



The Future of Carbon Removals: EEB Press Briefing on the Carbon Removals Certification Mechanism

The story: Carbon removals are rising up the EU agenda, but will they deliver genuine climate action or greenwashing?

The amount of carbon in our atmosphere is higher than ever. But rather than reducing emissions, we are watching them rise year-on-year. Urgent action is required to reverse this alarming trend and return atmospheric carbon to safe levels.

In light of the IPCC's 2022 [climate report](#), a reduction in emissions remains the first priority for climate mitigation, but will no longer be sufficient. As well as reducing our emissions, we now also need to reverse them as well. As we await the upcoming IPCC 6th Synthesis Report, now is the moment to act to ensure that the forthcoming framework for the certification of carbon removals is effective, reliable, and trustworthy.

In the race against time to mitigate the violent effects of climate change, we need to harness the power of earth as an ally. One of the solutions earning the growing attention of policymakers as well as industry is [carbon farming](#).

Carbon farming is hailed by many industry players and policymakers as the new "green business model" which will reward farmers and foresters for capturing and storing carbon on and in their land, thereby greatly boosting climate action. But scientists and civil society have warned that, as this field grows, so too does confusion, manipulation, and evasion of responsibility on carbon removals.

As the Commission explores options for categorising carbon farming methods, the EEB is taking this opportunity to highlight the creeping industry greenwashing that would severely undermine the effectiveness of the anticipated Carbon Removals Certification framework.

The policy background

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The European Climate Law requires the EU to reach climate neutrality by 2050 and to reduce its *net* emissions by [55% by 2030](#). In addition to emissions reductions, these objectives also require action on increasing “negative emissions” or “carbon removals” – solutions to capture and store carbon away from the atmosphere. In the [Communication on Sustainable Carbon Cycles](#) (December 2021), the Commission announced its intention to publish a legislative proposal on the Carbon Removals Certification by the end of this year (expected 30 November 2022). The Commission envisages that this new mechanism will upscale carbon, foster new industrial value chains for the capture, recycling, transport, and storage of carbon, and create a common EU standard for the certification of removals.

To support policymakers to make informed decisions, the EEB prepared recommendations for the Carbon Removals Certification framework. In the paper, we explore solutions and provide comprehensive policy recommendations for a well-functioning and trustworthy carbon removals certification framework that will provide benefits for climate, ecosystems, and local communities.

The facts

- By 2025, European forests will hold 18% less carbon than in the early 2000s due to intensive forestry practices. Close-to-nature forestry could vastly increase EU forests’ potential to store carbon, while also significantly enhancing their resilience.
- Organic soils (peatlands) cover only 3% of the EU’s agricultural area but are responsible for 25% of emissions from agriculture and related land-use. By rewetting this land, the EU can end these emissions and turn the land into a net carbon sink, sequestering at least 6 Mt CO₂ eq. per year.
- Agroforestry (integrating trees and bushes into agricultural land) holds major potential to help farming adapt to climate change, to sequester carbon in trees and soils, and to improve biodiversity on farmland; over 99% of the European arable land is suitable for agroforestry practices, yet only 11% of EU farmland is under some form of agroforestry.
- The latest IPCC report suggests that unabatable emissions (those inherent to the industrial process itself and not a consequence of energy inputs) are only about 5-10% of current emissions. All other emissions can be avoided, which should be the absolute priority of the EU climate policy.

Our key recommendations

Carbon removals must be additional to emissions reductions. This means removal certificates must not be used for “offsetting” emissions with removals by private or public entities. The EU needs to rapidly and drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions as a first priority. We must also avoid a possible ‘deterrence effect’ from investing in removals.

Voluntary carbon markets (VCM) are ill-suited to finance the deep changes we need to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises. They will not benefit most land managers due to low prices, high uncertainty, strict additionality requirements, and long-term liability for reversals.

Prevent false carbon neutrality claims. Offsetting and voluntary carbon markets leave the door wide open for greenwashing (such as corporate climate neutrality claims).

Not all “carbon farming” practices are suitable for CRC. Carbon farming comprises all land management practices that increase carbon in soil and vegetation. But many are unsuitable for

certification due to various risks such as reversibility. Only “high quality removals” should be eligible for certification.

In the land sector, the CRC mechanism must not be solely focused on carbon, but instead centred on ecosystem restoration. If done appropriately, it could provide great benefits for land managers, farmers, and wider society. Ecosystem restoration and enhancing biodiversity increases resilience, which is a prerequisite for high-quality removals.

The CRC framework must be fully transparent, and certificates must be accounted only once, in national greenhouse gas inventories. This will support the EU’s and member states’ environmental targets set out in other legislation, such as the LULUCF Regulation and the Nature Restoration Law.

The certification mechanism must include robust and long-term monitoring requirements to ensure the creation and maintenance of high-quality removals.

About the EEB

The EEB is Europe’s largest network of environmental citizens’ organisations in Europe with 180 member organisations in 38 countries, and representing some 30 million individual supporters.