

Biofuelwatch Press Release: 7 December 2011

UK Environmentalists: 'Committee on Climate Change would sacrifice the world's forests on the altar of our energy addiction'

Biofuelwatch [i] has today condemned the Committee on Climate Change's Bioenergy Review [ii], which calls for a massive expansion in the use of biomass in the United Kingdom. The review calls for one tenth of the UK's energy needs to come from wood pellets, energy crops, palm oil, waste and other biological sources by 2050.

Robert Palgrave from Biofuelwatch states: *"I welcome the fact that the review acknowledges that the proposed five-fold increase in UK bioenergy use could mean further negative impacts on food prices and on biodiversity. The effects of bioenergy production are however already very evident and the Committee on Climate Change has not given enough weight to them in making its recommendations. The impacts are being felt already in overseas countries where millions of hectares of land falsely described as 'abandoned or marginal' are to be converted to growing monoculture energy crops to fuel our economy. This is not land on which the UK has any legitimate claim – it is land on which the livelihoods of many millions of people depend."*

The Committee on Climate Change report claims that biomass could generate 100 Twh, 10% of the UK's energy demand, by 2050. Producing that much electricity from biomass would require 100 million tonnes, mainly of wood, to be burned every year. This is more than ten times the UK's annual wood production. The report strongly supports biomass power stations with Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technology. However, CCS is an unproven technology, with serious concerns about the possibility of guaranteeing safe long-term carbon storage and, furthermore, fitting power stations with CCS makes them substantially less efficient. Biomass electricity is already one of the least efficient ways of generating energy and if CCS was used then even more wood would need to be burned for the same electricity.

Biofuelwatch warns that using biomass on such a vast industrial scale not only puts pressure on the world's forests but also displaces land that should be used for agriculture, thereby pushing up food prices and threatening the world's poorest. Biofuelwatch further points out that, although the Committee on Climate Change criticises the Government's accounting for 'carbon savings' from bioenergy as being flawed, their own assumption about the potential for such 'carbon savings' are deeply flawed, too. On average, the upfront emissions of biomass electricity per unit of energy are about 50% higher than those from burning coal. A carbon debt is immediately created which is only paid back if new biomass is grown and the debt lasts until the new biomass has sequestered all the carbon emitted during harvesting, processing and combustion of the original biomass.

Biofuelwatch calls on the government to instead put money into reducing our energy consumption, and calls on the government to provide more support to renewable energies which have been proven not to harm the planet, such as appropriately sited wind, wave, and solar power.

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Notes:

[i] Biofuelwatch is a UK/US campaign and research organisation working to raise awareness about the human right and environmental impact of biofuels and biomass: www.biofuelwatch.org.uk

[ii] The Committee on Climate Change is the independent body which advises the UK Government on tackling and preparing for climate change. Its new report, the 'Climate Change Review' (December 2011) can be accessed at http://downloads.theccc.org.uk.s3.amazonaws.com/Bioenergy/1463%20CCC_Bioenergy%20review_bookmarked_1.pdf