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## A Global Moratorium on Ocean Fertilization?

**Delays, drama and diversions dog U.N attempts to reign-in commercial geo-engineers.**

Stalled at the eleventh hour by three isolated countries that are attempting to block consensus, most of the world's environment ministries and others are on the brink of reaching agreement on a worldwide moratorium on commercial ocean fertilization – controversial proposals to dump nutrients in the ocean to artificially alter the climate. The three blocking countries, Australia, China and Brazil have spent several days manipulating the process to avoid discussion and prevent progress, much to the exasperation of delegates and observers. The clock runs out on negotiations at 6pm today (Friday).

Following late-night sessions and with tempers frayed after two weeks of intense negotiations at the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Bonn, Germany, all indications are that most of the 191 countries who are members of the convention want to adopt a moratorium on large-scale ocean fertilization with a tightly controlled exemption for small-scale, legitimate scientific research. This news comes as a handful of ocean fertilization companies are preparing to carry out commercial activities backed by millions of private dollars. The companies claim that ocean fertilization is a valid technique for sequestering carbon, and hope to profit from the sale of carbon credits.

“There is a pretty militant feeling amongst delegates here that ocean fertilization companies are profiteering off of climate change concerns while unleashing a vast and dangerous experiment on us all,” explains Pat Mooney of ETC Group speaking from Bonn. “However Australia, Brazil and China are refusing to allow discussion of the issues while actively blocking consensus. Thanks to their procedural tactics the text under discussion keeps being diverted out of the negotiating room. We have taken to calling it the ‘wonderful mystery disappearing text.’ We would rather these three countries disappeared themselves and let the rest of the world make a decision.”

Led by African countries with the support of the EU, Norway, Canada and Southeast Asian and Latin American countries, the biodiversity meeting has proposed text that 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.” Many parties would also like to explicitly prohibit research by private companies that would lead to commercial sale of carbon credits. Australia, which appears to be protecting the interests of an ocean fertilization company based in

Sydney, had been unilaterally blocking progress but has seemingly recruited the Brazilian and Chinese delegations. All three countries have significant fossil fuel industries that may favour 'quick fixes' to reducing emissions.

Last week in Guayaquil, Ecuador, scientific advisors to another intergovernmental body, The London Convention and Protocol that controls the dumping of material at sea, also issued a critical report on the risks of ocean fertilization. While the London Convention has already made cautionary statements about ocean fertilization,(1) most parties at the CBD are pushing for something stronger and wider reaching.

ETC Group first brought the issue of ocean fertilization to the CBD last year amidst news that Planktos, Inc. of California was preparing to dump iron nanoparticles in waters near the Galapagos Islands.(2) Last November over 500 Filipino groups opposed similar plans by Australian company, Ocean Nourishment Corporation (ONC), to dump urea in the Sulu Sea. (3) Both companies were stopped although ONC is reportedly planning to fertilize waters off the coast of Oman. (4) The Omani environment ministry claims that ONC has not requested or received a permit from the Omani authorities. (5) Climos, Inc. of San Francisco is another ocean fertilization company that recently raised close to US\$4 million from private investors for a plan to dump iron in up to 15,000 square miles of ocean.(6) Climos has at least one lobbyist in Bonn attempting to derail negotiations.

"Ocean fertilization is an unacceptable attempt to profit from a global climate crisis threatening our already overstressed oceans," explains Saskia Richartz, Greenpeace's oceans policy advisor, also attending the negotiations in Bonn. "Ocean fertilization could prompt toxic tides and lifeless waters, disrupted ecosystems and negative impacts on coastal livelihoods," said Richartz.

"We are alarmed that Australia is trying to block negotiations to protect Ocean Nourishment Corporation," adds Wilhelmina Pelegrina of Philippines based SEARICE who were among the groups opposing ONC's Sulu Sea dump. "Unless this global moratorium is put in place southern island and coastal countries will continue to be the primary target for unregulated ocean fertilization projects."

While pushing hard for a moratorium on ocean fertilization, civil society groups recognize that many other proposed geo-engineering schemes still have no global or national oversight. Geo-engineering refers to the large-scale intentional manipulation of ecosystems, mostly proposed as 'quick fixes' to climate change. (7)

"If the international consensus prevails this moratorium will be the first global decision on a geo-engineering technology but there are other crazy schemes out there," explains Jim Thomas of ETC Group. "Geo-engineering proposals on the table range from polluting the upper atmosphere to trying to change the alkalinity of the ocean. We would like to see the moratorium extended to all of these geo-engineering schemes pending a much broader global discussion of their risks and threats," adds Thomas.

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

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**Notes to Editors:**

1. For more information on previous statements by the London Convention see ETC Group News Release, "London Convention Puts Brakes on Ocean Geoengineering," 9 November 2007. [http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub\\_id=661](http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=661)
2. See ETC Group News Release, "Geoengineers to Foul Galapagos Seas - Defying Climate Panel Warning," 3 May 2007. [http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub\\_id=617](http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=617)
3. See joint news release prepared by: ETC Group, Third World Network, SEARICE, Corporate Watch and Greenpeace South East Asia, "Pissing for Profit in the Pacific, Geoengineers prepare to pollute Philippine Seas as International Ocean Dumping Body Meets," 5 November 2007. [http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub\\_id=659](http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=659)
4. Kevin Scott, Gulf News "UAE 'in prime position to tackle global warming'" March 13th 2008. <http://www.gulfnews.com/nation/Environment/10196971.html>
5. Personal communication with Oman Delegation at CBD COP9 meeting in Bonn 2008.
6. See Paul Davidson, *USA Today*, "Global warming inspires enterprising solutions," 21 February 2008. [http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/environment/2008-02-20-carbon-offsets\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/environment/2008-02-20-carbon-offsets_N.htm)
7. For an overview of geo-engineering schemes see ETC Group *Communique*, "Gambling with Gaia," January 2007. [http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub\\_id=608](http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=608)