

# Open Letter calling on the Government to end Renewable Obligation Certificate Subsidies (ROCs) for electricity generated from biomass and redirect funds to genuinely low carbon, clean renewables

To sign the MP Open Letter, please email: [biofuelwatch@gmail.com](mailto:biofuelwatch@gmail.com)

**To the Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, and the Energy Minister**

In September 2018, the government announced changes to Contracts for Difference which will effectively rule out new subsidies for large-scale import-dependent biomass electricity.<sup>1</sup> This is a very positive development and sends a strong message that biomass burning is not part of the solution to climate change.

However, the changes to the subsidies rules only apply to new projects. Existing biomass power stations are due to continue receiving subsidies until 2027 which were previously granted under the Renewable Obligation. This means that billions of pounds of renewable energy funding, raised through utility bills, will be spent on energy which is neither clean nor low-carbon in the coming years.<sup>2</sup>

In 2017, biomass-burning power stations received around £1 billion in renewable subsidies, more than £38 per household on average, and the annual figure is set to rise. Last year, £797 million was granted as part of the Renewable Obligation, with the rest coming from a Contract for Difference for Drax.<sup>3</sup>

It has been shown that biomass burning accelerates climate change<sup>4</sup>, damages forests and biodiversity<sup>5</sup> and pollutes communities in source countries and at home.<sup>6</sup>

As elected representatives of our communities, we the undersigned believe we have a responsibility to act on climate change and to ensure that the UK can meet our international climate commitments to keep global temperature rises to 1.5C. **In the light of the recent UN IPCC report, it is vital that we urgently halt deforestation and phase out fossil fuels in order to prevent irreversible climate change.**<sup>7</sup>

In January 2018, 800 scientists set out the climate impacts of burning forest wood in an Open Letter: *“Even if forests are allowed to regrow, using wood deliberately harvested for burning will increase carbon in the atmosphere and warming for decades to centuries – as many studies have shown – even when wood replaces coal, oil or natural gas. The reasons are fundamental and occur regardless of whether forest management is “sustainable.”*<sup>8</sup>

Subsidies granted under the Renewable Obligation Certificates or ROCs, can be easily removed through 'secondary legislation'. This would free up hundreds of millions a year which, under the Levy Control Framework, must then be spent on genuinely low-carbon, clean renewables.

**Therefore, we urge the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to:**

- a. Initiate proceedings to remove subsidy already granted for biomass under the Renewable Obligation Scheme;**
- b. Ensure that the money saved is used to increase support for wind, solar and wave/tidal power under the Levy Control Framework. Furthermore, subsidies for energy efficiency and conservation should also be increased.**

Yours faithfully,  
[The undersigned]

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/736640/Consultation\\_document.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/736640/Consultation_document.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Biomass emits more carbon when burned, per unit of energy generated, than coal. This is because wood is less efficient than coal. In 2017 Drax power station emitted 11.8m tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> from burning biomass greater than the Committee on Climate Change's recommended total annual carbon reduction for the whole of the UK (10m tonnes) However, due to an error in international carbon accounting, **this carbon is zero-counted**. See Fixing a Critical Climate Accounting Error, Timothy Searchinger et al, October 2009 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19900885>. Also disregarded are soil emissions from logging, emissions from biomass used in processing e.g drying the pellets and the 'foregone sequestration' i.e the carbon that remains in the atmosphere because the forest is no longer there to draw it down.

<sup>3</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wcDkAORvDIxe4d-HwiQep3KjWsjOETKibjwD3HD8pAU/edit#>  
[http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/subsidies\\_briefing\\_update.compressed.pdf](http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/subsidies_briefing_update.compressed.pdf)  
<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/axedrax-campaign/#>

<sup>4</sup>According to a statement signed by 40 scientists in response to the IPCC report: "*The "natural technology" of forests is currently the only proven means of removing and storing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> at a scale that can meaningfully contribute to achieving carbon balance. [...] In responding to the IPCC report, our message as scientists is simple: Our planet's future climate is inextricably tied to the future of its forests.*" <http://www.climateandlandusealliance.org/scientists-statement/>  
[https://www.dropbox.com/s/l8sx5bl0h02x395/UPDATE%20800%20signatures\\_Scientist%20Letter%20on%20EU%20Forest%20Biomass.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/l8sx5bl0h02x395/UPDATE%20800%20signatures_Scientist%20Letter%20on%20EU%20Forest%20Biomass.pdf?dl=0)

Scientific reports: <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/resources-on-biomass/>

<sup>5</sup>This is in direct contravention of our obligation to 'protect carbon sinks and forests' under the Paris Agreement and to cease subsidy that damages biodiversity under the Aichi Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The majority of UK biomass comes from clear-felling of carbon-rich, wetland forests in the southern US in a recently designated Global Biodiversity Hotspot.

<https://www.cepf.net/stories/announcing-worlds-36th-biodiversity-hotspot-north-american-coastal-plain>

Evidence of clear-felling:

[https://www.dogwoodalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NRDC\\_2014-2017Booklet\\_DigitalVersion-resize.pdf](https://www.dogwoodalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NRDC_2014-2017Booklet_DigitalVersion-resize.pdf)

And resultant biodiversity loss:

[https://www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/publications/Biomass\\_Biodiversity\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/publications/Biomass_Biodiversity_white_paper.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Wood dust and particulates from burning biomass are both extremely damaging to human health with no safe level for the smaller particles, which can pass into the blood stream and lodge in intercellular spaces,

<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2014/biomass-aq-briefing/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15\\_chapter2.pdf](http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_chapter2.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.dropbox.com/s/l8sx5bl0h02x395/UPDATE%20800%20signatures\\_Scientist%20Letter%20on%20EU%20Forest%20Biomass.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/l8sx5bl0h02x395/UPDATE%20800%20signatures_Scientist%20Letter%20on%20EU%20Forest%20Biomass.pdf?dl=0)