

To the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans
To the Chair, Vice-Chairs, Members and Substitute Members of the European Parliament
Committee on the Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety
To the Ministers of Environment of all EU Member States and all COREPER I Ambassadors and
Environment Attachés in all Permanent Representations of all Member States to the EU

28 February 2023

OPEN LETTER: JOINT STATEMENT ON THE CARBON REMOVAL CERTIFICATION FRAMEWORK

We, the undersigned, strongly support the scaling up of **safe and effective carbon dioxide removal ('CDR')** to accelerate net emissions reductions, address residual emissions in hard-to-abate sectors as part of the transition to climate neutrality by 2050, and achieve net negative emissions thereafter. An ambitious net negative emissions target is crucial for the EU to demonstrate leadership and take responsibility for past and future emissions. This scale-up of carbon removals must occur in parallel with deep and rapid emissions cuts across all sectors of the economy and must not dilute nor delay those efforts.

We welcome the leadership shown by the European Commission with its **Carbon Removal Certification Framework ('CRCF')**, which introduces overarching rules for measuring, validating and certifying carbon removals. The legislative proposal is a first and significant step toward developing a strong carbon removal capability in Europe that contributes to the EU's climate goals. We note that the proposal aims to provide a basic framework to be expanded over time. However, to achieve its aims and ensure that carbon removal delivers real climate benefits, co-legislators **must address several critical shortcomings**, including adopting a definition of carbon removal compatible with existing international scientific guidance and consensus, and providing guidelines to govern the use of removal certificates that acknowledge the fundamentally different forms of carbon storage and stages of maturity of carbon removal methods, while keeping removals and emission reductions separate.

1. Clearly distinguish carbon removal from emissions reductions

The EU should adopt a clear definition of carbon removal, consistent with scientific consensus. Despite initially referencing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) definition in recital 2¹ of the CRCF proposal, in the legally binding Articles the Commission proposes a definition of carbon removal that includes activities that *do not* constitute removals as defined by the IPCC². Indeed, emissions reductions via "reduction of carbon release from a biogenic carbon pool to the atmosphere" are not carbon removals, and should not be defined as such.

¹ Recital 2 of the CRCF proposal reads: "[...] *The IPCC report also clearly states that 'the deployment of carbon dioxide removal to counterbalance hard-to-abate residual emissions is unavoidable if net-zero carbon dioxide (CO₂) or GHG emissions are to be achieved'. This will require the large-scale deployment of sustainable activities for capturing CO₂ from the atmosphere and durably storing it in geological reservoirs, terrestrial and marine ecosystems, or products.*"

² The IPCC has defined carbon removal as "Anthropogenic activities removing CO₂ from the atmosphere and durably storing it in geological, terrestrial, or ocean reservoirs, or in products. It includes existing and potential anthropogenic enhancement of biological, geochemical or chemical CO₂ sinks, but excludes natural CO₂ uptake not directly caused by human activities." (IPCC WGIII AR6).

Supporting a robust methodology for emissions reductions through halting and reversing the erosion of carbon sinks is a critical undertaking. Emissions reduction and avoided emissions activities should be clearly defined, incentivised and regulated, but this should be done separately to carbon removals since they provide a fundamentally **different form of climate benefit**. Some interventions will produce a mixture of emission reductions and carbon removal. Many independent bodies³ have already opted to clearly distinguish such instances by separately quantifying and labelling avoided emission/emission reduction activities and removal activities.

Providing clarity at the outset will avoid confusion later in the process and avoid the risk of divergence from definitions used in other jurisdictions, especially given the potential for the CRCF to set a global standard. The currently proposed definition of carbon removal is incorrect and inconsistent, and would risk condoning the improper and unfair use of certificates that could undermine public trust in the framework. **The EU must clearly define removals as activities that extract greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and store them for a very long time period, to achieve a permanent climate benefit.** The CRCF must require airtight liability regimes that do not just “aim” but actually ensure the long term storage of carbon, including the prevention and remediation of any reversal of CO₂ back into the atmosphere.

2. Govern the use of carbon removal certificates

To avert the risk of mitigation deterrence **the CRCF should set guardrails for how different types of carbon removal certificates or units may or may not be used.** Such a risk exists when the incentive to fund removals is to make a compensation claim - i.e., claiming that specific emissions have been balanced out with removals.

There needs to be clear delineation among the certificates resulting from the three types of activities (i.e., geological formations, carbon farming, products) as set out in the CRCF. The various methods of removing and storing carbon should be labelled in different ways, according to the origin and fate, especially the character and duration of the carbon storage, including its reversal risk. The use cases of the different certificates must be explicitly considered in the CRCF and aligned with the carbon storage character and type of the certificate.

Removals cannot distract from emissions reductions. Emission reduction targets of increasing ambition must be the primary tool for reaching climate neutrality; deeper emission cuts reduce our reliance on removals to achieve climate neutrality. Therefore, an ambitious explicit target for emissions elimination must be complemented with a separate explicit target for removals, toward the goal of balancing emissions that cannot be feasibly eliminated with removals at a societal level, delivering climate neutrality, and achieving net negative emissions immediately thereafter. Over time, as more emission reduction methods are developed and deployed, the emissions that are permissibly balanced by permanent removals must also decline to reflect these improvements, so that eliminating emissions to the greatest possible extent is always at the forefront of climate action.

Removals cannot contribute to greenwashing. Individual actors can currently buy carbon removal credits and use them in whichever way they wish, without any guardrails. This is untenable, and will lead to greenwashing, mitigation deterrence, and a loss of public trust. The

³ E.g. the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM)

CRCF proposal as currently drafted will do nothing to resolve this issue, and could even exacerbate it. Therefore, the CRCF and associated legislation must be amended to tightly regulate the permitted uses of carbon removals certified under CRCF-aligned registries. How removals are used, for example to make claims of balancing out specific emissions, is where the biggest potential for greenwashing lies. The CRCF cannot be silent on this issue.

Without these guardrails, suppliers of more expensive and permanent removals will be undercut by suppliers of cheaper and less reliable removals as buyers will default to buying cheap, potentially highly reversible carbon units. This will undermine both efforts to reduce emissions and to deploy permanent carbon removal activities. We strongly recommend that these different types of removals be clearly delineated in both methodology development as well as in the potential uses of the resulting certificates. **The uses permitted for different types of removals will have massive implications for the EU's ability to meet its climate goals.**

We believe that eliminating ambiguity as to what is and is not a removal, and setting out the ways in which certificates may be consistently used by buyers, will allow the new framework to achieve its stated intent of advancing the EU climate goals. We look forward to further collaboration with policymakers towards the development of the CRCF and its aims of integrating carbon removals into the EU climate policy framework, ensuring the development of a strong carbon removal capability in Europe, and realising the potential for European leadership in carbon removal certification.

Signed,

