

Thousands urge Government to drop subsidies for palm oil power stations as environmental and development groups hand over petition

Press release by Friends of the Earth, ActionAid, Sumatran Orangutan Society, Biofuelwatch and Action for Sustainable Energy for Bristol, No Oil Palm Energy (NOPE)

Photo opportunity outside Department for Energy and Climate Change, 1pm, 30th November

- Embargoed for Friday, 30th November 2012, 0:00 hours -

30th November 2012 – Representatives of six environmental and development organisations are today delivering a petition signed by over 6,500 people to the Department of Energy and Climate Change, urging DECC to drop subsidies for biofuel power stations, which are expected to run mainly on palm oil [1]. Campaigners warn that those proposals could more than double total UK palm oil imports [3], posing a threat to rainforests, climate and forest-dependent communities and indigenous peoples who face losing their land and livelihoods to new oil palm plantations.

Under government proposals due to be decided in early 2013, renewable energy subsidies would be guaranteed for burning up to half a million tonnes of biofuels in power stations every year [2]. Experience elsewhere in Europe has shown that biofuel power stations will almost always run on palm oil because it is far cheaper than other types of vegetable oil. So far, biofuel company W4B has planning permission to build two large palm oil power stations in Bristol and Portland and another company, Edgeley Green Power, is seeking planning consent for a power station in Shoreham-on-Sea, also listing palm oil as a potential feedstock.

Mike Andrews from Action for Sustainable Energy for Bristol, who set up the petition, explains: “Palm oil is the main cause of permanent forest loss in Indonesia and Malaysia and rapidly turning into a driver of deforestation across the tropics, including in Cameroon, Mexico and Papua New Guinea, too. It is responsible for vast carbon emissions from deforestation, drainage and burning of peatlands. Renewable energy subsidies must not be spent on creating an even bigger demand for it.”

In Indonesia alone, the Government is planning to see 20 million hectares – an area ten times the size of Wales, converted to new oil palm plantations to meet rising global demand.

Helen Buckland from the Sumatran Orangutan Society adds: “The buoyant demand for palm oil has already driven orangutans to the brink of extinction. In the Tripa peatlands, in Indonesian Sumatra, alone, 2800 of 3000 orangutans have died as their forest has been cut and burnt for palm oil. Subsidising power stations likely to burn palm oil will make an already disastrous situation even worse.”

Photo opportunity:

1pm outside the Department of Energy and Climate Change, 3 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2AW

Campaigners will be handing over the petition, holding a large, illustrated version with the text, photos and there will be orangutan costumers.

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Notes:

1) The petition can be found at

www.avaaz.org/en/petition/Stop_UK_government_subsidies_for_electricity_from_biofuels_including_palmoil_that_make_climate_change_worse_and_trash_t/.

2) Proposals for guaranteed long-term biofuel electricity subsidies form part of DECC's response to a public consultation about support available to different types of electricity classed as renewable under the Renewables Obligation from 2013 onwards:

www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/consultation/ro-banding/5936-renewables-obligation-consultation-the-government.pdf. Although biofuel electricity subsidies are already available the fact that they have not so far been guaranteed long-term has held back investment in that sector so far. Under the proposals, subsidies for biofuels would be capped but that cap would translate into 500,000 tonnes of biofuels being burned every year.

3) According to Defra, the UK imported 450,000 tonnes of palm oil last year:

www.defra.gov.uk/news/2012/10/30/sustainable-palm-oil/