

10th August July 2026

Open Letter: 106 organisations say no to the UK government funding Drax to power data centres

Dear Secretary of State Jonathan Reynolds & Minister Kanishka Narayan,

We are writing to express our deep concern at the recent application by North Yorkshire Combined Authority, in partnership with North Yorkshire Council, Drax Power Station, the University of York and other organisations to become an “Artificial Intelligence Growth Zone” and would urge that this application be rejected. We had previously written to the former Secretary of State Liz Kendall about this.

In February 2025, Minister for Energy Michael Shanks announced the government’s plan to award Drax four years of further subsidies via a new Contract for Difference, from 2027 (when Drax’s existing subsidies end) until 2031, despite widespread criticism of Drax and the subsidies they receive from MPs and Peers across the political spectrum as well environmental NGOs and other civil society organisations in the UK [and abroad](#). During that announcement, Michael Shanks stated that this subsidy decision “will ensure Drax plays a much more limited role in the system, providing low carbon dispatchable power only when it is really needed” and that “Drax will be supported to operate at a maximum load factor of just 27% – operating less than half as often as it currently does.”

If Drax was to become part of an Artificial Intelligence Growth Zone award, then the Energy Minister’s assurances to Parliament would effectively be overturned and Drax would continue to operate at far greater than a 27% load factor, i.e. burn significantly more wood than foreseen by DESNZ.

The criteria for [who can apply](#) to be an AI Growth Zone state that sites located near land suitable for the development of low-carbon power generation and energy storage infrastructure will be viewed favourably.

We therefore must make it clear that Drax power station does not provide low-carbon electricity generation. Drax biomass power station is the UK’s biggest single carbon emitter and world’s biggest tree burner. Last year alone [it emitted over 13 million tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere](#) - [3.5% of UK total emissions](#). Drax [burned 7.3 million tonnes of wood](#), much of it from the clear-felling of biodiverse forests in the Southern USA, Canada and Europe, with catastrophic impacts on forests, wildlife, communities and the climate. Burning wood for electricity releases significant CO₂ that isn’t offset for decades until trees eventually regrow, if ever. [Hundreds of scientists warned](#): ‘this burning of wood will increase warming for

decades to centuries... even when the wood replaces coal, oil or natural gas.’ [The Climate Change Committee has found](#) that the “sustained use of large-scale biomass generation is not compatible with the path to Net Zero”. The [European Academies Science Advisory Council](#), and [Chatham House](#), have both reached the same conclusion.

Please also note that, in 2018, [the then government decided](#) that no new CfDs should be given to biomass plants unless their life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions are below 29 kg CO₂e / MWh, a figure far below Drax’s lifecycle emissions. These figures are based on a methodology that does not account for smokestack emissions from biomass combustion, nor for most other emissions other than those from fossil fuel combustion along the supply chain. Nonetheless, even under that methodology Drax’s supply chain emissions are such that they would not be considered ‘low-carbon’ going forward. The decision announced in February 2025 exempts Drax from the 2018 rules on the grounds of energy security, not because Drax’s supply-chain emissions are now considered differently.

The bid in question is claiming that Drax Power Station, near Selby, would be home to a new AI and Clean Energy campus on the basis that the site would be able to develop bio-energy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) to deliver carbon negative power, helping the UK to meet climate targets.

However, being “able” to develop BECCS simply means having sufficient space on the site for building a capture plant. Other than a very small-scale solvent testing experiment (with a maximum of [27 tonnes of CO₂ captured and then emitted into the atmosphere](#)), Drax has not carried out any Research and Development into carbon capture, has no active plans to do so, and, furthermore, there is so far no planning consent for a CO₂ pipeline to transport any CO₂ that might be captured by Drax in future either. There are no known examples of functioning or scalable BECCS projects involving woody biomass combustion anywhere in the world. Neither Drax nor anyone else has the technical know-how to capture carbon from woody biomass burning at scale and [mass redundancies have recently been made by Drax backed company C-Capture](#). [Scientists from across the globe have raised the alarm on BECCS](#).

We also wish to make you aware of the serious impacts of logging on biodiverse forests in the USA, Canada and the Baltic States, from where Drax sources most of the wood pellets it burns. [Investigations have shown](#) that there are material impacts on biodiversity as a result of bioenergy harvests in forests including in Estonia, the United States, and Canada where old, even ancient, forests are being logged for wood pellets.

In addition, pellet production supplying Drax Power station causes significant harm to communities, particularly environmental justice communities, i.e. communities with a disproportionate number of people living in deprivation and with a large percentage of

non-white people, especially in the US Southeast. Pollution from the mills exacerbates health problems in communities with high levels of poverty (and that are majority-Black) and Drax has been accused of [driving environmental racism](#). The use of land for biomass also wastes space which could be better used for nature recovery and sustainable food production.

We therefore urge you to ensure that Drax will not be incentivised to burn even more wood than they will be under the recently announced 2027-2031 subsidies. We look forward to hearing from you.

Organisations

UK-based organisations:

Axe Drax	Fuel Poverty Action
Biofuelwatch	Grassroots Wirksworth
Campaign against Climate Change	Green Christian
Chesterfield Climate Alliance	Greenpeace UK
Christian Climate Action	Greener Jobs Alliance
Climate Action North East Derbyshire	Global Action Plan
Coal Action Network	Global Justice York Health for Extinction Rebellion
Corporate Watch	Just Transition Wakefield
Derbyshire Climate Coalition	The Lifescape Project
Earth Thrive	London Mining Network
East Midlands Combined County Authority	MP Watch
Climate Coalition (EMCCA Climate Coalition)	Medact
EcoNexus	Norwich Friends of the Earth
Environmental Investigation Agency	Operation Noah
Extinction Rebellion Calderdale	People & Planet Sheffield
Extinction Rebellion Glasgow	Scrap Carbon Capture
Extinction Rebellion Leeds	Stop Burning Trees Coalition
Extinction Rebellion York	South Yorkshire Climate Alliance
Fossil Free Greater Manchester	Tipping Point UK
Fossil Free West Yorkshire	Troublemakers
Friends of the Earth (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)	Weald Action Group
Friends of the Earth Selby	Yorkshire and Humber Climate Justice Coalition
	Zero Hour

Organisations based in countries that export wood pellets to Drax

350 Seattle, USA	Biomass Action Network
Acréscimo - Associação de Promoção ao Investimento Florestal	Biomass Working Group, PNW Forest Climate Alliance, USA

BirdLife Estonia
 Coastal Plain Conservation Group, USA
 Conservation North, Canada
 Dogwood Alliance, USA
 Estonian Forest Aid
 Estonian Fund for Nature
 Holding Nature, Estonia
 IRIS - Associação Nacional de Ambiente, Portugal
 Latvian Ornithological Society, Latvia
 Mighty Earth, USA

NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council), USA
 Partnership for Policy Integrity, USA
 Puse Latvijas, Latvia
 Quercus – ANCN, Portugal
 The Rachel Carson Council, USA
 Save Estonia's Forests, Estonia
 Southern Environmental Law Center, USA
 Stand.earth
 ZERO - Associação Sistema Terrestre Sustentável, Portugal

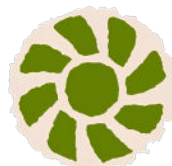
International network:

350 Deschutes
 A Community Voice
 A2 (Anthropocene Alliance)
 Alliance for Community Engagement (ACE) SW WA
 Athens County's Future Action Network
 Bulkley Valley Stewardship Coalition
 Cherokee Concerned Citizens
 Clean Air Action Network of Glens Falls
 Climate Communications Coalition
 Climate Emergency Science Law
 Cyber x Climate
 EarthNeighborhood Productions
 Ecology Center
 Friends of the Earth US
 FÓRUM CARAJÁS
 GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives)
 Global Forest Coalition
 Global Justice Ecology Project
 Heartwood

Hull and East Riding Friends of the Earth
 John Muir Project
 Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
 Mums for Lungs
 NC Climate Solutions Coalition
 NC Disaster Response and Resilience Network
 Old-Growth Forest Network
 Olympic Climate Action
 Pivot Point
 Protect Our Streams
 RESTORE: The North Woods
 Science Alliance for Forestry Transformation
 SOS Save Our Sumter
 Southern Forests Conservation Coalition
 Standing Trees
 Tennessee Heartwood
 The Working Class Climate Alliance
 Three Rivers Waterkeeper
 Valley Improvement Projects
 Young, Gifted & Green
 Zero Waste Ithaca



GREENPEACE



biofuelwatch







PACIFIC NORTHWEST FOREST CLIMATE ALLIANCE
Biomass Working Group



