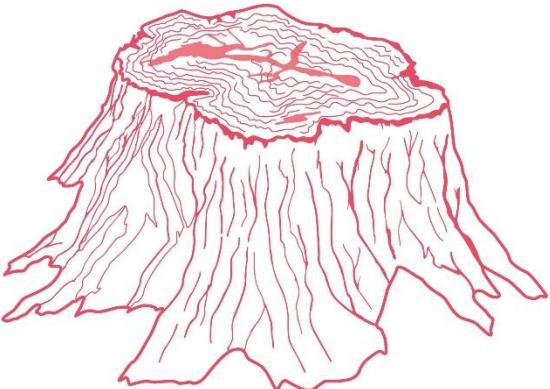


# CUT CARBON NOT FORESTS



## Parliamentary Briefing: New YouGov Poll on Public Attitudes Towards Biomass

YouGov has just conducted a new poll<sup>i</sup> regarding public attitudes in the UK towards biomass energy in the wake of COVID-19, revealing a striking disconnect between government policy and public opinion.

Key results include:

- » Fewer than one in four Britons (23%) believe burning wood for electricity should be classified as 'renewable energy.'
- » 55% also disagreed with the Government's continued subsidies for this source of energy as part of the UK's renewable energy strategy.
- » Large majorities (upwards of 80%) back the Government supporting wind and solar energy.
- » But only 3% say the Government should help companies that burn wood sourced from forests overseas. [Nearly all UK biomass is imported.<sup>ii</sup>]

And as the COVID-19 lockdown is eased, the British public believes the UK's recovery phase must prioritise true clean energy sources, such as wind and solar power. 82% of respondents agree that the UK should aim to preserve improvements in air quality by switching to energy sources with no associated air pollution emissions. Burning biomass from forests releases dangerous air pollution like particulate matter, in addition to climate pollution.<sup>iii</sup>

The UK is currently the largest user of biomass electricity in Europe, and much of the wood in question is cut down and shipped in from sensitive forests overseas, destroying habitats and wildlife.<sup>iv</sup> The data shows support for the protection of these natural forests and the wildlife that depends on them, with 85% worried about the impact on wildlife if trees in forests are being cut down to generate electricity.

At the smokestack, burning biomass in power stations emits more carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) than coal. Biomass industry proponents claim that burning forest wood as fuel in power stations is 'renewable' because the CO<sub>2</sub> it emits is reabsorbed by new trees. However, this process takes decades, if the new trees grow back at all. When asked how many years it should take for a low or zero carbon energy source to reabsorb the same amount of CO<sub>2</sub> it emits into the atmosphere, 58% of respondents said within ten years and just 18% think it should take longer.

Other key findings include:

- » 82% of respondents believe the government should promote solar power as a renewable energy source, closely followed by wind power (80%), hydroelectric power (71%), biomass using food, garden and waste wood from home or industry (58%).
- » In contrast, only 8% said the government should promote biomass using British forest wood, and only 3% said government should promote biomass using wood from overseas forests.
- » 57% said that lockdown has made them expect to need to reduce their overall household spending in the next 12 months.

Faced with the climate emergency and the need to rebuild the UK economy in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the Government must consider where money is being spent and ensure public investment goes towards genuinely clean and climate-friendly growth. With household budgets under pressure, there is no justification for continuing to waste over £2 million a day subsidising false solutions to climate change and increasing electricity costs for Britons when true renewables are affordable, abundant and readily available.

**In 2019, the UK spent approximately £1.67 billion subsidising burning trees for electricity, of which £1.26 billion was distributed via the Renewables Obligation Certificate (ROC) scheme and could thus be redirected.<sup>v</sup> We urge the UK Government to immediately end ROCs subsidies for wood-burning power stations and redirect savings towards truly clean and renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar.**

This briefing has been prepared by a group of environmental NGOs campaigning for the end of biomass subsidies in the UK. Our members include: Biofuelwatch, Dogwood Alliance, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC).

If you would like any further information, or to speak to representatives of the Cut Carbon Not Forests coalition on this issue, please contact [ccnf@cutcarbonnotforests.org](mailto:ccnf@cutcarbonnotforests.org).

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<sup>i</sup>All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2283 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th - 10th July 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). The poll was commissioned by Biofuelwatch, Dogwood Alliance, NRDC and the Southern Environmental Law Center.

<sup>ii</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/aburningissuebiomassisthebiggestsourceofrenewableenergyconsumedintheuk/2019-08-30#:~:text=Since%20the%20start%20of%20the,the%20United%20States%20and%20Canada>

<sup>iii</sup> EU Biomass Legal Case, “Drax (UK): 1,000 tonnes of deadly particulate pollution a year, a 400% increase since they switched from coal to biomass,” available at: <http://eubiomasscase.org/2019/03/08/drax-uk-1000-tonnes-of-deadly-particulate-pollution-a-year-a-400-increase-since-they-switched-from-coal-to-biomass/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.nrdc.org/resources/global-markets-biomass-energy-are-devastating-us-forests>

<sup>v</sup> Under the Levy Control Framework, reduced spending on biomass electricity subsidies should automatically free up increased funding for new subsidies for different and cleaner renewable electricity.