

Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels

An initiative of the EPFL Energy Center



ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE
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Participants' comments and opinion

(Unedited version)

1. *Principle on biotechnology?*

Phone talk:

- The term « technologies » seems very broad and could cover the field and the factory. It also seems to overlap with the other principles. If too broad, it may become redundant with these principles.
- It's not sure that there are best practices nor international norms for every technology in use.
- There is a social component to the use of biotechnologies that the SOC WG would have to take up in parallel.
- “Best” (practice) as compared to what? On the ecological side, we are aiming at reducing pollution. Would principles be stricter than those used for oil pollution?
- Synthesis: strictness needed for ALL forms of energy. But the point of the RSB is not to set international norms on energy but to define how the production of biofuels can remain sustainable compared to other alternatives.
- The risk of setting principles that are too strict, is to hurt the entire market
- Chair: remind that the next step is the definition of criteria. Whereas the principles can be broad and overambitious, the refining will happen in the setting of criteria.
- 93% of the GMs used in the US are biofuel crops (soy and corn) and violate environmental principles. It is essential to have something about BIOtechnologies rather than just technologies.
- It is not because it's a controversial issue that we must leave it as a separate category. Where best practices are not defined, we should refer to the precautionary principle.
- If we put forward biofuels as a “clean” alternative to fossil fuels, it's important to make sure they are clean.
- One cannot rely on the criteria for realism. There is going to be a huge degradation in every case. We cannot hold countries that have done very little deforestation to such a high standard.
- There is a concern about the term “bio” to be on the table, and even the term technologies (mechanical and chemical). A broader principle about responsible use of technologies and best practice in general should be developed. We need to take into account that different opinions exist in other countries (some initiatives in Brazil develop GMs for sugarcane).

Skype:

- Support to a principle on technology, so long as it's not too broad and redundant with other principles.
- Why should the principal be stricter for technology concerning biofuels than other energy sectors like oil (and are they)? Answer: we are setting principles on biofuel sustainability, not on every energy source!
- Why is this issue not considered as a criterion under Biodiversity?
- The question of GMOs and biotechnology should be dealt with at the criteria level under the appropriate principles.
- Biotech needs to be considered, as part of the whole system, i.e. within each of the principles there is room to do this.
- Do we consider animal grease too for instance?
- Will the carbon accounting working group be taking the question of carbon emissions related to land use change?

2. *Biomass or biofuel?*

Phone talk:

- Biofuel is too specific, we should say “throughout the biofuel production chain”.
- Are we missing an opportunity to address all forms of every use from biomass?
- RSB: it s important to remind that we deliberately chose to cover liquid biofuels for transports only.
- We cannot control how local people use biomass for instance.

Skype:

- Several are in favour of this shift in terminology, from biomass to biofuel.
- The speaker is correct saying we cannot control how local people use biomass for instance.

3. *Biodiversity and HCV Areas*

Phone talk:

- It's good to broaden this principle, especially into ecosystem services. There is a concern that a lot of these areas have not been identified everywhere yet.
- RSB: HCV is a concept, not a list of classified areas such as the UNESCO's for example. This concept includes specific criteria and indicators. Where they are not mapped, presumably the producer would have to identify if the area of concern meet the criteria.
- We could consider that any clearing of native ecosystem is not sustainable. For instance, an increase in fragmentation can occur. A particular area clear may not have a direct conservation value but it might have created a corridor or a broader high value area.
- We need to be clear with the definition of HCV areas.
- How can suppliers assure us if they cannot define these areas clearly?

- RSB: it is already a reality that many small producers will not be able to evaluate their production on their own, for instance with the calculation of their GHG balance. We already consider that some field partnership with NGOs, government or 3rd party certification, will be required for the assessment. We could consider community mapping exercises, for instance.
- There is a national sovereignty issue. There are trade-offs in all countries about how they want to deal with their emissions. Equity issue, as Northern countries aren't being charged for their historical emissions from deforestation. We need to be cautious about saying the other countries what they can do with their land.
- (RSB: we will not tell them what to do; every country has the right to do what it wants, but what we can do is indicate them whether, by doing this or that, they are actually environmentally and socially sustainable. Gathering experts from both Northern and Southern countries, the consensus reached by the RSB shall not be questionable on this point).
- We should recognise the challenge for other countries and cultures to comply with these principles. We should maybe allow countries with difficulties to comply a longer time with a clear guidance.
- Chair: HCV areas seem hard to define.

Skype:

- HCV is fine as long as the right of each nation to define those areas for itself is clearly recognized.
- The indirect impacts will be absolutely key.
- I suggest that we look at the different conservation priority areas that are already defined? Conservation International's site-specific areas are Key Biodiversity Areas, fyi. Something like this, in combination with nationally-defined conservation priority areas, could be effective.

4. *Soil, Air, Water*

- Might we want to add language about “beyond acceptable levels” (ex: cannot raise water pollution above x ppm/local level/international norms). We should be realistic and reasonable rather than idealistic.
- Could we keep principles as aspirational and be more specific in the criteria. (support for keeping them aspirational).
- We don't want to set into specific levels but rather improving practices.
- Where is the line of acceptable practice?

Skype:

- Someone says he would have thought in the end the Principles will be of interest to the consumer countries, and they will use the market to encourage compliance in producer countries.
- Agreement with the comment on acceptable level of pollution.
- If the principles are aspirational goals, we shall call them that.

5. *Rewording of principles*

Phone talk:

- Can we convert principles into positive rewording? Not “should not” but encourage best practice.

Skype:

- Rewording is a good suggestion. We could say production should protect soil, water, etc...(strong agreement on skype)
- Definitely keep them positive and practical - but still aspirational

6. *Tentative synthesis (Chair):*

- We need to be more realistic and practical than idealistic.
- Wording needs to be positive