



ETC Group
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Planktos's commercial ocean iron fertilization carbon-trading gambit

Brakes on Flakes

Intergovernmental scientific body fires shot across geoengineer's bow

An intergovernmental scientific committee of the London Convention on ocean dumping agreed, earlier today, at its closing plenary in Spain, to a tough consensus “statement of concern” warning that iron fertilization of ocean surfaces – as an attempt at commercial carbon sequestration – has environmental risks and lacks scientific evidence of effectiveness. The statement was triggered by news that Planktos, Inc. a for-profit enterprise with offices in San Francisco, Budapest, and Vancouver is about to dump 100 tons of iron nanoparticles over a 10,000 km² stretch of Pacific Ocean in the vicinity of the Galapagos Islands. The company’s goal is to sell carbon offsets on the unproven assumption that the phytoplankton bloom created by the iron dumping could lead to the permanent sequestration of CO₂ greenhouse gases. “Its a very strong statement – literally an emergency call for the full London Convention [of the International Maritime Organization] to take up the threat of ocean geoengineering when governments convene in London this November 5-9,” says Jim Thomas of ETC Group, en route to Europe. “By publicizing the scientific body’s concern now, governments are bluntly warning companies that there could be national and international regulatory repercussions from commercial iron dumping.” Planktos has already been advised by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that commercial iron dumping by a U.S. flagged ship could be in violation of EPA rules. In response, the company has told US officials that it will either find another flag or another ship. Although the company has said that it intends to dump 100 tons of iron particles in a stretch of ocean somewhere near the Galapagos Islands this month, the whereabouts of its vessel, the Weatherbird II, is not clear and ETC Group believes the boat to still be docked at Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Ecuadorian officials responsible for the Galapagos Islands have told Planktos that the proposed dump threatens the World Heritage Site’s unique environment. Silvia Ribeiro of ETC Group’s Mexico City office agrees but points out that, “The Planktos dump is only the first of a number of ocean and stratospheric geoengineering initiatives that companies are commercializing as so-called ‘green’ techno-fixes for global warming. Planktos has exposed a major gap in global governance that might let corporations play God with Gaia.” “It’s tempting to dismiss the company as a lot of hot air,” says Pat Mooney, executive director of ETC Group in Canada, “but it has the vessel, the iron, and the arrogance to make quite a mess.”

The full text of the Statement of Concern from the Scientific Groups of the London Convention and London Protocol appears below.

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Notes to Editors:

To view copy of the letter submitted by ICTA and ETC Group to the U.S. EPA: “Letter of Concern Regarding Imminent Violations of the Ocean Dumping Act by Planktos, Inc.” go here:

http://www.icta.org/doc/EPA_planktos_geo-engineering_letter%20of%20concern.pdf

For more background on Planktos’ iron dumping expedition to the Galapagos see previous ETC Group News Release “Geoengineers to Foul Galapagos Seas – Defying Climate Panel Warning,” May 3, 2007 – on the Internet:

http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=617

And ETC Group and ICTA’s News Release “Dumping on Gaia,” June 19, 2007:

http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=637

For more background on iron fertilization and other geoengineering schemes see “Gambling with Gaia” report available at

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

The U.S. governments’ submission to the London Convention about Planktos is available here: http://www.imo.org/includes/blastDataOnly.asp/data_id%3D18837/INF-28.pdf

Large-scale Ocean Iron Fertilisation Operations

1. Large-scale fertilisation of ocean waters using micro-nutrients such as iron to stimulate phytoplankton growth in order to sequester carbon dioxide is the subject of recent commercial interest. The Scientific Groups of the London Convention and the London Protocol take the view that knowledge about the effectiveness and potential environmental impacts of ocean iron fertilisation currently is insufficient to justify large-scale operations.
2. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), iron fertilisation of the oceans may offer a potential strategy for removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by stimulating the growth of phytoplankton and thereby sequestering the carbon dioxide in the form of particulate organic carbon. However, the IPCC also stated that ocean fertilisation remains largely speculative, and many environmental side effects have yet to be assessed.
3. The Scientific Groups of the London Convention and London Protocol note with concern the potential for large-scale ocean iron fertilisation to have negative impacts on the marine environment and human health. They therefore recommend that any such operations be evaluated carefully to ensure, among other things, that such operations are not contrary to the aims of the London Convention and London Protocol.
4. *Such an evaluation should include, among other things, consideration of:*
 1. *the estimated amounts and potential impacts of iron and other materials that may be released with the iron;*
 2. *the potential impacts of gases that may be produced by the expected phytoplankton blooms or by bacteria decomposing the dead phytoplankton;*
 3. *the estimated extent and potential impacts of bacterial decay of the expected phytoplankton blooms, including reducing oxygen concentrations;*
 4. *the types of phytoplankton that are expected to bloom and the potential impacts of any harmful algal blooms that may develop;*
 5. *the nature and extent of potential impacts on the marine ecosystem including naturally occurring marine species and communities;*
 6. *the estimated amounts and timescales of carbon sequestration, taking account of partitioning between sediments and water; and*
 7. *the estimated carbon mass balance for the operation.*

5. *The Scientific Groups request the 29th Consultative Meeting of the London Convention and 2nd Meeting of Contracting Parties to the London Protocol to consider the issue of large-scale ocean iron fertilisation operations with a view to ensuring adequate regulation of such operations. In particular, the Scientific Groups request that the following issues be addressed by the Parties:*

1. *the purposes and circumstances of proposed large-scale ocean iron fertilisation operations and whether these are compatible with the aims of the Convention and the Protocol;*
2. *the need, and potential mechanisms, for regulation of such operations;
and*
3. *the desirability of bringing to the attention of other international instruments and institutions proposals for such operations.*

6. *Further, the Scientific Groups request the Secretariat to release paragraphs 1 to 3 above as the Scientific Group's Statement of Concern and to invite Parties to the London Convention and the London Protocol to provide further information relating to proposed large-scale ocean iron fertilisation operations to the Secretariat and to the Scientific Groups as and when such information becomes available.*