

Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels

Ensuring that biofuels deliver on their promise of sustainability



ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE
FÉDÉRALE DE LAUSANNE

Official Newsletter – December 2007

Dear friends,

2007 has been a rich year! With an official launch in April, the **Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels** has not seen any time-outs: we've held about ten virtual meetings of the Working Groups (Environment, Greenhouse Gases, Social Impacts and Implementation), in addition to intense discussions on topics like conservation, greenhouse gases accounting, consultation process and biotechnologies held through e-mails and the Bioenergy Wiki platform.

But nothing is better and more productive than meeting people for real! Along with a rich first in-person meeting of the Steering Board, held in Lausanne in November, the RSB has already organized two regional outreaches, in Brazil and China, to get a better understanding of contextual issues and local concerns, and has actively participated in several international conferences on biofuel in Europe (Basel, Copenhagen, London, Brussels, Dubrovnik, Berlin), America (New-York), Africa (Cape Town, Ouagadougou) and Asia (Kuala Lumpur, Bali). And this is only the beginning! Please enjoy this brief summary of our 2007 activities, and some highlights of what to expect from us in 2008.

1) Principles and Criteria (Working Groups)

1.a Working Group on Environment

After the first virtual meeting in June, the group moved ahead apace through its challenging schedule. Almost four months were spent discussing **the wording and content of the principles on environment**, not only with the group, but through all the comments and suggestions received from non-members on the Bioenergy Wiki platform as well. In September, a consensus was reached on a temporary wording, with the agreement that some principles (conservation and biotechnologies) had to remain open until the necessary criteria were established.

The Working Group then opened the discussion on its first big piece: **conservation**. The cornerstone of the discussion is the introduction of **High Conservation Values**, as defined by the HCV network (<http://www.hcvnetwork.org>). The group considered the concept inclusive enough to cover almost all important areas to protect. The **Expert Panel on Conservation**, which included experts from Birdlife International, NRDC, UNEP, Shell, FSC, World Resource Institute, the Tropical Forest Trust, Petrobras and WWF, took the lead in discussing criteria and made suggestions to the Working Group, which then discussed and accepted (or refused) them. The discussion on the exact wording of criteria needs some more time and the group could only agree on the general content in the very short time imparted to it.

In December, the ongoing discussions are about **biotechnologies** (http://www.bioenergywiki.net/index.php/Talk:RSB_principle_on_Biotechnologies). This very controversial debate needed to be opened, as the demand was clear from members for the RSB to take a position on the use of GMOs for biofuels.

You can consult the whole history of discussions on Environmental Principles and Criteria, and see the draft criteria at:
http://www.bioenergywiki.net/index.php/RSB_Working_Group_on_Environment (Wiki)
and
<http://cgse.epfl.ch/page68126.html> (EPFL Website).

1.b Working Group on Greenhouse Gases (GHG)

About four virtual meeting of the Expert Advisory and the Working Group were organized. The Expert Advisory Group currently includes the Dr. Bruce Dale (Michigan State University) (co-chair of the GHG WG), Dr. Stephan Krinke (Volkswagen) (co-chair of the GHG WG), Dr. Alex Farrell (UC Berkley), Dr. Hisashi Ishitani (Keio University), Dr. Jeremy Woods (Imperial College London), Dr. Rainer Zah (EMPA, Switzerland), Dr. Guido Reinhardt (IFEU, Germany), Dr. Isaias Macedo (UNICAMP, Brazil), Dr. Michael Wang (Agronne National Labs, USA), Dr. Edgard Gnansounou (EPFL), Dr. Shoba Veeraraghavan (Shell) and Mr. Lucas Assunção (UNCTAD). The Working Group consists of 123 members.

Until the end of September some technical parameters (i.e. the functional unit, the borders of the approach etc) to be included in the recommended methodology, were chosen and the use of an existing methodology as a basis rather than creating a new one was decided. In addition, a draft version of the GHG principle was agreed by the group and released. By the end of September, Georgios Sarantakos rejoined the team as coordinator of the WG, in replacement of Dr. Tourane Corbière.

In order to facilitate the choice of an LCA tool/methodology that would prove most suitable in the frame of RSB standards, a questionnaire was sent to several groups that have developed a methodology/tool/database. The answers to the questionnaire were transposed into a comparative list of the methodologies. In addition, the tools and databases, adapted by the European Platform on Life Cycle Assessment were gathered into another list. During their last virtual meeting (mid December), the participants agreed on a new version of GHG principle and criteria, on the development of a guideline for minimum sustainability criteria, and on an associated tool based on this guideline. The organization of at least one in-person meeting to debate about issues such as the indirect land use change and by-product allocation is strongly supported by the Expert Advisory Group.

You can consult the whole history of discussions on GHG Principles and Criteria at:
http://www.bioenergywiki.net/index.php/RSB_Working_Group_on_Greenhouse_Gases
and
<http://cgse.epfl.ch/page68127.html> (EPFL Website).

1.c Working Group on Social Impacts

The SOC Working Group had an active autumn, recommending a new principle on community consultation as a key aspect of ensuring biofuels' sustainability, and separating national law into its own principle. The criteria for community consultation are pretty well developed, and the Expert Group on Rural and Social Development is now being formed, to examine how biofuels can be a driver for rural livelihoods improvement given an increasing trend towards intensive agriculture and concentrated supply chains.

You can consult the whole history of discussions on Social Principles and Criteria at: [http://www.bioenergywiki.net/index.php/RSB Working Group on Social Impacts](http://www.bioenergywiki.net/index.php/RSB_Working_Group_on_Social_Impacts) (Wiki) and <http://cgse.epfl.ch/page68128.html> (EPFL Website).

1.d Working Group on Implementation

The Working Group on Implementation will get to work early in 2008, to start to discuss how the developing standards can best be implemented, whether by voluntary measures, a certification system, membership requirements, etc. They will also discuss ways to ensure that small farmers and small businesses have access to the standard. Dr. Alan Knight, Sustainability Advisor to the Virgin Group, has just accepted to chair this Working Group.

2) Regional Outreaches

While the level of participation on the Wiki and in teleconferences is impressive, there is a need to compliment these English-only, technology-intensive activities with in-person interaction in producing countries, to ensure that all stakeholders are adequately represented. To that aim, the Secretariat is hosting or co-hosting a series of 1.5 day meetings around the world to discuss the draft principles and criteria in a region-specific context, allowing for more in-depth and personal interaction, ideally in local languages so that all stakeholders can participate.

Two regional meetings were organised in 2007, in cooperation with UNEP. The first was held as part of the EcoLatina trade show on October 17th & 18th in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, cosponsored by Petrobras. The second was held on November 13th and 14th, as part of the Michelin Bibendum Challenge in Shanghai. Each meeting had about 50 participants from industry, NGOs, governments, universities, and international organizations from throughout the region. Presentations, a participants' list, and conclusions can all be downloaded on our website.

The next steps will consist in integrating all these important elements into our discussions and standards, with a real wish to keep connected with the participants in the long run. There is a real challenge in combining a genuine concern for local people's livelihood and rights, especially indigenous people, protecting ecosystems, promoting small scale sustainable scheme and on the other side, being realistic about the worldwide demand in energy, EU or

US targets and consequent pressure on southern countries regarding production and potential national incomes.

3) Participation in conferences

As the RSB never misses an occasion to learn and share on biofuels, many international conferences were attended, either by the RSB secretariat (coordinators) or by some Steering Board and Working Group Members.

- In September, Charlotte Opal, the coordinator of the RSB, has chaired a discussion entitled “**Eat it or Burn it? The Potential of Bio Fuels**” at the the Swiss Chemical Society meeting in Basel. Earlier (May), she had taken part in the panel on biofuels in the UN’s Commission on Sustainable Development (NY City), and the World Economic Forum Industry Strategy Day in London.
- In June, the Workshop on Biofuels in **Copenhagen** (Technical University of Denmark) took a particular look at the technical aspects of land-use models and characterization of social impacts, while at the beginning of July, **Brussels** became for two days the epicenter of biofuels with the workshop on the **Fuel Quality Directive** and the **International Conference on Biofuels** bringing together governments, producers and NGOs from all over the planet, both organized by the **European Commission**; these three conferences were attended by Sebastien Haye, the coordinator of the Working Group on Environment.
- Later in 2007, Annie Sugrue, the coordinator of the Working Group on Social Aspects took part in the **Conference on Biofuels Market in Africa** (Cape Town 5-7 November) and RSB Steering Board member Jean-Philippe Denruyter chaired a discussion round in **Ouagadougou** in partnership with the UNEP (25-27 November), with the perspectives and regional aspects of biofuels **standards implementation in West Africa**.
- Moving on to **Greenhouse Gases accounting (lifecycle assessment)**, the RSB was invited to join the **IEA Bioenergy Task 29/38/40** discussions. Thanks to a close partnership with the **EMPA** (Swiss Research Institute), the RSB was represented at the workshop held in **Dubrovnik** (Croatia, 25-26 Oct) and will hopefully be present at the next one in Austria (feb 2007). Meanwhile, Georgios Sarantakos, who coordinates the Working Group on GHGs attended a conference organized by the **EC in Brussels** in the autumn. The complex question of **allocation vs substitution** was discussed in depth, without any agreement in the end but a clear statement of pros and cons for each scenario.
- In November, Sebastien attended the **Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil 5th** Conference in Kuala Lumpur. After more than 5 years of hard work, certified Palm Oil is about being delivered to food industry in Europe, which is an encouraging sign.
- In December, many members of the RSB’s Steering Board and Working Groups were in **Bali for the UNFCCC Conference**. The **IUCN** organized a side event where the positive potential of the RSB and other standards was outlined.

4) Outlook for 2008

Our tight deadline to deliver draft standards by June 2008 will keep our Working Groups busy for the next six months, accompanied by regional stakeholder meetings tentatively planned for Central America, East/Southern Africa, and South Asia. We thank all of you who have built up this Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels through your contributions and participation, and we look forward to collaborating in 2008!

With best wishes,

Annie, Charlotte, Georgios, and Sebastien
Roundtable Secretariat Staff