



action group on erosion, technology and concentration

ETC Group
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London Convention Puts Brakes on Ocean Geoengineering

Risky ocean fertilisation schemes “not justified,” require oversight and regulation, says international maritime body

In a shot across the bows of geoengineering companies, the London Convention (the International Maritime Organization body that oversees dumping of wastes at sea) today unanimously endorsed a scientific statement of concern on ocean fertilisation and declared its intention to develop international regulations to oversee the controversial activities. It further advised states that such large-scale schemes are “currently not justified.”

“We applaud the London Convention for addressing a major gap in global governance,” said David Santillo, of Greenpeace International’s Science Unit who attended the London Convention meeting this week. “The Parties meeting here this week confirmed that large-scale ocean fertilization schemes are not scientifically justified and they urged governments to exercise utmost caution when considering such proposals,” said Santillo.

Geoengineering refers to intentional large-scale manipulation of land, ocean or atmosphere in an attempt to ‘fix’ climate change. The governments meeting at the London Convention were confronted with a rash of private ‘carbon trading’ schemes that claim to sequester greenhouse gases by dumping large quantities of iron, urea or other additives into the sea. These techniques, known collectively as “ocean fertilisation,” claim to draw climate change gases out of the atmosphere by prompting growth of plankton. The geoengineers seek to win ‘carbon credits’ as a financial reward for these activities – despite the fact that international scientific bodies have warned of potentially devastating ecological consequences for marine ecosystems.

The historic decision of the international body meeting in London this week came just as one controversial ocean fertilisation company, [Planktos, Inc.](#), announced it had set sail from Florida, USA to dump iron in the ocean at an undisclosed location, possibly west of the Galapagos islands. A second private geoengineering outfit, [Ocean Nourishment Corporation](#) (ONC) of Australia, caused uproar this week in the Philippines with the discovery of a proposal to dump industrial urea in the ecologically sensitive Sulu Sea region. ONC is reportedly in discussions with the government of Morocco on another proposed dump. Meanwhile, a third private geoengineering firm, [Climos, Inc.](#) of USA, attended the London Convention meeting where it proposed a voluntary “code of conduct” for ocean fertilisation – a proposal met with little enthusiasm.

“Geoengineering profiteers should have no right to alter the ocean commons for their private gain. Until now they’ve been exploiting the lack of international governance,” said Jim Thomas of ETC Group. “The London convention is sending a clear message to geoengineering cowboys that ocean-dumping schemes are scientifically unjustified and must be regulated. We welcome the London Convention’s decisions on ocean-based geoengineering. We urge governments meeting at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bali next month, as well as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, to follow the London Convention’s lead and begin an international process to put all geoengineering technologies under intergovernmental oversight,” said Thomas.

The London Convention decisions were greeted with enthusiasm in the Philippines, where civil society organizations, small-scale fishers and environmentalists are protesting a proposal by Ocean Nourishment Corporation ”to dump urea in the Sulu Sea. The groups will hold a press conference on Monday 15 November in Manila to outline concerns and actions in the region.

“There’s clearly an urgent need for international oversight,” said Neth Dano of Third World Network. “We were alarmed to discover that a geoengineering company had already approached the Philippines government. Although no permit has been issued yet, at least one experimental dumping of urea has already occurred in the Sulu Sea – without a permit, without environmental assessment, and without public consent,” said Dano.

“The London Convention has taken a first, important step to prevent these abuses,” said Hope Shand of ETC Group. However, we maintain our call for a moratorium on large scale and commercial geoengineering projects until there is public debate, intergovernmental oversight and thorough assessment of social, economic and environmental impacts,” said Shand.
“Geoengineering techno-fixes are not an acceptable response to climate change.”

Note to Editors:

- International Maritime Organization news room: http://www.imo.org/Safety/mainframe.asp?topic_id=84
- 5 November news release on Ocean Nourishment Corporation’s proposal to Philippines government available here: http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=659
- Background on Geoengineering: http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=608
- Background on Planktos, Inc.: http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=617

For further information, contact:

Jim Thomas, ETC Group (Canada) – jim@etcgroup.org +1 514 6674932 (office) or +1 514 5165759 (cell)

Hope Shand, ETC Group (USA) – hope@etcgroup.org +1 919 960-5767 (office)

David Santillo, Greenpeace International (UK – attended London Convention)

D.Santillo@exeter.ac.uk +44 (0)781 387 4489 (cell)

Neth Dano, Third World Network (Philippines) - nethdano@pacific.net.ph +63 917 532-9369 (cell)

Ditdit Pelegrina, SEARICE (Philippines) - ditdit_pelegrina@searice.org.ph +63 2 433 7182 (office) or +63 917 793 8618 (cell)

Text from London Convention meeting (5-9 November 2007)

(1) Agreed text: “The Meetings agreed on:

1. endorsing the ‘Statement of Concern’ on large-scale ocean iron fertilisation as agreed by the Scientific Groups;”
2. the scope of the work of the London Convention/London Protocol includes ocean fertilization, as well as iron fertilization;”
3. the consideration of ocean fertilisation falls under the competences of the LC/LP, in particular in relation to the obligation of the Convention and Protocol to protect the marine environment;”
4. LC/LP will further study the issue from the scientific and legal perspectives with a view to its regulation;”
5. recognising that it is within the purview of each state to consider proposals on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the LC/LP, the LC29/LP2 urges States to use the utmost caution when considering proposals for large-scale ocean fertilisation operations. The LC/LP take the view that, given the present state of knowledge regarding ocean fertilisation, such large-scale operations are currently not justified;”