

Joint press release by: Biofuelwatch, London Mining Network, Friends of the Earth, Colombia Solidarity Campaign & Coal Action Network. For immediate use Monday 16th December 2013.

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Coal and biomass campaigners hit out at DECC “greenwash” over Drax conversion

Campaigners representing groups working on issues of opencast coal and biomass have jointly called on DECC today to end subsidies and industry support for Drax Power Station. The statement follows an announcement by DECC and Drax Plc claiming that “*Britain’s largest coal-fired power station is set to become one of Europe’s biggest renewable electricity generators, with the potential for new future generation on the site to be based on truly clean coal.*” [1]

The impacts of large-scale biomass for electricity are being felt in North and South America where most wood imports to the UK originate. In the southern US for example, ancient wetland forests are being destroyed by Drax pellet supplier Enviva. [2] Similarly, most coal burned in the UK is imported from abroad. In Colombia, the British-owned Cerrejón mine has caused long-lasting conflicts with local communities and resulted in unprecedented environmental destruction. [3]

The DECC announcement has been described as “misleading greenwash” by groups working on issues of opencast coal mining and bioenergy. Oliver Munnion from Biofuelwatch said: “*What DECC aren’t telling the public is that Drax’s half conversion to biomass, as well as being responsible for trashing ancient forests in the southern US, will extend the life of the other half of the power station which will continue to be fed on coal mined in Colombia, Russia and the UK. If Ed Davey thinks that a combination of deforestation and continued coal use qualifies as renewable energy then he is badly mistaken.*”

When fully operational, Drax’s biomass conversions will be eligible for an estimated £726 million in subsidies each year – more than the total cost of the conversion. [4] On top of this, Drax has been awarded a £50 million loan from the Green Investment Bank and a £75 million public loan guarantee. Drax’s experimental carbon capture project has also been given millions in Government support. [5] If all plans are realised, Drax will be burning 16 million tonnes of wood and 5.5 million tonnes of coal each year, long into the future.

Richard Solly, co-ordinator of the London Mining Network said: “*Colombian coal is the fruit of terrible injustices, yet Drax will now be allowed to keep burning it for years to come instead of closing the power station. The suggestion that this coal could ever be “truly clean” is a slap in the face for communities who have been forcibly evicted, partly to feed power stations in the UK, and to the communities currently under threat of eviction from expansion of the Cerrejón mine.*”

Kenneth Richter, Friends of the Earth’s biofuels campaigner said: “*Far from being a green form of energy the burning of trees for electricity can result in even higher climate emissions than fossil fuels and poses a threat to the world’s forests. Keeping dirty, outdated coal-fired power stations alive by now adding trees in the furnace is the worst possible outcome for the environment.*”

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Notes:

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cleaner-greener-future-for-british-coal-plants>

[2] The global impacts of the UK's growing biomass for electricity industry are documented in Biofuelwatch's new report *Biomass: the Chain of Destruction*.
<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2013/chain-of-destruction/>

[3] <http://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk/events/26-upcoming-events/594-el-cerrejon-mine-in-colombia-attacks-communities-ino-pasaran>

[4] <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/Oad6bb22-5ea8-11e3-8621-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2n4gGkEA2>
Article states: "Mr Vetter calculates that Drax's three converted units could be getting £726m a year in subsidies after 2016. Drax declines to comment." Mr Vetter is "Roland Vetter, chief analyst at energy investment firm CF Partners"

[5] The CCS project only includes the new White Rose development and there are currently no plans to introduce CCS technology to the existing power station.