



Together for birds and people

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA RELEASE

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Conservationists urge caution in drive to promote biofuels

BirdLife International has welcomed the Commission's Biofuels strategy, published today, as a step forward in the fight against climate change, but has expressed serious concerns about the delivery 'on the ground'. The strategy acknowledges the threats posed by the development of the biofuels sector to biodiversity but fails to outline a clear strategy to address them. While BirdLife welcomes the Commission's commitment to ensure that biofuels are produced sustainably and deliver substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the organisation is concerned that the new strategy remains too generic to offer real guarantees that wildlife will not be harmed.

Ariel Brunner, EU Agriculture Policy Officer, said: "There is a great danger that the development of biofuels will have a devastating impact on biodiversity while delivering hardly any reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The EU can ensure it doesn't go this way by putting in place a strong system of safeguards. This document is a step in the right direction, but only the bare bones of environmental protection are currently there."

The strategy covers the use of transport biofuels – mainly ethanol and biodiesel - in tackling climate change, and incentives to encourage development of the industry. The need to prevent loss of wildlife if uncultivated or 'set-aside' farmland or tropical forests are converted to biofuel crops is clearly mentioned but seems to be more of an "add on" than central to the EU strategic vision.

BirdLife is calling on the Commission to ensure that quick and effective action follows the broad declarations contained in today's strategy:

- Large scale conversion of set-aside land to energy crops must be avoided;
- A comprehensive and mandatory "farm to wheel" accreditation scheme should be established to ensure that biofuels, both locally produced and imported, have a greenhouse gas balance that is significantly better than that of fossil fuels and do not lead to large scale environmental harm;
- Biofuels should be promoted in ways that reward actual environmental performance and not with production subsidies.

Ariel Brunner said: "The EU has pledged to ensure that biofuels are sustainably produced and we shall be watching closely whether this declaration is followed by concrete action. Environmental protection must not be lost in the EU's drive to promote biofuels."

Ends

Notes

- BirdLife International is a partnership of people working together for birds and the environment. It promotes sustainable living as a means of conserving birds and all other forms of biodiversity and is the leading authority on the status of birds and their habitats. Over 10 million people support the BirdLife Partnership of national non-governmental conservation organisations and local networks.



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- A recent assessment of the overall status of birds in Europe by BirdLife International indicates that 43% of all bird species are now in trouble, and that the situation has worsened over the past ten years. Farmland birds in the EU-15 have fared particularly badly, experiencing a decline of 32% between 1980-2002. Many common farm birds such as Corn bunting, Yellowhammer, Common swallow and Tree sparrow have already gone through a sharp or even catastrophic decline in the EU.
- The **Biofuels Directive** sets “reference values” of a 2% market share for biofuels in 2005 and 5.75% in 2010. The 2005 target of 2% biofuels was not achieved. With the objectives set by the Member States, the share of biofuels would have attained, at most, only 1.4%. The Commission has launched infringement proceedings in seven cases where Member States adopted low targets without due justification
- The set-aside obligation, which was introduced with the 1992 reform as a tool to balance the cereals market, has been integrated into the new single payment scheme. Set-aside land can normally not be used for any type of production, but the cultivation of non-food crops (including energy crops) is authorised if the use of the biomass is guaranteed either by a contract or by the farmer. Recent surge in demand for biofuels is rapidly leading to widespread conversion of un cropped set aside to energy crops.
- Though not aiming at nature conservation, set aside has become a key element for the survival of many declining farmland birds. An abundance of insects and seeds in pockets of set-aside has been an incidental boon for farmland birds - in winter, because food is plentiful and in summer because nest sites are undisturbed and sparse vegetation means food is easier to find. It has been shown that set-aside land is one of the best sites for breeding skylarks because more food is available. Other breeding birds that benefit from feeding and nesting opportunities on set-aside include corn and reed buntings, goldfinches, linnets, yellowhammers and sometimes lapwing and grey partridges. In winter, crop stubbles left on set-aside, mean seed food for birds is abundant. Some globally threatened species heavily rely on set aside land as is the case of the Little bustard whose critically endangered french population depend almost entirely on set aside areas managed in a sympathetic way and currently threatened from competing use for energy crops.
- Indonesia's government plans to develop 3 million hectares of palm oil plantations in the next five years to meet increasing demand for biofuel, with the EU market signalled as a main market. Most of this area will be obtained by clearing rainforest; a new oil palm plantation covering an area of 1.8 million hectares in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) near the border with Malaysia would destroy one of the last large pristine expanses of rainforest known as “the heart of Borneo”, home to globally threatened species such as the Orangutang.
- This press release is available online at www.birdlife.org/eu and <http://www.birdlifecapcampaign.org/frameset.htm>

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