supervision.

"The 2020 targets for sustainable energy in transport are important for the EU environment and for all transport users. But tracking the achievement of the targets must be based on sound data and a reliable certification system. That is what our audit set out to examine", said Bettina Jakobsen, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report.

The auditors found that the Commission did not require schemes to verify whether biofuel production carried risks such as conflict over land ownership, forced or child labour, poor working conditions for farmers and dangers to health and safety. The schemes' assessments did not cover the impact on biofuel sustainability of indirect land-use change (when more land is cultivated for food to make up for crops used in biofuel production). The auditors accept that assessing indirect land-use change presents technical difficulties, but without this information the relevance of the certification system is undermined.

The Commission gave recognition to schemes lacking procedures to ensure that biofuels did indeed come from waste or that feedstocks fulfilled environmental requirements, say the auditors. Some schemes were not transparent enough or were governed by only a few members, which increased the risk of conflict of interest as well as prevented effective communication with other stakeholders.

The Commission does not supervise the operations of voluntary schemes and can therefore not be sure that these actually apply the standards on which they have been certified or detect infringements of the rules.

Member States are responsible for the reliability of their statistics on sustainable biofuels counting towards the

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on www.eca.europa.eu

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achievement of the ten per cent transport energy target. But the auditors found the statistics might be overestimated, because Member States could include biofuel whose sustainability was not verified. There were also problems with the comparability of data.

In their **recommendations**, the auditors call on the Commission to ensure that the certification schemes:

- assess how much biofuel production entails significant socioeconomic risks and indirect land-use change;
- verify that feedstock producers comply with environmental requirements for agriculture;
- provide sufficient evidence of the origin of waste and residues used for biofuels.

They recommend that the Commission itself should:

- assess whether the schemes' governance reduces the risk of conflict of interest and are sufficiently transparent;
- check that the operations of the certified schemes comply with the standards presented at the time of recognition and that the schemes set up transparent complaints systems;
- seek evidence from Member States on the reliability of their biofuels statistics and harmonise the definition of waste substances.

Notes to Editors

EU legislation defines biofuels as "liquid or gaseous fuel for transport produced from biomass", e.g. from biodegradable agricultural, forestry or fishery products, waste or residues or from biodegradable industrial and municipal waste.

The Renewable Energy Directive requires EU Member States to ensure that by 2020 the share of energy from renewable sources used in all forms of transport is at least ten per cent of final consumption. In practice, considering the present stage of technical development and possibilities to use alternative energies in transport, the ten per cent target can be achieved only through a substantial use of biofuels.

Biofuels emit fewer green-house gases, carbon dioxide in particular, than fossil fuels. This is because the same amount of carbon is emitted during combustion as that captured during the growth of the source materials - plants absorb carbon dioxide as they grow. But this only works if there are no additional emissions due to land use change. If land use does change, additional emissions are caused by the reclamation and cultivation of new areas for food crops. There is no competition with food production when biofuels are produced from waste, residues or other non-food biomass.

The auditors visited the four Member States which produce and/or consume the largest volumes of biofuels - Germany, France, Poland and the United Kingdom.

Special report No 18/2016: "The EU system for the certification of sustainable biofuels" is available in 23 EU languages.