

EU to trim biofuel targets on greenhouse gas fears

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A biofuel plant in Singapore owned by Finland's Neste Oil. The European Union plans to trim targets on biofuel use, once seen as a potential source of cheap alternative energy but now widely blamed for soaring food prices, according to a draft proposal.

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In 2009, the EU fixed a target for renewables to account for 20 percent of all the bloc's [energy consumption](#) and 10 percent in the transport sector, with biofuels set to play a growing role.

The aim was to reduce [greenhouse gas emissions](#), seen as responsible for global warming.

But a draft EU proposal seen by AFP on Tuesday said some biofuel production was failing to deliver hoped-for reductions in [greenhouse gases](#) because changing land use to grow crops for energy had its own adverse impact on emissions.

Emissions driven by land use change "can vary substantially ... and can negate some or all of the greenhouse gas savings of individual biofuels relative to the fossil fuels they replace," it said.

Accordingly, the draft suggested that by 2020 biofuels should account for 5.0 percent of transport sector [energy use](#), up from the current 4.5 percent.

The balance of the 2020 transport [target](#) would be met by other [renewables](#), with the draft saying the EU should "encourage a greater market penetration of advanced (low-Indirect Land Use Change) biofuels."

While current investment in the industry should be protected, the aim should be to "limit the contribution that conventional biofuels ... make towards attainment of the targets in the Renewable Energy Directive," the draft said.

An EU source said the proposals could be submitted in October.

Environmental and anti-poverty campaigners welcomed the news.

"It is excellent news that the European Commission finally realises that EU biofuels mandates are causing huge problems, including surging food prices, worsening hunger and accelerating [climate change](#)," said Marc Olivier Herman, Oxfam's EU biofuels expert.

"However the proposed 5.0 percent (transport) cap ... by 2020 won't help

put the brakes on the current spike on [food prices](#). EU biofuels mandates must be scrapped altogether now," he said in a statement.

Herman also called on the EU to "resist the backlash from industry and farming lobbies that have grown fat ... as a result of this crazy biofuels policy while poor people go hungry and consumers' money gets wasted."

In reaction, the German biofuels industry group association said such changes would be a bitter blow, especially for bioethanol and biodiesel producers targetting the transport sector.

"Such changes could force the closure of plants which were built only to meet the targets set down in the EU renewable energy policy," association head Elmar Baumann said in a statement.

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