

Peat should not be treated as a renewable energy source

On December 14th, 2006, the European Parliament adopted the Resolution on a Strategy for Biomass and Biofuels (2006/2082(INI)). During the discussions, the following amendment was submitted unexpectedly and 'last minute' by ALDE MEPs from the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland, and endorsed by the Parliament:

"The European Parliament... [78] Calls on the Commission to include peat, with regard to the life-cycle aspect, as a longterm renewable energy source for biomass and bioenergy production".

This amendment may severely harm the intentions of the resolution and the main objectives of EU energy policy.

We request you to consider the following facts.

- **Peatlands constitute the top long-term carbon stock in the terrestrial biosphere.**

While covering only 3% of the World's land area, peatlands contain 550 Gt of carbon in their peat. This is equivalent to 30% of all global soil carbon, 75% of all atmospheric C, equal to all terrestrial biomass, and twice the carbon stock in the forest biomass of the world (Draft UNEP-GEF Assessment on Peatlands, Biodiversity and Climate Change).

- **The slow rate of renewal of peat implies that it – from a climatic point of view - should be treated as a non-renewable resource.**

Peat occupies an intermediate position between biomass and lignite/coal. It has been forming for 360 million years and it is still being formed today. Part of the present-day peat is at this moment changing into lignite and will change into coal in future. Similar to lignite and coal, peat is renewable.

Coal and lignite are, however, *called* "non-renewable" because their slow rate of renewal makes their renewability *irrelevant* for humankind. The volume of old coal currently being burnt is many orders of magnitude larger than the volume of new coal currently being formed. The same accounts for peat. In the EU, in almost all countries of the EU, and in the whole world, the stocks of peat are decreasing much more rapidly than new peat is being formed. Globally peat losses exceed the new formation of peat with a factor 20, leading to a net emission of 2 Gigatonnes of CO₂ annually (Draft UNEP-GEF Assessment on Peatlands, Biodiversity and Climate Change).

Classifying peat as a "long-term renewable energy resource" is misleading because - in order to achieve environmental sustainability and a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions - carbon-based fuel resources must replenish as quickly as they are consumed.

Peat used for fuel, in contrast, is thousands of years older than our modern society. This and the failing renewal of peat cause peat fuel to contribute to the greenhouse effect in the same way as burning other fossil resources. Therefore peat –similar to lignite and coal – should be treated as a non-renewable resource.

- **For these reasons the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories refrain from classifying peat as biofuel and treat peat as fossil carbon.**

The Guidelines define as follows: "*Biofuels*: Any fuels derived from biomass, either deliberately grown or from waste products. Peat is not considered a biofuel in these guidelines due to the length of time required for peat to re-accumulate after harvest.

Biogenic carbon: Carbon derived from biogenic (plant or animal) sources excluding fossil carbon. Note that peat is treated as a fossil carbon in these guidelines as it takes so long to replace harvested peat. ...*Biomass*: (1) The total mass of living organisms in a given area or of a given species usually expressed as dry weight. (2) Organic matter consisting of or recently derived from living organisms (especially regarded as fuel) excluding peat.

Includes products, by-products and waste derived from such material."

(www.ipcc-nggip.iges.or.jp/public/2006gl/pdf/0_Overview/V0_2_Glossary.pdf)

- **For these reasons the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) rejects a classification of peat as a renewable energy resource.**

In its letter of April 13, 2005 to IMCG, GEF has declared: “We share your concern about the preservation of peatlands. Not only are they not renewable on a societal time scale; their low rate of renewal is also too slow to be relevant for the objective of climate change mitigation. As a matter of general policy, we therefore do not endorse peat as a renewable energy resource. ... We will pay heed that in the further development of this project and the GEF renewables portfolio, peat will be excluded from the support of the GEF. Unfortunately, however, this might not influence the definitions and terminology that governments are using for their national legislation, as we are a country driven mechanism, but it will ensure that GEF resources are not used for promoting peat.”

- **For similar reasons the Eco-label Regulatory Committee has excluded peat from EU Eco-labelled soil improvers and growing media.**

In Written Question E-1454/06 ALDE-MEP Chris Davies asked the Commission: “The commercial extraction of peat destroys peatland sites through clearance of the plant community, drainage of the wetland and excavation and removal of the dried peat soil. Most peat extraction in the European Union takes place on lowland raised peatlands, a habitat of Community importance highlighted both for its rarity in the EU and for the widespread damage and poor condition of the habitat where it does occur. In addition to the direct ecological damage, peat extraction also contributes significantly to climate change by releasing a large stored carbon source that has accumulated over a period of several thousand years in a manner equivalent to fossil carbon storage in coal and oil deposits. Will the Commission therefore continue to ensure the exclusion of peat from products bearing the EU’s Ecolabel when this issue is discussed by the European Union Ecolabelling Board on 5 April?”

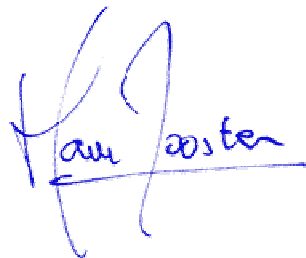
On 29.5.2006 Commissioner Stavros Dimas answered on behalf of the Commission (E-1454/06EN): “The process of developing criteria for soil improvers and growing media was concluded on 6 April 2006 where the Eco-label Regulatory Committee voted on the final drafts for the two product groups. In both cases peat was explicitly excluded, ensuring that no product containing peat will be able to use the EU Eco-label.”

We request the European Commission to refrain from using the misleading label of “peat as a long-term renewable energy resource” as

- **the use of fuel peat is unsustainable and has similar negative effects on the environment as the use of other fossil fuels,**
- **the use of this label is inconsistent with the aims of the Resolution on a Strategy for Biomass and Biofuels itself, with the objectives EU energy policy, and with various other EU and global environmental policies.**

For more information on the subject: www.imcg.net/imcgnl/nl0104/kap12.htm

On behalf of the International Mire Conservation Group IMCG (www.imcg.net),



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Greifswald, January 3, 2007.