

EDITORIAL

EU hopes hang by a carbon thread

Tough times, again, for the European emissions trading scheme (EU ETS). A judgement in the European Court of First Instance late in September threatens to throw into disarray the whole system by offering two EU member states – and potentially another six – a chance to allocate more carbon allowances to their industry.

According to the EU judges who upheld cases filed by Poland and Estonia, the European Commission had no right to impose limits on the allowances these two countries set in their national allocation plans. Another six similar cases are pending.

This is by no means a technical matter. Not only does it have the potential to depress the carbon price, should a fresh batch of allowances flood the scheme. But it exposes the EU ETS, once more, to robust criticism.

Never in the history of EU law-making has one piece of legislation been so open to attack or engendered so much confusion over its implementation. Delays and hiccups in applying EU

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legislation are a notorious problem: tens of infringement proceedings by the commission against member states for in-existent or insufficient compliance are a regular corollary of most directives.

But the stakes for the EU ETS are much higher. On its success are pinned

the hopes of many EU policies and a sizeable part of the bloc’s reputation. When the carbon price crashed in its first phase, the EU ETS attracted global attention for all the wrong reasons.

The EU institutions managed to persuade observers that teething problems were at the root of the problem and things would be different second time around. But the European court’s recent judgments have not only paved the way for an unexpected influx of carbon allowances but, more importantly, re-awakened fears about the scheme’s inherent weakness.

The commission and market supporters have rushed to say all will be fine. We can only hope, for the sake of the EU ETS’s climate objectives and more widely for the integrity of EU policy-making, that they are right.

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VIEWPOINT

Obsolete pesticides: Europe needs to act now



By John Vijgen, International HCH and Pesticides Association

Let me first briefly explain the issue: pesticides become obsolete when they can no longer be used, either because of legislation banning them or because they have deteriorated.

In the new EU member states and in nearby countries across the Russian Federation and Central Asia, there are an estimated 256,000 to 263,500 tonnes of these obsolete pesticides.

Significant risks arise from not acting to contain this environmental threat. Unprotected sites, estimated

to number in the tens of thousands, constitute a lethal danger for humans and animals. Obsolete pesticides seriously risk undermining agricultural trade between the EU and these non-EU countries.

For example, the 2002 Nitrofen food scandal in Germany caused total direct and indirect damages of more than €500m. For that amount of money, 60% of all obsolete pesticides in the region could have been cleaned up. Why do we have to wait for the next scandal? It will come! But why wait until it is too late to avoid lasting environmental damage?

Obsolete pesticides in non-EU countries also constitute an imminent

risk for the EU because stocks are often stored near watercourses. Take Europe’s largest hexachlorobenzene stockpile of more than 10,000 tonnes in western Ukraine. This is a real time bomb that lies along the banks of the Savka river, a tributary of the Dniester, flowing from Ukraine to Moldova.

The Dniester river basin is home to more than seven million people. The river itself is the main source of drinking water in Moldova and parts of Ukraine. Can you imagine the type of catastrophe that would derive from an incident involving this poisonous stockpile? We really have more than enough reason for the EU to act now.



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