

Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels

An initiative of the EPFL Energy Center



ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE
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6th Virtual Meeting of the Working Group on Environment, 1 February 2008 Principle and Criteria on Conservation and Biodiversity

[Due to unforeseen circumstances, the teleconference could not be recorded]

1. Background and Goals of this Teleconference

For the past four months, the **Expert Panel on Conservation** and the **Working Group on Environment** have debated the content and wording of the principle and criteria on Conservation and Biodiversity within the RSB draft standards. Thanks to the serious and expert contributions from every member, the discussions have covered all the aspects that will need to be taken into account to ensure that biofuel production does not involve significant damages to biodiversity, ecosystem functions and other conservation values.

The discussion held on 1st February 2008 was highly intense and rich in outputs, which will be presented to the RSB Steering Board on its next Virtual Meeting (15th February 2008). The main points discussed were:

- **The format and visual for the Principle and Criteria**
- **The indicators to be ultimately added to the table**
- **The need for participative approach during the Environmental Impact Assessment**
- **The responsibilities of each actor along the biofuel value chain, as regards conservation and biodiversity**
- **The retroactive aspect of some criteria**
- **Buffer Zones. Technical considerations.**
- **Ecological Corridors. Technical considerations**

In introduction, the Working Group's Chair (J. McNeely) informed that Biofuels are still a major topic of discussion around the world, particularly in Japan where experts are highly interested in the RSB outputs. In this country with close relationships with China and Indonesia, guidance on sustainable biofuels will be very much welcome.

Several points discussed during this 6th Virtual Meeting have not yet reached a consensus. The Principle and Criteria on Conservation will hence be presented to the Steering Board (15th February 2008) as per the current state of progress; points that request more discussions or with no consensus will be clearly highlighted and might also be discussed by the SB in order to formulate a position and guidance toward the Working Group.

2. Format of the Principle and Criteria on Conservation and Biodiversity

- Following recent discussions, the Expert Panel on Conservation has considered the possibility to describe criteria on conservation through a **synthesis table** (see background paper n° 21). This format is found highly suitable and clear, but it would also implicate that the whole set of RSB principles and criteria would have to be organized in a similar fashion, hence a groundbreaking change.

The proposition is positively welcomed by **the Working Group who unanimously accepts to use this format**. In consequence, it will be proposed to the Steering Board for approval on the 15th of February 2008.

Some participants have suggested specifying the **requirements** in a more measurable way. This point will be **passed to the Working Group on Implementation**, which in turn, will develop a precise guidance to help producers comply with the requirements.

3. Indicators

- The question of **indicators** was raised during the teleconference, with a concern regarding their integration in the structure of the table and **consistency** with familiar visual structures used in other standards, such as the RSPO's (criterion/indicator/guidance).

- However, **indicators are to be developed in partnership with the WG IMP** only after the first draft of Principles and Criteria is released (June 2008). For now, it seems delicate to integrate an empty column in the table, as no technical discussions on indicators were held so far. Furthermore, the indicators might require more than table columns to be described and consequently, separate pages might be developed.

- The RSB is to create a '**meta-standard**', which will recognize many other standards. Being too specific on the indicators will probably make harder to benchmark RSB meta-standard against crop-specific or other standards. Indicators may indeed vary much depending on crops and habitats.

For now, the Working Group is supportive of the 'meta-standard' approach. No new column is added to the current table but a footnote clearly indicating that indicators are forthcoming shortly. The format of the table may be adapted once indicators are developed.

4. Criteria

- Several participants point out that **the Environmental Impact Assessment (criterion 7a) needs to be performed through a sound participatory process**, which would specially include **Indigenous People**, as their knowledge proves very precious in the identification of areas of conservation importance for example. As a reminder, High Conservation Values include cultural and traditional characteristics and the participation of Indigenous People (including the Free Prior Informed Consent) is also to be required in the Social Principles

- Some participants would like the **responsibility for providing maps to producers** to be more specifically described. In most of the cases HCV areas are identified and mapped by authorities, but

some flexibility must remain so that some producers with sufficient means may conduct their own identification and provide maps as well. **The RSB secretariat is hoping to work with other “Roundtables” and expert institutions around the question of the identification and mapping of HCV areas.** This includes the responsibility of any possible stakeholders.

- **Question: What if HCV areas are identified AFTER having been converted into plantations?** The RSB is likely to consider that HCV areas converted for biofuel production (after a cut-off date) and mapped afterward do not comply with the RSB standard, and to request that unidentified areas cannot be converted, unless evidence exist that it does not include any of the elements presented under criterion 7a.

The success of the identification will depend on how familiar producers are with the RSB standard and the type of HCV areas in a given region. Yet, technical reviews and networking will help a lot along the process.

The retroactive aspect is to be added to the criterion. The Steering Board may give guidance on this point.

- Several participants pointed out the **difficulty of dealing with indirect effects (versus direct/on-site effects), in particular transnational impacts,** and the current formulation is judged too vague to be implemented in practice. Nevertheless, solving this issue implies the involvement of several actors, from the producer to the RSB standard itself, which shall contribute to promote and enhance global land management mechanisms among governments. This promotion is also to be taken care of by the Working Group on Implementation and the RSB wants to involve other roundtables and interested institutions in a global reflection about this issue and means at disposal to solve it, as certification fails to mitigate indirect effects.

- **Buffer Zones.** Many types of Buffer Zones exist, depending on their **use and local conditions.** The definition of BZ in the table appears too vague for some participants, whereas some countries have thoroughly studied BZ and implemented accurate management (in Canada for example) and institutions like IUCN have developed a sound expertise on this very topic. Hence, some participants would like a more precise definition to be developed by the RSB. First, a distinction should be made between Buffer Zones surrounding HCV areas and BZ surrounding production sites. **The existing Buffer Zones around HCV areas, ecological corridors and other biological conservation areas should not be damaged** by the production site, whereas **new Buffer Zones must be set** between the production site and surrounding areas, their characteristics depending on the type of crop, production, soil and typology, climate, etc... Meanwhile, producers should be encouraged to restore degraded Buffer Zones on the production site or degraded lands. Some participants suggested including **steep slopes** along with riparian zones in areas to be maintained/ restored. For now, legislation and good practices can remain the reference, as our timeline does not allow us to enter into the detail for each type of Buffer Zone to be set. At last, a detailed guidance can be added in the table and more precise parameters developed in the indicators.

- The proposition to replace “biological conservation areas” by “any legal conservation areas” is rejected by the working group, as some areas without legal restriction may need protection though (private reserves for example). The mention of “public and private” needs to be added to the text.

- **Ecological Corridors.** Several participants point out the confusion in the definition of Ecological Corridors (EC), to be perhaps distinguished from the notion of habitat connectivity and wildlife movement. Another confusion exists due to the requirement of “no disruption” combined with a

possibility to compensate a decrease in habitat connectivity. Participants suggest that formally identified EC must not be converted and that in parallel, previously degraded EC should be restored and habitat connectivity and wildlife movement enhanced on production site. The creation of new ecological corridors should be promoted. **As the management and protection of Ecological Corridors is exhaustively included under criterion 7e, ECs are no more mentioned in criterion 7b.**

The updated synthesis table is included at the end of this document (Annex 1). The text in red indicates edits made after the teleconference, based on the participants' comments. As definitions and good practices could not be discussed during the teleconference, these two annexes are left as such, while still possible for each participant to comment on them.

Annex 1: Principle and Criteria on Conservation
[Related Indicators to be developed over the second semester 2008]

7. Biofuel production should avoid negative impacts on biodiversity and areas of High Conservation Values			
Criterion	Requirements	Responsibilities	Guidance for Implementation
7.a Environmental assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HCV areas, native ecosystems, ecological corridors and other public/private biological conservation areas should be adequately identified and mapped through a participative and multi-stakeholder consultation process. This identification must be performed prior to any exploitation of the area of concern. No exploitation can occur before the formal identification of the area. Ecosystem functions and services should be locally evaluated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The producer is responsible for collecting the necessary elements of information about a potential production area through an environmental impact assessment and land management plan appropriate to the scale and intensity of the production. Maps of HCV areas, native ecosystems, ecological corridors and other public/private biological conservation areas, as well as information about local ecosystem functions and services may be provided by competent authorities and/or producers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Producers or cooperatives unable to perform an environmental impact assessment and/or a land management plan will need support. Governments and conservation organisations should support and coordinate national identification of High Conservation Values (HCV) Areas, native ecosystems, ecological corridors and other biological conservation areas to provide producers with maps and other relevant data. Environmental Impact Assessments must involve local and/or indigenous communities, and be performed in accordance with national guidelines.
7.b Protection of HCV areas, native ecosystems, ecological corridors and other biological conservation areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct conversion of HCV areas, native ecosystems and other public/private biological conservation areas into plantation or production site. No loss of any High Conservation Value. Indirect conversion and loss must be assessed and mitigated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The producer is responsible for not converting HCV areas, native ecosystems and other biological conservation areas and not destructing any of the High Conservation Values. Producers and decision makers are held responsible for regulating land uses in order to avoid biofuel production causing displacement of essential food crops or cattle into HCV areas, native ecosystems and other public/private biological conservation areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited exploitation, consistent with appropriate management plan can occur so long as HCVs are maintained. Conversion of areas having irreversibly been degraded after xxx is allowed.
7.c Ecosystem Functions (EF) and Services (ES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid, minimise or mitigate negative direct and indirect effects on EF and ES. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The producer is responsible for the preservation of EF and ES. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts on local EF and ES and potential changes due to the production must be evaluated in accordance with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*.

* Exact reference document to be discussed.

7.d Buffer Zones (BZ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The production site must not damage any existing BZ. • BZ to be set between production site and HCV areas, native ecosystems, ecological corridors or other biological conservation areas. • Surrounding zones, including riparian areas, to be kept in their original state or restored if previously degraded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The producer is responsible for collecting the information on the existing Buffer Zones and to avoid damaging them. • The producer is responsible for setting BZ between the production site and surrounding areas, as well as keeping surrounding zones in their original state or restore these whenever possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where necessary, BZ must be created on the production site, not outside. • Appropriate BZ must be set according to national requirements, the type of area that requests specific protection and/or the characteristics of the crop under cultivation (e.g. pesticide spray characteristics). • Clusters of individually-owned small agricultural parcels can be considered as a single production site.
7.e Ecological Corridors (EC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No disruption of existing Ecological Corridors • When possible, restoration of previously degraded Ecological Corridors • On production site, habitat connectivity and wildlife movement should be enhanced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The producer is responsible for collecting information about Ecological Corridors in the potential area of production • Governments may provide necessary information and support/guide producers through a national ecological corridors management plan. • The producer is responsible for avoiding the disruption of ECs, restore previously degraded ECs when possible and enhance habitat connectivity and wildlife movement on production site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If an EC is identified in the production site, it must be maintained in its original state. • If habitat connectivity or wildlife movement is reduced on the production site, a significant area of the production site must be set aside to restore an equivalent connectivity. • A part of the production site may be dedicated to restore habitat connectivity and wildlife movement on a voluntary basis.

Annex 2: Definitions (to be completed)

Degraded Lands are lands being highly and irreversibly damaged by anthropogenic activities from an ecological perspective (low biodiversity value).

Note: Definition to be reviewed after consultation of WWF's methodology on identification of degraded lands. Other definitions welcome.

Ecological Corridor (EC) is understood as “a thin strip of vegetation used by wildlife and potentially allowing movement of biotic factors between two areas”. (*European Environment Agency definition*).

Ecosystem Functions (EF) include ecosystem physico-chemical integrity, regeneration and succession; genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity; natural cycles that affect the productivity of the ecosystem.

Ecosystem Services (ES) are the benefits obtained by people from ecosystems. These include provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting services, as defined by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

The six High Conservation Values are those defined by the HCV network (www.hcvnetwork.org)

Producers are understood as farmers or land owners growing biomass, as well as any owner of biomass processing units.

Annex 3: Good practices in Conservation supported by the RSB

During the course of our discussions, many good practices have been identified that should not be considered minimum requirements but should somehow be encouraged in the Roundtable. The concept of a 'sustainability scorecard', with 'unacceptable', 'acceptable', and 'better' practices identified for each principle has been endorsed by the RSB Steering Board. The Implementation Working Group will be discussing how to encourage producers and suppliers to progress towards these practices (for instance, progress requirements, making markets for better practices, etc.). So far, the good practices related to conservation identified by the group include:

- Use of degraded and/or idle land (to avoid indirect conversion of HCV areas through displacing other agricultural activities)
- Use of native species
- Creating and using a regional landscape management system
- Avoiding monoculture (also relevant for some other principles, e.g. soil quality)

Implementing these practices would improve a producer's sustainability score, above their compliance with the minimum requirements. It is likely that the ENV Working Group will return to this definition once some implementation mechanisms have been drafted in the IMP Working Group.

Some other good practices have been mentioned during our discussions but are not related to conservation (e.g. no-till practices). They are likely to be moved under other principles or a separate category gathering all good practices together.