

Letter to the members of the liaison group on Climate-Related Geo-Engineering as it Relates to the Convention on Biological Diversity

11th August 2011

As participants at the London meeting, we would like to share with you our comments on the liaison group process so far. We do not think the process to date responds well to the mandate from COP 10, in particular to those aspects of it which direct us to:

*“Compile and synthesize available scientific information, and **views and experiences of indigenous and local communities** and other stakeholders on the **possible impacts of geo-engineering techniques on biodiversity and associated social, economic and cultural considerations**, and options on definitions and understandings of climate-related geo-engineering relevant to the Convention on Biological Diversity”*

Our main comments are as follows:

- We are concerned that the report as drafted so far draws primarily on two previous reports, by the Royal Society and the IGBP, both of which were written by a group predominantly of people supportive of geo-engineering. Reliance on those two reports was presented as a 'fact' at the meeting and not subject to discussion by participants.
- The report does little to address the dearth of knowledge on the question of potential geoengineering impacts on biodiversity.
- The mandate relates to the impact of geoengineering on biodiversity, yet few biodiversity specialists are involved, very few civil society groups and no indigenous and local communities (ILCs). This is unacceptable as this is a particular contribution that the CBD should make to the debate.
- The process of establishing a Liaison group was unclear, especially the way in which it emerged that only members of the group who attended the London meeting would be invited to make input until October. This is contrary to the official announcement, which stated that most of the work would be done by the full group via email (rather than the attendees of the London meeting forming a 'core drafting group'). See <http://climate-iiisd.org/news/cbd-liaison-group-to-address-geo-engineering/>.
- It was also unclear how decisions over who was offered CBD funding to attend the meeting were made. There should have been funding for Southern civil society organizations to attend, and that should have been announced in advance and disbursed in a transparent way.
- The notice for the London meeting was extremely short, making it impossible for several people to attend, who thereby find themselves excluded from the first part of the process. We understand that at least one indigenous person was prevented from attending due to visa problems. Given the well-known problems with delegates from outside Europe and North America obtaining UK visas we would question the choice of London as a venue, particularly with such short notice.
- Those who attended the London meeting had little time or opportunity to make decisions about the approach or the work to be done, hence the process was driven by the chairs, including the structure of the report and the selection of lead authors.
- With both the Chair and the Deputy Chair of the meeting being from the UK, and with only one co-lead-author of one chapter being from a Southern country, and with all others coming from the UK, there is no regional balance regarding the 'key roles' for compiling the report.

- Indeed, with the process chaired and mostly written by UK authors and funded by the UK, and with much of the research being used also from the UK, will this report carry international legitimacy?
- In the 'baseline' chapter, projected impacts of climate change on biodiversity are being considered in close detail. Yet other drivers of biodiversity loss and in particular the risks that different types of geo-engineering could accelerate and add to them has received very little attention as yet. This biases the report in favour of geo-engineering.
- When considering baselines, it would be important to include one for radical emission reductions and agroecological farming.
- There were major unresolved differences over definitions, yet those are not fully acknowledged in the draft report. Some attendees wanted to consider all types of reforestation and afforestation and even agro-ecological farming as constituting 'geo-engineering'. Others wanted to exclude all reforestation and afforestation as well as BECS from the decision, and yet others had a range of positions according to which large-scale land-conversion to industrial tree plantations, or, as one person suggested, large-scale tree plantations if the trees are genetically engineered, can constitute geo- engineering.
- It is vital that Parties should understand the policy and regulatory implications of adopting different proposed definitions of geoengineering, but that is not addressed in the report.
- Several attendees expressed the opinion that social, economic, cultural and ethical issues should be considered. However, there were insufficient specialists on these issues present to develop an adequate chapter. The process around lead author and ongoing work was never made explicit.
- Some London participants highlighted issues of uncertainty and ignorance, our lack of knowledge of biodiversity compounded by the lack of understanding of the impacts of proposed geoengineering (e.g. the possibility of irreversible drought-induced regional die back as a result of unpredicted impacts of geoengineering), but these are not adequately reflected in the report.
- We find the drive to set out the discussion in tables highly problematic, as this does not respond to the complexity and the high level of uncertainty of the issues. There is a high chance that delegates will primarily look at the 'summary table', not at the full document, which, unlike the tables, acknowledges at least some of the uncertainties.
- We believe the use throughout of the term “ecosystem services” rather than “ecosystem functions” is highly problematic. The term fails to take into account the complexity of an ecosystem, and the reactions and relationships between parts of an ecosystem, including the species. It is a term more suited to the market, in which a service either has a market price, or becomes invisible. It is not appropriate to the consideration of geoengineering. .
- Sources of information: there was some discussion of this and it was decided that well-referenced but not peer-reviewed literature was acceptable as a source, but different lead authors appear to have taken different views.. However, this still does not readily admit the “views and experiences of indigenous and local communities and other stakeholders” which is in the mandate. On the other hand, citing 'personal correspondences' from pro-geoengineering scientists as 'evidence', as is currently the case in the draft SRM paper, is very dubious.

In conclusion, we reiterate that we do not think that the current process of producing a liaison group report fulfils the CBD decision.

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