



ETC Group
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The World Torpedoes Ocean Fertilization: End of Round One on Geo-Engineering

191 countries agree to a landmark moratorium on ocean CO2 sequestration

As the ninth meeting of the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) draws to a close in Bonn, Germany the world's governments are set to unanimously agree a wide-ranging "de-facto moratorium" on ocean fertilization activities. This first-ever global decision on a geo-engineering technology should spell the end of commercial plans to sequester carbon dioxide by dumping nutrients into the open ocean. Nonetheless, one ocean fertilization company, Climos Inc. of San Francisco, appears to be moving full steam ahead in defiance of international consensus.

"The message from the UN Biodiversity Convention is clear. The world does not want commercial ocean fertilization and companies like Climos should be looking for another occupation," says Pat Mooney, Executive Director of ETC Group, who is in Bonn at the negotiations. "Ocean fertilization could lead to toxic tides, lifeless waters and disrupted ecosystems and livelihoods. There is unanimous agreement among the 191 countries here that it is absolutely the wrong way to tackle climate change."

German Environment Minister and CBD president Sigmar Gabrielle announced this morning that an agreement on the "de-facto moratorium" had been reached following ministerial level discussion. He told Reuters, "It's a very strange idea that technology can solve everything. It's very risky and shows what humans are ready to do. I'm glad we came to a de facto moratorium." (1) That agreement requests countries "to ensure that ocean fertilization activities do not take place until there is an adequate scientific basis on which to justify such activities, including assessing associated risks." The moratorium makes a limited exception for small scale scientific research, but it warns that such studies should only be authorized "if justified by the need to gather specific scientific data, and should also be subject to a thorough prior assessment of the potential impacts of the research studies on the marine environment, and be strictly controlled, and not be used for generating and selling carbon offsets or any other commercial purposes."

African countries, especially Ghana, led the negotiations towards the moratorium, supported strongly by European, South East Asian and some Latin

American nations. One party, Ecuador, requested that an additional statement be added to the decision: "We came here to get a straightforward moratorium without exceptions, because of the great danger that this kind of experiment put on unique ecosystems such as the Galapagos Islands. We accepted this text, in the spirit of collaboration with the other parties." The United States, the only country left openly supporting ocean fertilization, is not a signatory to the Convention.

"This moratorium is particularly a victory for Southern countries who have been repeatedly targeted by the ocean fertilization companies in the hope that they wouldn't understand the threats that these experiments imply," explains Silvia Ribeiro of ETC Group's Mexico Office. "Civil society, Peoples' movements and fisherfolk in countries such as Ecuador and Philippines have led the global opposition to these outrageous schemes. Now their governments have stepped up to the challenge of dumping ocean fertilization – hopefully for good. The unanimous decision in Bonn explicitly confines scientific experimentation to coastal waters, meaning that national governments would have to consent to experiments literally almost within sight of land. The NIMBY principle (not in my backyard) will make such experiments very rare."

While the moratorium should spell the end of commercial plans for ocean fertilization at least one US company, Climos Inc. of San Francisco seems to be powering full steam ahead to defy the international convention. Last week, knowing that a moratorium was under discussion, Climos CEO Dan Whaley announced that his firm was approaching investors for an injection of up to 12 million US dollars to finance a plan to fertilize 100 to 200 kilometers of the ocean.(2) Climos had at least one lobbyist in Bonn attempting to derail negotiations. ETC warns that this is not the last we have seen of the "geo-engineering" dream of a large-scale techno-fix for climate change.

"This is just the end of round one on geo-engineering," warns Jim Thomas of ETC Group's Montreal office. "There are still plenty of crazy unregulated schemes being proposed to fix the climate – these range from polluting the upper atmosphere with nanoparticles to changing the alkalinity of the oceans. The CBD should now move swiftly to open up wider negotiations on how to govern geo-engineering in general. This moratorium on ocean fertilization is a good start."

Notes to Editors:

A background briefing on ocean fertilization prepared for delegates of the CBD is available from ETC Group.

For an overview of geo-engineering schemes see ETC Group *Communiqué*, "Gambling with Gaia," January 2007.

http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=608

(1) Madeline Chambers, Reuters "U.N. talks halt plans for oceans absorb CO₂" May 31st 2008

(2) Rachel Barron, Greentech Media "Climos Seeks \$10M to \$12M to Fertilize Ocean" May 21st 2008 – online at <http://www.greentechmedia.com/articles/climos-seeks-10m-to-12m-to-fertilize-ocean-923.html>

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The full text of the agreement at the CBD due to be approved this afternoon reads:

C. Ocean Fertilization

1. *Notes* the work of the London Convention on the prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (1972) and the 1996 London Protocol, *welcomes* the decision of the 29th Consultative Meeting of the Contracting Parties of the London Convention and the second meeting of the contracting parties of the London Protocol, held 5 to 9 November 2007, which (i) endorsed the June 2007 "Statement of concern regarding iron fertilization of the Oceans to sequester CO₂" of their Scientific Groups, (ii) urged states to use the utmost caution when considering proposals for large-scale ocean fertilization operations and (iii) took the view that, given the present state of knowledge regarding ocean fertilization, large-scale operations were currently not justified.

(a) *Requests* the Executive Secretary to bring the issue of ocean fertilization to the attention of the Joint Liaison Group;

(b) *Urges* parties and other governments to act in accordance with the decision of the London Convention;

(c) *Recognizes* the current absence of reliable data covering all relevant aspects of ocean fertilization, without which there is an inadequate basis on which to assess their potential risks;

(d) *Bearing in mind* the ongoing scientific and legal analysis occurring under the auspices of the London Convention and the London Protocol, *requests* Parties and *urges* other Governments, in accordance with the precautionary approach, to ensure that ocean fertilization activities do not take place until there is an adequate scientific basis on which to justify such activities, including assessing associated risks, and a global transparent and effective control and regulatory mechanism is in place for those activities; with the exception of small scale scientific research within national jurisdiction. Such studies should only be

authorized if justified by the need to gather specific scientific data, and should also be subject to a thorough prior assessment of the potential impacts of the research studies on the marine environment, and be strictly controlled, and not be used for generating and selling carbon offsets or any other commercial purposes;

(e) *Requests* the Executive Secretary to disseminate the results of the ongoing scientific and legal analysis under the London Convention and the London Protocol, and any other relevant scientific and technical information, to the 14th meeting of SBSTTA.