

EU lawmakers urge California to reject REDD, fearing wider use by airlines under CORSIA

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California should reject the use of REDD tropical forest protection credits under its carbon market because it won't ensure emission cuts and could pave the way for much greater use by airlines under the UN's CORSIA offsetting mechanism, a cross-party group of EU lawmakers warned on Wednesday.

California regulator ARB is due to decide this spring whether to approve a Tropical Forest Standard (TFS) that would need to be met by jurisdictions seeking to link their sector-based offset programmes to the US state's WCI-linked carbon market. The standard does not include any specific REDD protocols.

The ARB's decision is being closely watched worldwide as it could lead to the first compliance programme anywhere that allows REDD. Although REDD projects have usually relied on government donations, lately they have drawn voluntary commitments from oil majors.

The EU in particular has been wary of using forestry-based carbon credits, barring their use from its ETS. From 2021, it will ban foreign credits entirely in the wake of major doubts about the environmental integrity of the 1.6 billion UN Kyoto units imported into the ETS over the past decade, as well as their price-depressing effect on EUAs.

"We believe that adopting the TFS would water down climate ambition in California, the EU, and globally, as it would constitute a further step towards allowing regulated entities, such as companies or airlines, to replace real emission reductions with the purchase of credits that at best do little to address climate change and at worst lead to increased emissions and human rights violations on the ground," six members of the EU Parliament (MEPs) said in an letter to the ARB seen by Carbon Pulse.

"We therefore urge you to reject the TFS and consider instead other measures to curb deforestation rates, especially by directly addressing the drivers of deforestation," they added.

The six MEPs signing were from four of the seven main political groupings, including the largest two: the centre-right EPP and centre-left SPD. The authors included climate policy veterans Bas Eickhout (Greens), Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (centrist ALDE), and the EPP's Julie Girling and Sirpa Pietikainen.

All MEPs will next month face re-election battles for a new five-year term in the assembly, which must agree to most EU laws together with the Council of the 28 member state governments.

WEDGING IN

The letter said California adopting the TFS could "open the door for (more) forestry offsets in the global aviation offsetting scheme CORSIA".

“This is a great source of concern to us, EU policymakers, as it would open the door for one of the most controversial types of international carbon credits for use by European airlines, despite the EU having taken steps to consistently ban such credits from use towards our own climate targets,” it added.

CORSIA is yet to decide on eligible credits types but could provide by far the biggest potential market for REDD credits as it is expected to stimulate demand of over 3 billion tonnes between 2021-2035.

The MEPs also said the TFS doesn't do enough to prevent double-counting of emission reduction efforts, stop deforestation from merely moving to areas outside REDD projects, or guarantee permanent emission reductions.

But REDD proponents argue that these long-standing concerns have largely been resolved by more effective policy designs in recent years, with the TFS itself setting out safeguards such as a 100-year permanence requirement and a 10% credit buffer pool.

By Ben Garside – ben@carbon-pulse.com

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