

Commission adopts biomass sustainability report

The Commission today adopted a report on sustainability requirements for the use of solid biomass and biogas in electricity, heating and cooling. The report makes recommendations on sustainability criteria to be used by those Member States that wish to introduce a scheme at national level, in order to avoid obstacles for the functioning of the internal market for biomass.

Günther Oettinger, Commissioner responsible for Energy, said: "Biomass is one of the most important resources for reaching our renewable energy targets. It already contributes more than half of renewable energy consumption in the EU, providing a clean, secure and competitive energy resource. With this report, the Commission provides recommendations to Member States concerning sustainability criteria for solid biomass and biogas. A review is foreseen in 18 months in order to assess whether the scheme needs to be modified, including through the introduction of some mandatory standards."

The report is accompanied by an impact assessment which shows that binding criteria would impose substantial costs on European economic actors, bearing in mind that at least 90 % of biomass consumed in the EU comes from European forest residues and by-products of other industries. Hence, the report concludes that at this stage, more detailed legislation is not necessary.

In the absence of harmonized rules at EU level, Member States are free to put in place their own national schemes for solid and gaseous biomass used in electricity, heating and cooling. The report provides recommendations for Member States to follow similar patterns and most importantly to be guided by the sustainability criteria explained in the report. In this way, it will be possible to minimize the risk of the development of varied and possibly incompatible criteria at national level, leading to barriers to trade and limiting the growth of the bio-energy sector.

The recommended criteria relate to:

- (a) a general prohibition on the use of biomass from land converted from forest, other high carbon stock areas and highly biodiverse areas;
- (b) a common greenhouse gas calculation methodology which could be used to ensure that minimum greenhouse gas savings from biomass are at least 35% (rising to 50% in 2017 and 60% in 2018 for new installations) compared to the EU's fossil energy mix;
- (c) the differentiation of national support schemes in favour of installations that achieve high energy conversion efficiencies; and
- (d) monitoring of the origin of biomass.

It is also recommended not to apply sustainability criteria to wastes, as these must already fulfill environmental rules in accordance with waste legislation at national and at European level, and that the sustainability requirements should apply to larger energy producers of 1 MW thermal or 1MW electrical capacity or above.

Under the Renewable Energy Directive, Member States must submit National Renewable Energy Action Plans in June 2010. These will be a key tool for identifying the EU's ambitions for exploiting its biomass potentials, whether in electricity, heating or transport. Following the submission of these plans and analysis of emerging national schemes, the Commission will consider in 2011 whether additional measures such as common sustainability criteria at EU level would be appropriate.

Background

The Renewable Energy Directive adopted in 2009, sets up sustainability criteria for biofuels and bioliquids. The Directive provides that the Commission should report on requirements for a sustainability scheme for biomass other than biofuels and bioliquids. The report fulfils this obligation.

The report as well as related information is available on the Commission's renewable energy transparency platform at:

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/renewables/transparency_platform/transparency_platform_en.htm