

John Hayes slips up on Palm-oil Power

Long-term subsidies planned for climate-damaging fuels.

Electricity,-Draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order 2013

On Wednesday 6th March 2013, MPs must vote whether to accept Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) plans to subsidise ‘green electricity’. But leading scientists agree that the biofuels to be subsidised are not ‘green’ as Minister John Hayes (Con.) holds, but are worse for climate change than the fossil fuels they replace. The widely accepted belief that growing biofuel absorbs the carbon released when it is burnt, has been shown to be false.

The subsidies are a key part of the government’s strategy to reduce carbon emissions. But to (LibDem) Secretary of State Ed Davey’s dismay, expert scientists from the [European Environment Agency](http://www.europeanenvironmentagency.com) and Princeton <https://www.sciencemag.org/content/326/5952/527.summary> and [Leicester Universities](http://www.leicester.ac.uk) now agree that the biofuels like palm-oil that he intends to subsidise for 20 years will make climate change worse, destroy tropical forests and endangered species, and add tens of millions of pounds a year to voters’ electricity bills.

Note to editors:

The Statutory Instrument laid before Parliament can only be accepted or rejected by MPs in its entirety. As it specifies ROC subsidies for many kinds of truly renewable electricity such as wind, tidal, etc. it is less likely to be rejected by MPs. But the sustainability issue is of national and global importance.

The belief that growing biofuel absorbs all the carbon released when it is burnt, has been shown to be a fallacy. It takes no account of the vegetation present before it was cleared and planted - ‘land-use change’ (LUC), nor the need to grow food crops displaced by the fuel-crop elsewhere - ‘indirect land-use change’ (ILUC). Many oil-palm plantations, carved from the rainforest, are planted on peat, which can then release greenhouse gases for centuries.

Planning permission has already been granted for palm-oil fuelled power-stations at [Avonmouth](http://www.avonmouth.gov.uk), Bristol and [Portland](http://www.portland.gov.uk) despite strong local opposition. Another is planned at Shoreham-by-Sea. Their profitability relies on these Renewables Obligation Certificate (ROC) subsidies. But the scientists claim that the European Renewable Energy Directive (RED) and even the Kyoto Protocol have fallen into the same ‘accounting error’ for carbon, which fails to include the ‘tail-pipe’ emissions of carbon fuels. Their evidence shows that using bioliquid fuels like palm-oil releases more greenhouse gases (GHGs) than using fossil fuels.

Ed Davey has urgently passed the problem to DECC's Chief Scientific Advisor, the physicist Prof David MacKay, well known for his insightful book "[Renewable Energy Without The Hot Air](#)". It will be interesting to see whether MacKay agrees with the Government Chief Scientist Prof. Sir John Beddington FRS, who has said "[Cutting down rainforest to produce biofuel crops is profoundly stupid](#)".

Burning biofuels is very big business. More than a third of all the maize planted in the USA is now used for ethanol for cars. Even Stavros Dimas, a former Wall Street lawyer and Greek Industry Minister who became EU Environment Commissioner, expressed concerns that the RED and Biofuel Directive are causing rising food prices for the poor, rainforest destruction, and driving poor people off their land.

The scale of the plantation industry is remarkable. Oil palm plantations are [the main cause of forest loss in Malaysia and Indonesia](#). A couple of years ago the Indonesian government said that they plan to increase palm oil plantations by 20 million hectares by 2020. That is over 4/5ths of the entire area of the UK. [Indonesia is already the world's third highest emitter of GHGs](#).

As the green tide of oil-palms spreads, environmental activists are appalled by the destruction of entire eco-systems and the toll on critically endangered species like the orangutan, Sumatran tiger and the Borneo pigmy elephant. In February, 14 of these rare elephants [were found poisoned by palm-oil workers](#).

As if this were not enough, palm oil producers are inflicting [major human rights abuses](#) in southeast Asia, [Central](#) and South America and West Africa: including forced eviction of populations, **rape** and **murder**.

At present DECC are claiming that a cap of 500,000 tonnes on imports of palm oil for fuel will avoid excessive expansion of plantations, but this will double the amount imported by the UK. Those who claim that only fuel certified as 'sustainable' will be used ignore the fact that such certification is widely corrupt, and that the new demand for bioliquid fuel, driven by subsidies and directives, will cause new plantations anyway as the existing demand for food and chemicals is displaced into new plantations.

At present John Hayes looks like he is on a slippery slope to a major policy error that will cost both voters and the planet dear. Why doesn't he follow [the example of the Netherlands and Germany](#) and just stop subsidies for *all* biofuels? There is nothing in the RED that says you have to have them.

"These subsidies will result in the deaths of children". Says Mike Andrews, former TV executive producer for the BBC's Natural History Unit, based in Bristol.

"Do you want to kill a child every time you turn on a light switch?"

“Burn palm-oil biofuel in power-stations like the one proposed for Avonmouth, and other families in tropical countries will be driven off their land by gunmen and shot if they resist.

“It is a fallacy that biofuels cause less global warming than carbon fossil fuels. The truth is that their use causes tens to thousands of times more global warming than burning coal or oil.

“Global warming causes the rains to fail in hot arid countries. In Ethiopia I have seen children dying for lack of food. A village leader from the Karayu pastoralists appealed to me to do something to help. Well you CAN do something. Stop these grotesque subsidies for biofuel power.

“ The fallacy of bioliquid fuels being green has been promoted by the European car and petroleum lobbies to influence Angela Merkel and the EU Renewable Energy Directive. Claiming that biofuels are better than petrol/diesel gives the car-makers an opportunity to pretend they produce less carbon. They don't want a ban on big inefficient engines. They make more profit on big cars.”

Further contacts:

Almuth Ernsting, *Biofuelwatch* Tel 0131 6232300

almuthbernstinguk@yahoo.co.uk

Kenneth Richter, *Friends of the Earth* 0759 0063454

kenneth.richter@foe.co.uk

Helen Buckland, *Sumatran Orangutan Society*, 07970 666051

helen@orangutans-sos.org

Ian Duff, *Greenpeace* 07079 880 864 ian.duff@greenpeace.org

Anders Dahlbeck, *ActionAid* 020 3122 0551 Anders.Dahlbeck@actionaid.org

Mike Andrews

ACSEB – Action for Sustainable Energy for Bristol

Tel. 0117 9682140, 28 Seawalls Road, Sneyd Park, Bristol BS9 1PG