

Sustainable renewable fuels key to meeting EU's 2030 energy and climate objectives

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Sustainable renewable fuels are key to meeting the EU's ambitious 2030 energy and climate objectives, writes Malcolm McDowell.



Malcolm McDowell | *Photo credit: Neste*

Both the United Nations climate change agreement signed in Paris in 2015 and the European Union's 2030 climate and energy framework put a strong emphasis on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Given the transport sector's important share of the EU's overall GHG emissions (upwards of 20 per cent), timely and decisive actions to decarbonise the transport sector are needed for the EU to make good on its own as well as global commitments by 2030 and beyond.

The European Commission recently outlined a number of key areas to achieve transport decarbonisation, which includes accelerating the transition towards low and zero emission vehicles and speeding up the deployment of low-emission alternative energy for transport.

In 2030 in the EU, combustion engines and therefore liquid fuels will continue to largely dominate across the sector. Within that time horizon, there will also be very limited feasible alternatives to fossil fuels in heavy duty transportation and aviation other than renewable liquid fuels.

This means that sustainable biofuels will have to play an important part if the EU is to meet its greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitments as well as its renewable target.

The industry's preferred approach to ensuring the supply of high quality, sustainable, advanced biofuels is via mandatory and technology neutral renewable targets in transport for biofuels from non-food crops; with no other restrictions on feedstocks to enable a broad raw material base.

And there must obviously be the requirement to meet all of the EU's sustainability regime under legislation in force. This type of instrument is already widely in place across the EU, unlike any other alternative, thanks to the renewable energy directive.

Extending and adapting it, so that it provides focussed support for biofuels that meet the above criteria, represents the most certain way of ensuring the continued confidence of investors in advanced biofuels.

What is more, there is recent evidence that replacing fossil fuels with waste and residue-based diesel is one of the most cost-efficient ways to cut emissions in road transport.

As regards availability, not only do such biofuels already exist but projections make for quite ambitious targets.

As the world's largest producer of renewable diesel and a pioneer in making premium quality, advanced drop-in biofuels from waste and residues, Neste projects that a four per cent consumption target is feasible by 2030 for the technology it already uses today (hydrotreated vegetable oil). Users of other advanced technologies reckon they could match that. That makes for emissions savings achievable in transport by 2030 of 50 Mt CO₂eq (around five per cent of current transport greenhouse gas emissions) and a non-negligible contribution towards renewable energy use in the EU.

About the author

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