Sustainable Carbon Cycles

2022/2053(INI) - 18/04/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 323 votes to 257, with 59 abstentions, a resolution on sustainable carbon cycles.

General considerations

The resolution stressed that the impact of natural and industrial carbon removal solutions on balancing GHG emissions is limited and should not come at the expense of ambitious climate mitigation goals, which require a substantial reduction in emissions. It underlined the EU's objective to prioritise swift and predictable emission reductions and, at the same time, enhance removal by natural sinks.

Members recognised that the Sustainable Carbon Cycle Initiative can contribute to the EU's goal of net carbon removals. They are also aware of the need to avoid double counting and safeguard the integrity of removals.

Parliament cautions against many IPCC scenarios that rely heavily on future CO2 removals. It considered that, given the many uncertainties related to those technologies and the risks that most of them entail for land use, water resources, biodiversity protection and food security, priority should be given to scenarios that minimise the use of CO2 removals, such as low energy demand scenarios. It called on the EU Independent Advisory Board on Climate Change to prioritise those scenarios when assessing what could be a 1.5°C compatible GHG emissions budget for the EU, and to carefully consider the use of CO2 removal options and technologies in a socially, environmentally and economically conscious manner.

The resolution stressed that the EU should aim to **achieve negative emissions** as well as emission reductions. While welcoming the Commission's plan on how carbon offsets can help achieve net negative emissions, Members called on the Commission to define a **list of practices with the highest absorption potential**, which is important for farmers, and to invest more in developing accessible and affordable carbon-removal technologies. Members stressed that removals should be counted towards a **separate removal target** to ensure that they do not slow down economy-wide decarbonisation efforts.

Parliament stressed that **agriculture and forestry** should play a significant role in achieving the EU carbon removal target for the land-use sector and, like all economic sectors, should contribute to the EU's climate neutrality goal; underlines that healthy natural ecosystems can constitute an important source of long-term removals;

Carbon farming

According to the resolution, the growing interest in carbon farming should be an opportunity for farmers to transform their business model and should allow for better rewards for farmers who engage in a transition to sustainable agroecological agroforestry practices. Members considered that carbon farming should be developed on the basis of a **credible and effective policy framework**, taking into account the need for a clear set of rules for farmers and foresters who decide to implement carbon farming practices.

The resolution stressed the need to keep in mind the different starting points of Member States and farmers and insisted on the need to ensure equitable opportunities for farmers and foresters in carbon farming across the EU.

Parliament asked the Commission to make available to land managers **verified emission and removal data**, based on a farm level and a result-based approach, well before 2026, in order to be used in the expected legislative proposal for sustainable food systems as well as in the upcoming revision of the common agricultural policy.

Blue carbon

Stressing that the blue carbon economy has great potential to contribute to CO2 storage in coastal regions, the resolution encouraged the Commission to collect more data on blue carbon sequestration and storage.

Members recalled the need to map marine and freshwater ecosystems. They reaffirmed Parliament's position on extending the scope of the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) regulation to include greenhouse gas emissions and removals from marine, coastal and freshwater ecosystems, and to apply specific targets to these emissions and removals.

CCS and CCU

Members considered that technologies such as direct air capture that are combined with permanent storage and are scientifically proven and environmentally safe can play a role in helping achieve climate neutrality in the EU by no later than 2050. Emissions reduction at source must always remain the priority.

The resolution highlighted that solutions based on CO2 capture and storage (CCS) and CO2 capture and utilisation (CCU) technologies can play a role in decarbonisation, especially for the mitigation of process emissions in industry, for those Member States that opt for these technologies. The Commission is urged to put in place an **efficient and reliable system of traceability of captured CO2**, distinguishing between carbon capture on site and from the atmosphere to avoid double counting and to safeguard the integrity of removals.

Members noted that carbon storage is not allowed in all Member States and that Member States are free to decide whether or not to authorise the geological storage of CO2 on their territory. They called on the Commission and Member States to sufficiently document the **long-term effects of carbon storage** in areas with geological storage capacity and to support research to obtain more data on the overall environmental impact, energy efficiency, social acceptability, economic costs and risk of leakage and geological perturbations, before its large-scale deployment.

New regulatory framework for certification of carbon removals

Parliament took note of the Commission proposal for a regulation on establishing an EU certification framework for carbon removals and the Commission’s intention to put in place a framework for the identification of activities that unambiguously remove carbon from the atmosphere. It stressed that this **new monitoring, reporting and verification** (MRV) framework should be the basis of further measures to incentivise those new types of carbon removal activities.

Funding carbon cycling

Parliament called on the Commission to **review current funding options** to reward practices with scientifically proven climate and environmental benefits that lead to long-term and sustainable increase in carbon sequestration in soils and other biogenic carbon pools while ensuring societal co-benefits. Research and innovation concerning sustainable carbon cycles should be encouraged and financed, using different EU financial instruments, such as the LIFE and Horizon Europe programmes or the Innovation Fund.

Knowledge sharing and cooperation

The resolution highlighted the need for increased cooperation, exchange of information and sharing of best practices between stakeholders to promote better knowledge and understanding of opportunities and risks in the implementation of carbon cycling initiatives. International cooperation with third countries and international institutions should be encouraged to promote sustainable carbon removals at the global level.