

12 January 2012

Stop subsidising deforestation and land-grabbing for biomass and bioliquid electricity

Open letter to the UK and Scottish Governments relating to the Renewables Obligation Banding Consultation

We call upon the UK and Scottish Governments¹ to stop subsidies for electricity from biomass and bioliquids (i.e. agrofuels) which mean more land-grabbing, logging and industrial tree plantations worldwide.

Under the Renewables Obligation, the UK and Scottish Government are offering generous subsidies for burning unlimited amounts of wood, most of it imported, as well as agrofuels for electricity. Although the UK Government has proposed to cap the amount of subsidies for electricity from agrofuels, that cap would still translate into a minimum of 110,000 hectares of new plantations, most likely oil palm plantations in the global South.

The scale of the UK's biomass plans: The UK Government wishes to see biomass generating up to 50TWh by 2020. This would require over 50 and possibly over 60 million tonnes of wood being burned in UK power stations each year, compared to a total UK wood production of less than 10 million tonnes annually. This figure is likely to escalate, as the unlimited subsidies are likely to attract more investment from companies. By comparison, total EU wood pellet imports were 11 million tonnes last year.²

At present, most UK wood imports come from North America, as well as from Scandinavia, the Baltic States and Russia, contributing to more logging and more forest and biodiversity destruction in those regions as well as releasing large amounts of carbon as a result. Companies are increasingly looking to source wood from industrial tree plantations in Southern countries, too, for example from Brazil and Ghana. Both directly and indirectly, the vast new demand for wood requires an expansion of industrial tree plantations and thus more land-grabbing, more destruction of forests and grasslands and more depletion and pollution of soils and freshwater. This poses a further threat to the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples, forest-dependent peoples and small farmers.

Agrofuels for electricity in the UK: The UK proposes to burn 400,000 tonnes of bioliquids burned in UK power stations, which, if they were run on palm oil alone (by far the cheapest bioliquid) would require 110,000 hectares of land to be converted to plantations. Experience in Germany and Italy shows that palm oil is by far the most likely type of agrofuel to be burnt in power stations. This will mean yet more land-grabbing, human rights abuses and carbon emissions from deforestation.

Sustainability standards for biomass and bioliquids: The UK government insists that it can source biomass and bioliquids 'sustainably' and as such proposes to introduce biomass 'sustainability standards' from 2013. For agrofuels, EU standards already apply to renewable electricity subsidies in the UK.

1 The UK Government is responsible for decisions regarding renewable energy subsidies for England and Wales only. In Scotland, such decisions have been devolved to the Scottish Government.

2 <http://www.iwoodfuels.com/energy-articles/>

Agrofuel and proposed biomass sustainability standards are grossly inadequate: Above all, they do not address the inherently unsustainable nature of the new demand for wood and vegetable oil being created, on top of an already vastly unsustainable demand for both in the UK and across Europe. Standards ignore all indirect impacts from biomass and agrofuels, as well as all impacts on communities, human rights, the right to food, soil and water. What's more, the carbon savings requirements for biomass and bioliquids under the criteria are a false target, as the methodology by which carbon emissions are calculated wrongly assumes that burning bioenergy is carbon-neutral. And there will not even be any independent auditing or verification of companies' claims.

No subsidies for biomass or bioliquids electricity: By driving up the demand and the global price for wood and energy crops such as palm oil through subsidies (called Renewable Obligation Certificates or ROCs), the UK's policy on industrial biomass and bioliquids is set to increase land grabbing and speculation for tree plantations, expand destructive logging, speed up the conversion of biodiverse native forests to monoculture tree plantations, and worsen climate change. The government must show it cares about people and planet by investing in clean and genuine renewable energy solutions that do not adversely affect the global south.

We therefore call upon the United Kingdom to scrap all support measures for biomass and bioliquids and to focus on cutting the demand for energy, including through investment in energy efficiency and home insulation and focussing support on genuinely renewable and sustainable energy technologies instead.

Signed by:

- ✧ ADP (Amics de Palanques) , Spain
- ✧ Africa-Europe Faith & Justice Network (AEFJN), Belgium
- ✧ AFRICANDO, Spain
- ✧ Afrika-Europa Network, Netherlands
- ✧ Agencia de Desarrollo Local, Argentina
- ✧ Amazònia Assemblea de Solidaritat, Spain
- ✧ American Environmental Health Studies Project, US
- ✧ ATTAC España, Spain
- ✧ Biofuelwatch, UK/US
- ✧ Biomass Accountability Project, Massachusetts, US
- ✧ Breathe Clean Air Group, UK
- ✧ Buckeye Forest Council, Ohio, US
- ✧ Bushwacker Wholefoods, UK
- ✧ Campaign Against Climate Change, UK
- ✧ CAPP- Ecological Justice, Indonesia
- ✧ Carmelitas Descalzas de Olza, Spain
- ✧ Center for Biological Diversity, US
- ✧ CESINSAD, Colombia
- ✧ CISP - Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli, Italy
- ✧ COECOCEIBA-Friends of the Earth Costa Rica, Costa Rica
- ✧ Colectivo de Ex Detenidas Desaparecidas "Carmen Soler" Asociación HIJOS PY, Paraguay
- ✧ Comisión de DDHH de Paraguayos Residentes en Buenos Aires, Argentina
- ✧ Comité Oscar Romero, Spain
- ✧ Concerned Citizens of Franklin County, Massachusetts, US
- ✧ Consejo de Organizaciones de Médicos y Parteras Indígenas Tradicionales por la Salud Comunitaria en Chiapas, Mexico

- ✧ Corporate Europe Observatory, Netherlands
- ✧ Dachverband Kulturpflanzen- und Nutztiervielfalt e.V., Germany
- ✧ Dogwood Alliance, US
- ✧ Down to Earth, UK
- ✧ Earth 3000, Germany
- ✧ Earthpeoples
- ✧ Ecological Society of the Philippines, Philippines
- ✧ Econexus, UK
- ✧ Ecoportal, Argentina
- ✧ Eco Sitio, Argentina
- ✧ Edinburgh 350, UK
- ✧ Elephant Family, UK
- ✧ Espacio Bristol-Colombia, UK
- ✧ Forest Monitor, UK
- ✧ Forum Ökologie & Papier, Germany
- ✧ Friends of the Siberian Forest, Russia
- ✧ Fundacion del Rio, Nicaragua
- ✧ Global Forest Coalition
- ✧ Grangemouth Community Council, Scotland
- ✧ Green Delaware, US
- ✧ Grupo Autoayuda Los Andes, Germany
- ✧ Healthy Dubois County, US
- ✧ INCOMINDIOS, Switzerland
- ✧ Institut für angewandten Regenwaldschutz/Regenwald-Institut. e.V., Germany
- ✧ Irish Doctors Environmental Association, Ireland
- ✧ Kalpavriksh, India
- ✧ Keep Our Island Clean, Hawaii, US
- ✧ Labour, Health and Human rights Development Centre, Nigeria
- ✧ Levegő Munkacsoport (Clean Air Action Group), Hungary
- ✧ Les Amis de la Nature et des Jardins (ANJ), DR Congo
- ✧ Movimiento Nacional de Victimas, M.N.V., Paraguay
- ✧ National Association of Professional Environmentalists (Friends of the Earth Uganda, NAPE), Uganda
- ✧ No North Blyth Biomass Power Station, Scotland
- ✧ NOPE (No Oil Palm Energy), UK
- ✧ No Leith Biomass Campaign, UK
- ✧ No Southampton Biomass, UK
- ✧ North East Peoples Alliance, India
- ✧ Oakland Institute, US
- ✧ Olympic Environmental Council, Washington, US
- ✧ Organizacion Fraternal Negra Hondureña, OFRANEH, Honduras
- ✧ Philippine Initiative for Conservation of Environment and the People, Philippines
- ✧ Port Talbot Residents Against Power Stations, UK
- ✧ Preserve Pepeekeo Health and Environment, Hawaii, US
- ✧ PTAirwatchers Port Townsend, WA, USA
- ✧ Reforest the Earth, UK
- ✧ Regenbogenkreis, Germany
- ✧ Rettet den Regenwald e.V., Germany
- ✧ Salva la Selva, Spain
- ✧ Save Americas Forests, US
- ✧ Second Chance Foundation, US

- ♣ Sobrevivencia / Friends of the Earth Paraguay
- ♣ Society for Threatened Peoples International
- ♣ Timberwatch Coalition, South Africa
- ♣ Umweltinstitut München e.V. , Germany
- ♣ War on Want, UK
- ♣ Westfälische Gesellschaft für Artenschutz e.V. (WGA, Westphalian Society for Conservation),
Germany
- ♣ Wight Biomess, UK
- ♣ Wiregrass Activists for Clean Energy, Georgia, US
- ♣ World Rainforest Movement
- ♣ World Temperate Rainforest Network

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