

Webinar Report: Acting on Aviation Emissions

May 4th, 2016

Carbon Market Watch organized a webinar on the global market-based measure being negotiated by Member States in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the UN body charged with addressing international aviation emissions.

Speakers included Andrew Murphy from Transport and Environment, Hannah Mowat from Fern and Dr. Katherine Watts from Carbon Market Watch. The event was moderated by Simon Roach from ENDS Europe.

Andrew Murphy from Transport and Environment gave an introduction to growth in the aviation sector, estimated to triple by 2050 if no action is taken, and the sector's role to achieving the Paris goal of keeping warming to around 1.5 degrees. The sector's reliance on high oil prices to incentivize more efficient aircraft puts even more importance on establishing ambitious goals to cut pollution early. He presented the non-binding goals of ICAO, carbon neutral growth from 2020, and industry, (-50% reduction by 2050 compared to 2005) before explaining more in-depth the coverage of the Global Market Based Measure (GMBM) being developed by ICAO. Attempts to reconcile the UNFCCC principle of differentiation with the ICAO principle of non-discrimination of aircraft on the same routes has led to exempting around 40% of emissions. Murphy goes on to explain that without redistribution of these emissions the CNG2020 target, which was used in the UNFCCC synthesis report, is undermined. The presentation ended with ways to increase ambition through an improved review clause, further in-sector reductions, and additional measures at the national or regional level.

Katherine Watts from Carbon Market Watch spoke on mandatory elements that were required for a functioning offsetting scheme touching on accounting, quality standards for emissions units and transparency of information. She began by explaining the need to avoid emissions reductions being issued or claimed more than once. This task is complicated by the fact that the Paris Agreement, with its various types of targets, is being operationalized at the same time as ICAO accounting principles that will need to be synchronized between the two organizations. To ensure that credits used provide the environmental integrity intended, Watts recommends stringent and mandatory criteria for offset credits including ensuring permanence of reductions, requirements for contributing to sustainable development and post-2020 vintage restrictions on credits. Watts emphasized the importance of a negative list, found in all ETSs, that would ban projects with known harmful effects to either humans or the environment including fossil fuel, large hydro and industrial gas destruction projects. She ended her presentation by emphasizing the need for transparency in both the market-mechanism to establish confidence in the measure as well as public access to ICAO documents and meetings for wider participation of civil society.

Hannah Mowat from Fern elaborated on the risks associated with putting forest activities into market mechanisms, starting with an explanation of why forest carbon has traditionally not been accepted in compliance markets. Through a graph depicting how many years we could maintain current levels of emissions and stay within the IPCC's carbon budget to explaining the various carbon cycles and their timescales she highlighted that efforts in the land sector and decarbonization of the economy were needed hand in hand, but could not replace one another. Turning to the GMBM, she highlighted that forestry credits would pose a large double counting problem as 100 countries already include land-use and forests in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), meaning they could not be counted towards a second target. She further highlighted permanence concerns through the example of

Portugal's forest fires in 2003 and Ash die-back in the UK in 2012, emphasizing that this activity was highly affected by climate change. She ended her intervention highlighting the need to recognize the rights of indigenous people on forested land and improving governance in countries with heavy deforestation to catch illegal logging concessions.