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Submission to the Local Government and Environment Committee on the Sustainable Biofuel Bill

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 50 nationally organised societies and National Members. It has 26 Branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies as well as individual members. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action. The Council has a long history of commenting on environmental issues.

In the short time available for consultation, NCWNZ canvassed its membership, and received some responses. The intention of the Bill, which is to enforce sustainability of all biofuels sold in New Zealand from 1 May 2010, was firmly supported by all members, except for one who doubted that sustainability could be achieved.

Comments from members are as follows:

Part 2 Amendments to principal Act, Clause 5 New Part 3A inserted

“Part 3A: Sustainable Biofuels

“34A Purpose of this Part

The purpose of this Part is to ensure that biofuels which are supplied or sold in New Zealand after 1 May 2010 are sustainable biofuels.

“34B Minister must recommend Order in Council providing definition of sustainable biofuels for the purpose of section 34C ...

“(3) The principles of sustainable biofuels are:

“Principle 1: Less greenhouse gas

“sustainable biofuels emit significantly less greenhouse gas over their life cycle than other engine fuel....

“Principle 2: Food production

“sustainable biofuels do not compete with food production and are not grown on land of high value for food production

“Principle 3: Biodiversity and land with high conservation value

“the production of sustainable biofuels does not reduce indigenous biodiversity or adversely affect land with high conservation value. ...”

These clauses were supported by the members who responded. Members commented that it does seem to make sense. It is seen that if biofuels are not sustainable in this way, it will make the situation regarding climate change and peak oil worse, and defeat the object of using biofuels. One member thought that biofuels were already sustainable.

Members agreed with the Biofuel Bill, provided that in the making of fuel:

1. Crops needed for food are not used.
2. Land needed for food growing is not used.
3. Thought is given to the balance of the economy of areas proposed for biofuels to be grown.
4. Growing these biofuel crops does not pollute the land. It must be a carbon efficient operation.

One farmer member commented that she knew of a Co-operative Phosphate Company that had processed the oil seed rape that local farmers grew as part of their crop rotations. As well as a heat source, by-products were used in the local economy.

Another member quoted David Blume's book "Alcohol can be a gas!"¹ There are many sustainable sources for biofuels, such as:

kelp (very prolific, can be harvested weekly, residue can be used as fertiliser);

raupo (can be planted in sewage runoff, it absorbs nutrients, leaves clean water and residue can be used as supplementary cattle feed or fertiliser); and,

fodder beet (the residue left can be used as hay).

Before World War I, most vehicles were run on biofuels. Farmers have already been producing biofuel from waste and using it in tractors. This was stopped in one instance because of a \$2,000 charge for licensing before it could be sold.

Members thought that the Government should strongly encourage those producing biofuel on a small scale where it cost practically nothing and residues could still be used as fertiliser or animal feed.

All members were emphatic that food crops should not be used for biofuel. Even though the residue can still be used, the process does reduce the food value of the crop.

Conclusion:

There was overwhelming support from members for this Bill as it is obvious that it is very practical to make sustainable biofuels in New Zealand. Members also commented that there was strong public support of the NCWNZ view on this Bill. As we stated in a previous submission² – "biofuel should not be imported into, or exported from, New Zealand. The true financial and carbon cost of doing this would greatly outweigh any benefits from the use of the fuel, and so would be adding to the problem."

Elizabeth Bang
National President

Sara Dickon
Convener Environment Standing Committee

¹ Blume, D. 2007. David Blume's Alcohol can be a gas! : fueling an ethanol revolution for the 21st century; edited by Michael Winks. International Institute for Ecological Agriculture, Santa Cruz, Calif.

² Submission of National Council of Women of New Zealand to the Local Government and Environment Committee on the Biofuel Bill dated 28 January 2008.