Tech companies unclear over stance on potential new EU climate targets

Leaked document shows BusinessEurope group would oppose more ambitious goals

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Tue 18 Sep 2018 19.01 EDT

Companies including Facebook, Google and Microsoft have failed to distance themselves from a lobby group’s proposal to fight any effort by the EU to set more ambitious climate change goals.

A leaked document shows that BusinessEurope, Europe’s biggest business lobbying group, will urge members to oppose any moves by the European Commission to ratchet up the bloc’s 2030 targets for clean energy, carbon cuts and energy efficiency.

The commission is considering whether to set more ambitious goals in November after a key international science panel report on meeting tougher global warming targets is published in October, and before a UN climate summit in December.
But, at meeting in Brussels on Wednesday, BusinessEurope will ask big companies to agree a “line to take” on the prospect of steeper carbon cuts. If the commission’s measures have teeth, the group’s “advocacy and communication strategy” recommends companies agree to fight them. “To oppose the new increase of ambition, using the usual arguments of global playing field, we cannot compensate for others, etc,” the document said.

If the commission opts for warm words and a political statement rather than a material ratcheting up of the targets, the group suggests it should react by being “rather positive”.

BusinessEurope’s members include household names in the energy and technology sectors, many of which have spoken of the need for strong action on climate change.

When contacted by the Guardian to ask if they agreed or disagreed with the lobby group’s suggested opposition, UK business trade body the CBI, German conglomerate Siemens, French energy firms Engie and EDF Energy, and Japanese multinational Hitachi all failed to distance themselves from the proposal.

Tech giants Facebook, Google and Microsoft, all of which source renewable energy and have stressed the importance of cutting emissions, also failed to comment on where they stood on the proposal.

A CBI spokesperson said the group “has always been supportive of the ambitious and challenging climate targets set by the EU and the UK”. BusinessEurope said the meeting was a starting point to discuss what its position should be.

Kate Blagojevic, head of climate and energy at Greenpeace, which obtained the leaked document, said: “This powerful industry lobby is busy plotting behind the scenes to derail further action from the EU ahead of a major climate summit.”

Blagojevic said she was surprised companies appeared willing to go along with the proposal and urged them to “reject this cynical plan and use Wednesday’s meeting to stop it in its tracks”.

EU energy chief, Miguel Arias Cañete, said in August that the commission was weighing up whether or not to increase the goal of cutting carbon emissions by 2030 from 40% to 45%.

The plan has the support of the commission’s president, Jean-Claude Juncker, who has said that he shared Cañete’s conclusions on the carbon target. “This summer’s droughts are a stark reminder - not only for farmers - of just how important that work is to safeguard the future for generations of Europeans. We cannot turn a blind eye to the challenge in front of our noses,” Juncker said this month.

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