



Open letter to Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potocnik

Subject: European Commission advisory bodies and the EU's agrofuels policy

Sender: Corporate Europe Observatory [1]

Date: June 1st 2007

Dear Commissioner Potocnik,

With this letter we would like to express our concern about the undue privileged access and influence granted to commercial interests in the development of the EU's agrofuels [2] policy, including the research agenda. We would in particular like to emphasise the case of BIOFRAC, the Advisory Research Council for Biofuels which you initiated in 2005. The membership of BIOFRAC was seriously unbalanced and entirely dominated by representatives of commercial interests, such as the oil and automotive industries. [3] Apart from producing the report "Biofuels in the European Union. A Vision for 2030 and beyond", BIOFRAC was also invited to prepare the ground for the Strategic Research Agenda and to provide considerable input to the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

The unbalanced composition of BIOFRAC and the strong role it was granted in shaping the EU's agrofuel policy has continued with the establishment of the EBFTP, the European Biofuels Technology Platform, also launched on your initiative last July. As with BIOFRAC, the oil and automotive industries dominate the EBFTP's steering committee, whereas there is not a single public interest civil society organisation represented.

We believe that these processes are at odds with democracy and fairness in public policy-making. In contrast with the privileged access and influence awarded by your Directorate-General first to BIOFRAC and then to the EBFTP, the Commission has failed to adequately consult with a broader range of stakeholders (including with affected communities in agrofuel-producing countries in the global South).

The impacts of these biased processes and the one-sided advice emerging from them are potentially very far-reaching. It has affected how the EU is planning to tackle the fundamental challenge of reducing CO2 emissions from road transport and the fact that the EU is throwing its weight behind the promotion of large-scale agrofuel imports from developing countries. This is happening despite growing public concern about the environmental and social impacts, and despite the mounting evidence that agrofuels aggravate, not mitigate, the threat of climate change.

We also find it very troubling that the Commission is planning to channel large amounts of EU public funds towards the research and development of agrofuel projects determined by corporations with direct commercial interests in this area.

It is on this background that we encourage you to thoroughly assess the role of BIOFRAC and the EBFTP in European Commission decision-making on these important issues and to take the necessary steps to prevent Commission advisory bodies from being controlled by commercial interests.

We will send a copy this letter to Commission President Barroso and Commission Vice-President Kallas as the privileged access and influence granted to BIOFRAC and the EBFTP underlines a wider challenge for the Commission in addressing the frequently unbalanced representation of interests in advisory groups assisting its preparing of policy proposals.

With kind regards,

Belen Balanya
Corporate Europe Observatory

1. Corporate Europe Observatory is an independent, non-profit research and campaign group based in Amsterdam. Founded in 1997, Corporate Europe Observatory aims to ensure that the political activities of corporations and their lobby groups do not harm democratic processes, social justice and the environment. See also: <http://www.corporateeurope.org/about.html>
2. We use the term agrofuels instead of biofuels, as the latter has unmerited environmentally-friendly connotations.
3. Corporate Europe Observatory this week published a report titled “The EU Agrofuels folly: policy capture by corporate interests”; see: <http://www.corporateeurope.org/agrofuelfolly.html>