



guardian.co.uk

4pm BST

Airlines flying in and out of Europe must cut CO2 emissions from 2012

David Gow in Brussels
guardian.co.uk, Tuesday July 08 2008 16:06 BST



Photograph: Getty Images

All airlines flying to and from the EU will be forced to cut their carbon dioxide emissions from 2012 under a compromise deal approved by MEPs today.

But the initial cut will be only 3% of average 2004-06 emission levels, rising to 5% in 2013, and airlines will be handed out 85% of their pollution permits for free. MEPs also dropped earlier plans for intra-EU flights to be affected from 2011.

Even so, angry airlines struggling with higher fuel prices warned that their inclusion within the EU's emissions trading scheme (ETS), its flagship mechanism for fighting climate change, would bring extra costs, higher fares and no environmental benefit.

MEPs voted 640 to 30, with 30 abstentions, to endorse a heavily watered down version of proposals first launched by the European commission and due to be rubber-stamped by ministers within the next few weeks.

Their vote could trigger an escalation of a dispute with the US which could seek legal action over the inclusion of non-European airlines within the ETS. MEPs hope a new president in the White House will be more amenable to a global deal on the issue.

Hailing the vote, Stavros Dimas, EU environment commissioner, said greenhouse gas emissions from international air transport were increasing faster than from any other sector in the EU.

They account for only 3% of overall emissions but have grown by 87% since 1990 and could more than double on current trends by 2020. Dimas said someone flying from London to New York and back generates as much CO2 as the average EU citizen does by heating their home for a year.

He held out the threat to deepen the planned emission cuts for aviation and reduce the number of free permits from as early as 2013 under an ETS review he is now undertaking. But smaller airlines will be exempt and fast-growing start-ups will be given free permits.

Friends of the Earth Europe aviation campaigner Richard Dyer said the deal was "so weak it will have little impact on the rocketing growth in CO2 pollution from flying" and the EU should press for international aviation and shipping to be included in the next (post-2012) phase of the UN climate change treaty. He said airlines should bid for all their pollution permits.

Peter Liese, a German Christian Democrat MEP who helped broker the final compromise, said revenues generated from auctioned allowances should not disappear into the general state budget but be earmarked for funding green public transport through lower taxes and research into clean aircraft.

Related information follows Ads by Google