

The EU and Tar Sands in 2011

A report in May 2011 indicated that Connie Hedegaard, the EU Climate Change Commissioner, wanted tar sands oil banned from EU fuels (Guardian 31/5/2011, page 25)

The UK was being accused of undermining a Europe – wide drive to ban forecourt sales of petrol and diesel derived from the carbon intensive process of mining Canada's tar sands. The UK is accused of refusing to back other countries that want tar sands specifically named in the Fuel Quality Directive (FQD) which was due to come into effect in Autumn 2011.

The Co-op's head of social goals and sustainability said that the UK has caved into pressure from Canada.

Canada's tar sands can require up to three times the amount of greenhouse gases to extract from the earth. There are also fears that the process of extraction can poison underground aquifers.

Shell's response is that the CO₂ content can be dealt with by carbon capture and storage.

Tar sands were originally named in the draft proposals from the European commission, which were drawn up to ensure that member states were able to meet the legally binding target of reducing green-house gas by 6% by 2020. By late 2010, following intense lobbying from the Canadian government, all references to tar sands were dropped, triggering a campaign by the Co-op, WWF and others for the words to be reinserted.

In March 2011 Connie Hedegaard said that tar sands would be put back in the draft fuel proposals. If Member states had agreed then

the new standards would have been introduced by the autumn of 2011.

In May 2011 the DoT , while totally committed to reducing GHG emissions from transport fuels, questioned whether the EU's stance on tar sands was the right one. Instead it stated:

“We are pushing the European commission to agree a method for assessing the emission of fossil fuels from different sources as part of the FQD as soon as possible. Such a methodology , based on sound science, could be a key means to reduce emissions ”.

Campaigners called this a stalling tactic.

At the Norwegian Statoil AGM, the management said that tar sands are an essential energy resource that must be exploited. WWF Norway said that the ecological consequences of tar sands are greater than those of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

On the 5th October 2011 the Guardian reported that: *” oil from tar sands is likely to be all but banned ”* from Europe after a decision yesterday. It continued:

“In a victory for Connie Hedegaard the commission has decided to back a directive on fuel quality. This will set minimum environmental standards for a range of fuels, including tar sands ”.

This proposal was to be considered by EU Member states in November. The standard for tar sands was a GHG value of 107 grams per megajoule of fuel (this compares with 87.5 grams for crude oil).

The UK minister of transport stated in a letter dated 26th September (2011) that the government will oppose inclusion of tar sands value and will *“continue to have discussions with colleagues*

in other member states to ensure all heavy crudes are dealt with, not simply oil sands” .

The EU had, in fact, included other fuels with higher carbon values than tar sands in the proposals to try and get around this objection.

Canada warned that banning oil from tar sands will raise energy prices for Europe.

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