

Climate Camp NZ



Biofuel imports from third world countries: Crime against nature & humanity

**Talk given by Kay Weir, editor Pacific Ecologist -
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To avoid dangerous climate change it's vital to move away from fossil fuel use and to develop renewable wind and solar energies and some biofuel production. For example we can develop biofuels from waste products, like whey, or algae on sewage ponds. A spinoff from developing sustainable biofuels is it will create stable ongoing jobs into the future. Fish and chip shops waste oil can easily be turned into locally produced biofuel, and immediately used in essential vehicles, within the local region with no waste of energy in transport costs as Geoff Waterhouse with his sustainably fuelled tourism taxis has shown in Northland. This type of biofuel production is benign.

But massive agrofuel plantations being developed in third world countries under the banner of sustainability, and promoted by development banks and rich countries so they can continue with unsustainable private car travel and also plane travel are a hideous plague on the earth, destroying nature, the habitats of threatened species and the places where millions of people living sustainable subsistence lives produce their food.

That this is happening shows how enormously unsustainable are rich countries like New Zealand, Australia, the UK, EU and United States. We are blundering from unsustainable development into more unsustainable development with no proper analysis of what is sustainable and what is not. Instead of sitting down and working out how to make the world sustainable and equitable, rampant exploitation of third world countries continues.

Instead of reducing the dangers of climate change, millions of hectares of third world land being used in vast plantations of monocrops with oil-based fertilisers and pesticides are massively extending the industrial agricultural frontier in Africa, Brazil, Latin America and South-East Asia, thus contributing to soil erosion, deforestation and global warming emissions,

as well as devouring much needed water and land resources. Unsustainable development is continuing in the name of sustainability, causing misery, hunger and havoc to keep the rich world in the manner to which it is accustomed with sustainable indigenous peoples and others being evicted from their land.

Many countries, e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa, currently being used to produce biofuels for the rich industrial world's cars are the poorest countries in the world, where people live on communal land, not clearly protected in law from takeovers, and some are famine countries, already under great stress through drought caused by climate change. Even protected areas like the Babile Elephant Sanctuary in Ethiopia, home to endangered elephants have been allocated for export fuel production, and orangutans, elephants and other creatures are in rapid decline in Borneo, Sumatra and Kalimantan with ever expanding plantations for export biodiesel crops destroying their forest homes.

Africans call for agrofuel Moratorium

The misery and injustice agrofuel projects are bringing to third world countries was in 2007 correctly called a *crime against humanity* by then UN special rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler. African civil society organisations from many countries have signed a statement calling for a moratorium on agrofuel developments on the African continent saying: *"We need to protect our food security, water, land rights, farmers and indigenous people from the aggressive march of agrofuel developments which are devouring our lands and resources at an unbelievable scale and speed."* - (see African Biodiversity Network for full statement.)

Yet these projects still continue to devastate Africa. For example, Norway-based BioFuel Africa Ltd, aims to produce biofuel by growing the oil-rich jatropha tree - 1.7 million of them, eventually, on lands in Ghana. Other companies from countries like the UK, Germany and the US have also bought up land in places like Ethiopia and Tanzania to grow "biofuels." An article in *The Independent* this year reported, biofuels are bringing a global land grab with about 20 per cent of international land deals taking place are for cultivation of biofuels rather than food. A race in rich countries to achieve targets by providing a percentage of "renewable" biofuels for cars and even for plane travel, is driving this grotesque destruction. Most unfortunately, the promise of "sustainable palm oil," according to shonky certification processes of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil" was backed by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which was an important factor behind the EU's decision to go ahead with a 10% agrofuel target by 2020. And no, the 10% is not going to be achieved by EU countries using their own lands to source the "biofuels," it's to be sourced from tropical countries with priceless rainforests, like Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Colombia, and these countries are greatly at risk from climate change damage.

Ethanol from Brazil in NZ

At some stage last year, 2008, about 15 Mobil petrol stations in the greater Wellington region were reported to be selling bioethanol blended petrol sourced from Brazil and other stations in the North Island are reported to be selling it. Mobil has been selling a 98 octane fuel containing up to 10% ethanol (E10), and a 91 octane fuel containing up to 3% ethanol. E10 and E3 is available from Mobil's Johnsonville station. The station is only selling bioethanol blends. I also found mention on a website of bioethanol from Brazil being sold by Mobil in other places around NZ. Next year and continuing onwards there could be much more biofuel from Brazil or Latin America in our petrol stations. - (NB: - see later section Action: raising awareness)

Serious problems in Brazil's sugarcane fields

In June 2008, EECA, NZ's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority welcomed Mobil's trial of two ethanol blends, saying it was sourced from "sustainable Brazilian sugarcane." A paper, commissioned and published in 2008 for EECA, *The Sustainability of Brazilian Sugarcane Bioethanol: a Literature Review*, by Andrew Barber, Glenys Pellos & Mariana de Aragao Pereira, raises more problems for Brazilian sugarcane's sustainability than it solves, yet this paper surprisingly is interpreted by EECA as showing Brazil's bioethanol to be "environmentally sustainable." Many pages of problems are reported in this paper, including severe water pollution, caused from waste products including nitrates from sugarcane production released to waterways and causing death of fish, crustacean and vegetation, increased water acidity, soil erosion in sugarcane fields, air pollution from burning of sugarcane causing respiratory problems. It is not believable to be told in a few short sentences that these problems have been alleviated or are on the wane. Agrofuel production is on the increase in Brazil, so it's highly unlikely these problems are on the wane, and other reports attest to increasing problems.

In January 2008, The Smithsonian Institute of Tropical Research reported sugar-based ethanol and soy-based agrodiesel brought more environmental destruction than fossil fuels. This research draws attention to the environmental destruction in Brazil caused by increased sugarcane production.

Maria Luisa Mendonca, journalist and coordinator of the Network for Social Justice & Human Rights in Brazil, reports in her 2009 paper *Impacts of Expansion of Sugarcane Monocropping for Ethanol Production*: "The sugarcane industry has expanded rapidly and generated enormous environmental damage. To begin planting sugarcane, it's necessary to clear native vegetation, and thus all trees are uprooted. In August 2008, an agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture resulted in a series of modifications of the Law of Environmental Crimes. One of these results was announced in a decree from President Lula allowing for construction of sugarcane factories in the Pantanal. According to data from the National Institute for Space Research, INPE from IBGE and Brazil's Ministry for the Environment MMA, new sugarcane factories are being built in conservation areas, close to natural springs." These natural spring can only be polluted and degraded by sugarcane production.

Mendonca's paper reports that studies indicate each year nearly 22,000 square kilometres of savannah in the vital Cerrado region in Brazil are cleared. The Cerrado region provides most of Brazil's water and is rich in biodiversity with 160,000 species of plants and animals. It's estimated half this vital region has already been devastated and if the same destructive development model continues its destruction will be complete by 2030. This would be a huge environmental disaster and tragic loss not just for Brazil but the entire world. .

WATER ISSUE VITAL

A study from the Center for studies in Applied Economics, University of Sao Paulo, estimates 73 new ethanol companies will be built in the Center-South region of Brazil costing \$US14.6 billion. Researcher Sergio De Zen believes "ethanol has become an environmental threat."

Studies, including the UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report, show human pressures on the biosphere and resource use are already highly unsustainable, without large-scale modern agroenergy production. According to this report, 60% of ecosystem services are already degraded and there is increasing likelihood of non-linear changes in ecosystems which could have severe impacts on human society. Any major shift from fossil fuel energy to bioenergy will significantly increase human demands on the planet's photosynthesis capacity, and on the biosphere in general.

“If we look at how much more water we will need for food and how much more for biomass for energy going forward ... it is quite worrying,” said Jan Lundqvist, director of the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI). Global food needs are expected to roughly double by 2050, at the same time as climate change and dwindling oil reserves are pressuring countries to set aside ever more land for producing biomass to replace greenhouse gas-emitting fossil fuels. These global trends risk colliding with “the water-constrained biophysical reality of the planet,” according to SIWI.) Large quantities of water are needed to grow agrofuel crops, and water pollution is exacerbated by agricultural drainage containing fertilizers, pesticides, and sediment.

Rich countries expectations dangerous

Rich industrial countries expectations that third world countries can be used to sustainably maintain their car and plane travel are absurdly impossible. How can the UK and all EU countries, and the US and NZ and Australia, all get their cars AND plane travel even partially fuelled from third world countries resources, sustainably? These countries **are** where most of the world’s people live and millions of people are badly affected by agrofuel production. **Long haul flights** across the world use enormous amounts of fuel, and this demand can’t be met without immense destruction and pollution. More than anything else the biofuels issue shows the dangerous energy illiteracy of the rich world, which third world social movements know all about as shown in issue 17 of *Pacific Ecologist*

Even the best life-cycle greenhouse gas assessment cannot help prevent agrofuels from accelerating global warming, because it cannot account for indirect impacts, displacement of other agricultural activities, or accelerated deforestation linked to infrastructure to transport agrofuels, (the link between road building and forest degradation is well established). Nor do life-cycle assessments account for non-linear climate feedbacks from deforestation, which are amongst the most serious risks to carbon sinks and so to stability of the global climate.

There is a high risk, according to research - (see Maria Luisa Mendonca, AND Almuth Ernsting, HOW MEANINGFUL ARE ‘GREENHOUSE GAS STANDARDS’ FOR BIOFUELS IN A GLOBAL MARKET?) of non-linear events, such as Amazon die-back which could be rapid, irreversible and lead to catastrophic acceleration of global warming as well as major changes in rainfall patterns, which could very rapidly cause global food shortages and large numbers of refugees. Such risks cannot be represented in ‘life-cycle’ studies done for agrofuels. Given strong evidence that biofuel targets in NZ, Australia, the EU, US and elsewhere will threaten to accelerate Amazon destruction, a precautionary climate strategy means opposing biofuel imports from the Latin American region and of course from all third world countries.

Right to Food

According to Article 11 of the UN’s International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, states have the obligation of “respecting, protecting and guaranteeing” the right to food. To respect this right means states cannot obstruct or impede people’s access to adequate food as is the case when rural communities are displaced from their lands, especially those who depend on them for their subsistence. States should guarantee the universal right to food through measures that protect vulnerable social groups.

Padre Thorlby, who works in a sugarcane zone in Brazil with an ecumenical church organisation, The Land Pastoral Commission, says cars are causing a holocaust. He talks and writes about the Academic roadshow travelling the world to encourage you to believe in myths about Brazil’s ethanol being clear, sustainable energy for the rich world’s cars. But don’t expect them to tell you the truth, he says, because they have never been near a canefield or talked with any of the hundreds of thousands of families evicted from the land. “To say the energy

produced by this model is 'clean, sustainable' is an attack on Nature and a crime against those expelled from the land to make way for this green desert." The developed world, he says, singles out the under-developed' but more under-justiced world to produce the materials "to allow it to continue consuming at lunatic rates."

Action: Raise awareness of biofuel imports in NZ

In August, the conservative International Energy Agency's chief economist Fatih Birol, warned world crude oil production is set to peak in about 10 years. But an "energy crunch" could start in 2011, with soaring oil prices threatening to derail any recovery from the current world recession. Fatih recommends "accelerating mobilisation of renewables, energy efficiency and alternative transport. The energy crises will bring increasing pressures for "biofuels. " We must face up to the fact the private car and the jet plane are not and will never be sustainable mass transit systems. Our main priority is how to put a halt and reduce increasing fuel consumption.

We must work to bring about a ban on all imported biofuels into New Zealand on human rights grounds as well as environmental factors to help prevent continued deforestation and increased global warming emissions caused by industrial agrofuel plantations. We cannot any longer hide behind the devastation of third world countries and deprivation of millions of people and pretend agrofuel production is sustainable. It is bringing ecocide, total devastation, the death of life. As Rahui Katene for the Maori Party said so inspirationally in Parliament at the First Reading of the Sustainable Biofuel Bill: *"the fact is we need to radically change the way we live. A safe environmentally sound and economically viable energy pathway that will sustain human progress into the distant future must be the horizon we seek to achieve and we must start to do something about this now."*

As many New Zealanders are unaware biofuels from Brazil are here and of their terrible effects, **firstly 1.** we must raise awareness, perhaps by small groups of people with appropriate placards, walking in the streets particularly during peak hour traffic jams. A flute player or two would help create a festive air. We are seeking to make a much better, less stressful more equitable world, and doing it in as good humoured, charming way as possible may bring better results.

2. Secondly another focus of our attention could be the **EECA conference at Te Papa in Wellington on Biofuels and Electric cars on 21 April next year , 2010** where Elizabeth Beall, of the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels, who works for the Inter-American Development Bank, which promotes biofuels produced in third world countries, will be a key-note speaker.

3. Thirdly, of course, we must look to our own transport footprints, can we stop using the car and plane travel? Can we find satisfying ways to live by walking more and using public transport? We must constantly promote to government and city councils the need to greatly improve public transport and to live in solidarity with our fellow human beings in third world countries, who do not have cars or get into planes.

In conclusion, here's a Christmas message from Padre Thorlby in Pernambuco, Brazil:

" Peace on the Land ... what Peace? ... what Land?

Peace and Land to maintain piece-meal privilege

... concentrated in the hands of the few

- the agro-industry? - the agro-auto industry? - the agro-chemical industry?

... "the violent latifundiary - self-satisfied at the other's expense

... the devastating monoculture model - profits that cost the earth

... the servile State - and unrepresentative governments?

**“OR: “the Peace-Solidarity of the People and Shepherds of the countryside
- the Peace-of the land, of the water, of the bread, shared
“The Peace of Mother Earth preserved
“ YOU, ME: We have a choice!
 Be Happy This Christmas!”**

Kay Weir, author of this talk, *“Biofuel Imports: crime against nature & humanity,”* is editor of *Pacific Ecologist*, produced in Wellington - see issue 17 for more information on biofuels - pirmeditor@paradise.net.nz - PO Box 12125, Wellington, New Zealand -www.pacificecologist.org

Talk ends here

Additional Notes about Brazil

In Latin America, deserts are expanding. In Brazil, 58 million hectares of land, at least, are affected by desertification. Scientists warn global warming will accelerate desertification in the region increasing poverty and fuelling emigration. Figures from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics state 48.4 percent of the population in the Northeast is poor, nearly triple the rate of the Southeast (17 percent, on average) and of the South (18.3 percent). The semiarid region of the north-eastern interior “is the most vulnerable to climate change, with a portion of it tending to become fully arid,” said José Antonio Marengo, CPTEC researcher. The “Semi-Árido” covers nearly 1.1 million square kilometres of the Northeast, and the northern part of the south-eastern state of Minas Gerais. This is 13 percent of the national territory, and is home to 29 million people.

There is serious maldistribution of resources in Brazil, the world's 9th-largest economy, which is a net exporter of agricultural products. Yet a mere 1% of the Brazilian population holds 47% of the arable land. Large tracts have historically been left idle for speculation. Though the 1988 Constitution guarantees land reform, large landowners have used their close ties to the political elite to block progress on its implementation. Under such conditions, when large numbers of people have nothing to fall back on, drought becomes famine. Mary Lorena Kenny reports Brazil is a “‘low-intensity’ democracy” which has had few social and economic reforms that have hampered elite interests, minimized inequity, or empowered the poor. Patronage continues to be the dominant tool for survival, especially in the drought-ridden Northeast, where access to scarce state services is extremely competitive and personal connections determine or facilitate access.”

Of note, if there is so much unused land, why is it that Brazil has the world's highest rates of deforestation, and the Amazon region has been “utilised” for cattle farming, with great destruction of the globally important Amazon rainforest. Why is it that Brazil's civil society and social justice organisations, are calling out for agrarian reform and for recognition of the territories of traditional peoples and communities, and for a process of land democratisation as a way to guarantee food and energy sovereignty. If there is so much land, why not bring about land reform in Brazil? A Declaration in Oct 2007 from 500 participants, including via Campesina, representing millions of peasant farmers, at the First National and Popular Conference on Agroenergy in Brazil, said: “The current agribusiness model [in Brazil] is a process of continuous land concentration.” “The current model of agroenergy production is pushing and expanding agricultural frontiers, menacing Brazil's biomes, mainly of Amazonia and the Cerrado.” They demand an end to deforestation and expulsion of farmers in Brazilian ecosystems.

Today it's agrofuels invading Brazilian land to keep the rich world in "biofuels" for its cars under a false sustainability banner. A decade ago it was soybean plantations for export, to feed animals in first world countries like The Netherlands, which shoved peasants from the land on to the margins. Now both soybeans and agrofuels for export compete for land and precious water in Brazil, and this enriches small elites and impoverishes millions of the poor, and is a health hazard for the poor sugarcane workers. Effects of ever spreading plantations of agrofuels in the Cerrado and Panatal regions and elsewhere on Brazil is tremendous destruction of biodiversity. If it continues the Amazon rainforest will be at risk. **See Maria Luisa Mendonca's Jan 2009 paper, *Impacts of Expansion of Sugarcane Monocropping for Ethanol Production*. To find out more read *Pacific Ecologist*, issue 17, Summer 2009. - email - see pacificecologist.org pirmeditor@paradise.net.nz**