

Beware of biofuels

The great energy and climate change debates – in London as the government embarks on its energy review and wider afield at the UN's climate change convention in Montreal – point to renewables as the great hope for the future fuelling of a green, sustainable planet. Part of the renewables mix is biofuels. The UK Government now has in place a Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation which requires 5 per cent of all forecourt fuel to come from renewable sources by 2010. Transport Secretary Alastair Darling calculates that such a move will take one million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions out of the atmosphere – the equivalent of taking one million cars off the road, says the Minister. In the delivery of such a “techno-fix” it is vital to ensure that mono-cropping of oilseed rape on a vast scale as an oil source does not ruin the increasingly diverse nature of our countryside, post Common Agricultural Policy reform, says EFRC Director Lawrence Woodward.

Even more importantly we must guard against global moves to deliver biofuels at any cost. There is already evidence that the Brazilian rainforest is being felled to provide land for bioethanol production and in Malaysia expanding palm oil plantations, as feedstock for biofuel, are also accelerating forest destruction.

“It is folly to pursue renewables at such environmental cost”. Instead, says Lawrence Woodward: “let's get the Minister's million car equivalents off the road, thereby tackling causes not effects”.

Further reading:

<http://www.monbiot.com/archives/2005/12/06/worse-than-fossil-fuel/>