

National Renewable Energy Action Plans: An Introduction

Summary

On 30 June 2009 the Commission adopted a template setting out minimum requirements for National Renewable Energy Action Plans (NREAPs), as required by the Directive on renewable energy. NREAPs must include detailed estimates of energy consumption in the years to 2020, as well as information on all policies and procedure and support schemes to promote renewable energy. Member States must also provide details on how the sustainability criteria for biofuels and other bioliquids will be met. Outside of this no specific requirements on sustainability are required, reflecting the lack of such criteria in the renewable energy Directive for example on solid biomass or land use change.

Background

In December 2008 the new Directive (2009/28/EC) on the use of renewable energy was finally approved, setting a target of 20 per cent of all energy use to be sourced from renewable resources by 2020. The first step in the implementation of the renewable energy Directive was the establishment of a template of minimum requirements for National Renewable Energy Action Plans (NREAPs) – adopted by the European Commission on 30 June 2009 (Commission Decision 2009/548/EC). The NREAPs will be particularly vital for monitoring expansion in the use of biomass for energy and specifically the sustainability of biofuels.

Member States have until 30 June 2010 to set out how they plan to reach the Directive's renewable energy targets for transport, electricity, and heating and cooling by 2020. Forecasts on flexibility measures, ie estimates of excess/deficit renewable energy production and joint projects, are due by 31 December 2009. This will be an important point at which Member States will reveal the extent of their reliance on statistical transfer of outputs elsewhere in the EU, potentially altering the power balance between key countries.

Policies and measures

The NREAPs are required to include detailed measures on a multitude of topics to fulfil the requirements found in the Directive. The four main areas of the plans will cover:

- Year-by-year **estimates of gross final energy consumption**, as well as **estimated trajectories of energy from renewable sources**. The estimates must be broken down to sector-specific trajectories for heating and cooling, electricity and transport;
- **Measures to promote the use of energy from renewable resources in electricity**, in particular financial support schemes. Much of the support for renewable energy is expected to be in the form of investment incentives, tradable certificates and feed-in premiums;

- Member States' future strategy regarding fulfilment of the **sustainability criteria for biofuels and bioliquids** and verification of compliance with the scheme. The development of voluntary 'certification' schemes for biofuel and bioliquid sustainability is expressly listed as a possible pathway; and
- The **use of joint projects and statistical transfers between Member States to meet the targets**. Forecasts on excess or deficit production of renewable energy must be completed by the end of 2009, with these forecasts being fed into Member States' NREAPs.

Biomass

Member States are required to assess their potential for energy production from domestic and imported biomass resources. The impact on and the interaction with other non-energy sectors (such as the food industry, pulp and paper industry, construction industry and so on) must be analysed. As the Directive does not include sustainability criteria for bioenergy, other than bioliquids, no such measures are required to be included in NREAPs. This is despite expectations that the Commission will soon bring forward proposals on this issue.

In addition, the potential for using degraded or unused arable land for energy production must be assessed, but, again, with no express requirement to assess the sustainability of such production. Additionally, there is little clarity within the bioenergy community as to precisely what is meant by degraded and unused land, nor the potential impacts of exploiting this.

The NREAPs must contain strategies on how to improve forest management techniques in order to maximise the extraction of forest biomass in a sustainable way. However, it is difficult to assess how robust this provision would be, as it does not call for any verification or certification scheme, other than the recommendations from the Standing Forestry Committee ad hoc Working Group II in July 2008.

Future developments

The template only sets out the minimum requirements for what must be included in Member States' NREAPs. The Commission is required to imminently publish clarifications regarding the interpretation of bioliquid sustainability requirements and additional proposals on bioenergy sustainability; it is hoped any changes would be rapidly incorporated into the NREAP format as these will be vital to the monitoring of Member State performance.

References

1. Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources and amending and subsequently repealing Directives 2001/77/EC and 2003/30/EC, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:140:0016:0062:EN:PDF>
2. Commission Decision of 30 June 2009 establishing a template for National Renewable Energy Action Plans under Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:182:0033:0062:EN:PDF>