

A Burning Issue – Biomass and its impacts on forests and communities - public meeting and report launch.

- for immediate release-

Biofuelwatch is holding a public meeting on Tuesday 29th October at the Lumen Centre, 88 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9RS.

At this event we will be launching our new report "**Biomass: the Chain of Destruction**" which tracks the impacts of the rapidly growing industry using biomass for electricity generation - from the cleared forests of the Americas to the communities in the UK living in the shadow of it.

The report includes the **first case study of land grabs and deforestation in ecologically sensitive areas** arising directly from UK government renewable energy policies, government subsidies and Green Investment Bank loans.

The public meeting will hear presentations from the World Rainforest Movement[1], Dogwood Alliance[2] (via videolink), Mossley Environmental Action Group and Biofuelwatch[3], who have done on-the-ground research for the report.

We will hear about the thousands of hectares of **eucalyptus plantations that have replaced diverse ecosystems and communities** in the Brazilian state of Maranhão. This is as a direct result of a memorandum of understanding between suppliers Suzano and UK based MGT Power who have plans for huge new biomass power stations on Teeside and Tyneside.

We will hear about the **clear-felling of ancient wetland forests** in the Southern US to fuel Drax and E-On's switch to so-called "clean" biomass energy.

Lastly we will hear about the **struggles of communities in the UK** fighting unfair planning, poor air quality and environmental injustice.

This industry is only at the very early stages of planned exponential growth[4] and already, even before many of the power stations are operational, it is having unacceptable impacts that contravene sustainability criteria in UK and EU renewable energy policy. This is a scandal that must be brought to the attention of the public and the government.

The meeting will be attended by leading NGOs campaigning in this field, sustainability specialists, journalists and grass-roots campaigners.

****The event is free but places are limited so please email us to let us know you are coming biofuelwatch@ymail.com** Hi-res photographs will be available

For more details please see our website:

http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2013/burning_issue_public_event/

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Notes for Editors

[1] <http://wrm.org.uy/>

[2] <http://www.dogwoodalliance.org/2013/05/danna-smith-on-dogwoods-forests-arent-fuel-campaign/>

[3] [1] Biofuelwatch is a not-for-profit grassroots organisation set up to raise awareness of the negative impacts of industrial biofuels and bioenergy <http://biofuelwatch.org.uk/>

[4]Background to biomass

The government has put big subsidies in place to encourage the burning of biomass for electricity generation. It is disregarding all of the science about the true and highly negative climate impacts of burning wood for electricity on a large scale – it has even made it clear that DECC's own scientific advisor's work on estimating carbon emissions from different types of biomass will be ignored for policy purposes until at least 2027!

The biggest biomass investments so far are going into the (partial and full) conversions of old coal generation stations. There are 5 with planning permission which could consume (at less than 40% efficiency) over 50 million tonnes of wood per year, most of it imported from the US and Canada. This is driving clear-felling of biodiverse, old-growth forests, often to be replaced by fast-growing monoculture plantations. Most of these power stations would have had to close shortly under EU pollution regulations. In many cases the conversion allows them to extend the coal burning life of these old inefficient plants.

There is also a growing dedicated biomass power station sector with existing projects predicted to consume up to 32 million tonnes of wood, most of it imported. This is likely to come from fast-growing trees in plantation, especially in the global south. Already Brazil has around 6.7 million hectares of 'green desert' timber plantation, with devastating impacts on forests, communities, food and water sovereignty.

This means that current projects could create a wood demand of 82 million tonnes per year – more than 8 times the total UK annual wood production for all uses.

Pollution from burning wood is similar to that from coal, though more of some pollutants (such as very small particulates – which can have grave public health impacts) and less of others (especially sulphur dioxide – which is one of the main reasons why some coal power station units are being converted to biomass).

For more information visit:

<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/uk-campaign/coal-biomass-conversions/>

<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2013/biomass-faq-2/>

<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/wp-content/maps/uk-biomass.html>