

Briefing: a 'Greener Paper' on Energy

New vision for a truly sustainable, competitive and secure energy future

The European Commission is due to present a Green Paper on 'Secure, Competitive and Sustainable Energy for Europe' on Wednesday 8 March, with the intention of kick-starting a debate on EU energy policy which is supposed to culminate next spring.

Greenpeace is concerned that drafts of the Green Paper obtained to date do not challenge the status quo. The Commission has failed to set out crucial and fundamental questions about the future of EU energy policy. It does not, for example, question the wisdom of an EU25 dominated by large centralised fossil fuel and nuclear power plants, nor ask how to make the uptake of renewable energy and efficiency binding. Other vital areas which are ignored include: how to ensure that energy decisions are compatible with existing and anticipated climate objectives, and how to encourage a level playing field in the energy market, where member states do not constantly bail out bankrupt nuclear operators.

➤ Support for secure, sustainable, efficient energy sources

The Commission asks how long-term targets should be formulated for clean energy sources. Instead, it ought to be designing binding targets in order to achieve swift results.

Renewable energy sources protect the climate, strengthen security of supply, contribute to a cleaner environment, create jobs and entail no hidden external costs. They are suited to a decentralised network where energy is produced close to the point of consumption, minimising wastage. Energy efficiency and renewable sources are the ideal means for the EU to boost competitiveness, improve security of supply and protect the environment – but they need political support to achieve their potential. A pre-condition for guaranteeing this support is the setting of long-term targets.

The recent Green Paper on Energy Efficiency¹ states that today's energy consumption can be cut by 20% by 2020, leading to yearly savings of €60 billion and creating 1 million new jobs. This requires an EU-wide mandatory target to reduce energy consumption.

Similarly, the EU needs to demonstrate a commitment to renewable energy sources by setting a mandatory target. Coupled with ambitious efficiency measures, the target for their primary energy share should be 25% by 2020. In addition, legally binding sectoral targets for the share of renewable energy in electricity, heating/cooling and transport are required.

The European Commission should initiate legislation in these areas as a matter of urgency.

➤ Existing climate objectives

The drafts of the Green Paper mention climate change but omit to invite dialogue on how existing and anticipated climate commitments should be reflected in energy policy. European Union leaders last year endorsed the objective of limiting mean global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. Meeting this objective would require deep greenhouse gas emission cuts across the EU – at least 30% by 2020 and about 80% by 2050. Such emission reductions would have significant energy policy implications.

➤ **Status quo on costly, dirty, dangerous energy sources**

Coal and nuclear power have received billions in subsidies and state aid in recent decades. The Commission does not question the status quo of giving preferential treatment to polluting and hazardous energy sources. And it appears to have already made up its mind on carbon capture and storage, despite unresolved uncertainties and risks surrounding the technology.

The draft Green Paper suggests a debate on the future role of nuclear energy. This debate should be long closed. The Commission has tested public opinion on this matter: a Eurobarometer survey on attitudes to energyⁱⁱ published in January showed that most Europeans believe that governments should develop solar and wind power, while just 12% support nuclear energy. Greenpeace argues that nuclear power has no future: it presents the risk of nuclear accidents, produces highly radioactive waste for which there is no disposal solution, and is wholly dependent on state aid, before, during and after a reactor's life. *It is the antithesis of a competitive, sustainable and secure energy source.*

➤ **Conclusion**

Greenpeace has shown in its Energy Revolution Scenarioⁱⁱⁱ that Europe can phase out nuclear power and, at the same time, reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 30% by 2020 to avoid dangerous climate change. By 2050, half of Europe's energy demand could come from renewable energy sources and CO₂ emissions could be reduced by nearly 75%.

Greenpeace recommends that the EU seize this opportunity to launch a full-scale review of energy policy, and advises the Commission to adopt a 'Greener Paper' with the calibre and vision required to make Europe's energy truly secure, competitive and sustainable.

For more information:

Mahi Sideridou, EU climate & energy policy director, tel +32 2 274 1904 / +32 496 122 094
Katharine Mill, media officer, tel +32 2 274 1903 / +32 496 156229

Greenpeace European Unit
3 March 2006

Notes

i European Commission, 2005.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/efficiency/doc/2005_06_green_paper_book_en.pdf

ii Eurobarometer 2006. http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_247_en.pdf

iii Greenpeace, 2005. 'Energy Revolution: a sustainable pathway to a clean energy future for Europe': <http://eu.greenpeace.org/downloads/energy/EU25scenario2050.pdf>