

11 September 2009

Submission

to the

Local Government and Environment Select Committee

on the

Sustainable Biofuel Bill

Summary of main points:

- Caritas supports the intention of the Bill to ensure that biofuels supplied in New Zealand come from sustainable sources, and endorses the principles under which sustainability is to be evaluated.
- Our view is based on the experience of our staff and development partners overseas, in witnessing the damage caused to land, livelihoods and communities by biofuel plantations
- Alternatives to fossil fuels must come from sustainable sources which do not themselves contribute to environmental or community destruction or a reduction in food supply.

Introduction

1. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is the Catholic agency for Justice, Peace and Development. We are mandated by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference to work for the elimination of poverty and injustice through development and aid work internationally, and through advocacy and education for social justice in New Zealand. We are a member of the Caritas Internationalis confederation of 164 Catholic aid, development and social justice agencies working in over 200 countries and territories.
2. Our position on this Bill is based on:
 - Catholic social teaching, particularly the principle of **Stewardship** which calls on us to care for all the resources of creation and the **Preferential protection for the poor and vulnerable** which asks us to consider policy by its effects on the poorest members of our local and global communities.
 - Our experience as a development agency working in over forty projects in the Pacific, Asia, Latin America and Africa, in particular our experience with rural communities in the Pacific and Asia.
 - Our insights into the experience of climate change learned through our membership of the Caritas Internationalis confederation, in particular in our own region of Caritas Oceania.

Position on the Bill

3. Caritas supports the intention of the Bill to ensure that all biofuels supplied or sold in New Zealand come from sustainable sources.
4. We are not in a position to assess the feasibility and adequacy of types of methodologies and mechanisms that could be used to assess the sustainability of biofuels, as proposed in clause 34 B; and there may be debate over how reliable a particular methodology or mechanism may be. However, we understand that the wording of the Bill as proposed is the same as that used to incorporate sustainability provisions in last year's Biofuel Act. As such, it has already received scrutiny from the Select Committee process and Parliament.

5. We endorse the prime principles for evaluating whether particular biofuels are sustainable or not, namely:
 - they result in significantly less greenhouse gases over their life cycle
 - biofuel production does not compete with food production
 - biofuel production does not reduce indigenous biodiversity, and
 - that the evaluation measures should apply to biofuels sourced from New Zealand or overseas.

Evaluation of biofuels based on these principles would meet many of our concerns about overseas-sourced biofuels as outlined below.

Caritas experience

6. Our view of the need for sustainability standards is based primarily on the experience of our own staff and also development partners overseas, in witnessing the impact of biofuel plantations in many developing countries. This was reflected in written and oral submissions we made to this Committee on the Biofuel Bill in 2008, which we summarise briefly here.
7. In our 2008 submission, we referred to United Nations reports that biofuel development could result in widespread food shortages and displacement of indigenous people and small farmers, and European Union scientific advisors who warned that the production of biofuel could be more polluting than traditional fossil fuels.
8. We cited the experience of our international staff in witnessing large-scale devastation of the landscape in Laos, as forests were cleared and whole villages forcibly moved to make way for plantations. In our oral submission, we raised the concerns of one of our partners, the Center for Environmental Law and Community Rights, over the conversion of more than 100,000 ha of land to palm oil production in Papua New Guinea. It threatens that country's huge biodiversity, the food security of marginal farmers depending on the land for survival, and puts pressure on customary land rights.
9. We have also heard more recently, from a representative of a West Papuan partner, of how biofuel production is removing forests on which indigenous communities rely on for food and other resources. We continue to hear through our partners and from elsewhere around the world, of the damage caused to land, livelihoods and communities by biofuel plantations.

Conclusion

10. Alternatives to fossil fuels must come from sustainable sources which do not themselves contribute to environmental destruction or a reduction in food supply. In making your deliberations on this Bill, we ask the Select Committee to remember the lives of millions of people in Asia and the Pacific who depend on the land for their survival, or who face the uncertain threat of climate change. Please act wisely to ensure a sustainable and viable future for *all* who share this earth, and those who will come after us.