

**Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels (RSB)**  
Working group on ENVIRONMENT (ENV WG)

**Background documents- Paper 1**  
General information, principles and scopes

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Within the RSB, the Working Group on Environment aims to set global principles, criteria and indicators, for the environmental aspects of sustainable biofuel production. This working group has to cover all environmental issues, except the greenhouse gas (GHG) aspects, which are fully covered by a separate working group (GHG WG). There will of course be some overlap with other Working Groups (for instance, deforestation affects biodiversity as well as greenhouse gas emissions) – the Secretariat will coordinate to make sure work and discussions are not duplicated.

The ENV WG works on a participative basis, meaning that each participant can initiate discussions on the topics of concern, debate with the other participants and form contrary opinions. Each decision regarding the draft and final principles, as well as the draft criteria and indicators, will be preferably agreed by consensus or by simple majority, but always through a democratic process of consultation. The communication and meetings will be held through any available technology that allows quick, clear and thorough exchanges among the participants with the aim of minimizing travel and consequent GHG emissions. This is why, in addition to the regional (cross-Working Group) stakeholder meetings that will be held on site, web communication (wiki, blogs, emails) and conference calls have to be used as often as possible.

The environmental issues related to the production, transport and trade of biomass are numerous and have emerged as a threat to the credibility and potential of biofuels as an alternative to the traditional fossil fuels. Many articles have recently been published, both in scientific and popular press, pointing out the damages related to the biofuels and raising the skepticism of civil society toward them.

Several existing documents already include relevant principles of environmental sustainability, and the RSB compiled many of them in order to propose draft principles of sustainable biofuels production and processing. Currently, the environmental principles proposed by the RSB steering board are:

- Biomass production should not lead to the destruction or damaging of **areas of high biodiversity**.
- Biomass production should not degrade or damage **soils**.
- Biomass production should not contaminate or deplete **water resources**.
- Biomass production should not lead to **air** pollution.

- Use of **GMOs** should be transparent to buyers such that they can make their own decisions.

These principles have been suggested based on the current best thinking, as per previous documents published by international organizations, GOs and NGOs to develop sustainability criteria for biofuels. Their formulation and content will be discussed among all the participants throughout the oncoming months, with the aim to definitively validate them by December 2007.

Ultimately, the ENV WG aims to develop and discuss on the translation of these principles into applicable criteria and indicators on a worldwide perspective of implementation. Our aim is to have a draft version of the criteria and indicators to meet these environmental principles by May, 2008.