

02.11.07 US NGOs unite to advise government on offsets

A group of six US-based non-profit groups are joining forces to advise policymakers on how to integrate greenhouse gas emission offsets into future climate change legislation, it announced Thursday.

The Offset Quality Initiative (OQI) will issue regular policy recommendations to lawmakers on the best way to integrate offsets in current and future state, regional and national climate change policy.

“As policymakers begin to design future climate legislation it will be important to have an authoritative source of information regarding effective, high quality greenhouse gas offsets,” said Janet Peace, senior fellow at the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, one of the OQI’s member organisations.

The OQI also includes leaders from The Climate Trust, California Climate Action Registry, Environmental Resources Trust, Greenhouse Gas Experts Network and The Climate Group.

The Climate Trust’s Alexia Kelly explained that the group’s aim is not to create a set of standards for offset projects in the US voluntary carbon market, but to “help policymakers work through some key questions” that are arising as the prospect of federal regulation of greenhouse gas emissions becomes more plausible.

“We’re moving from a voluntary market to a regulatory market,” Kelly told Point Carbon. “We have to figure out ways to bridge that gap and smooth the transition.”

She said the group is likely to issue policy papers recommending the best type of offset projects to be introduced into market design, criteria for high-quality greenhouse gas offsets, and opportunities and challenges presented by certain offset project types.

Establishing the initiative would “provide a space to get some of the heads together to hash through the issues, arriving at as many conclusions as we can,” Kelly said.

Kelly added that the first official meeting of the OQI will be held in Washington DC on 16 November to lay out the work plan over the next six months. Though she said the first meeting is not going to be open to the public, they will begin to reach out to regulators and stakeholders.

The dozen greenhouse gas cap-and-trade bills that have been introduced in Congress so far recommend restricting the use of offsets to force emitters to make greenhouse gas reductions on site, rather than paying for projects that cut emissions by growing trees or capturing methane from landfills.

The Lieberman-Warner bill, which passed out of a Senate subcommittee Thursday, restricts the use of offsets to 15 per cent.

Two other industry coalitions – the Carbon Offset Providers Coalition and one led by the Business Council on Sustainable Energy – formed earlier this autumn to advise the federal government on how to implement a greenhouse gas offset program in future legislation.

Washington DC

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