

Early Day Motion 1771, tabled 29 October 2018

SUBSIDIES FOR ELECTRICITY GENERATED FROM BIOMASS

That this House expresses its concern that renewable energy subsidies for electricity generated from biomass, most of which is generated using imported wood pellets, are resulting in energy bill-payers paying for expensive, high-carbon electricity¹; notes that burning wood to generate electricity is a high-carbon power source²; notes that biomass damages forests and biodiversity³, pollutes communities⁴ in source countries and and at the point of generation and worsens climate change⁵; notes the recent warning by the IPCC⁶ that substantial progress on comprehensive decarbonisation of the economy must be made in just a dozen years if we are to avoid catastrophic damage to the climate; notes that more than £1 billion in biomass subsidies were paid out in 2017 amounting to more than £38 per household on average⁷; believes that government should follow the logic of its recent decision effectively to end new subsidy for large-scale import-dependent biomass under Contracts for Difference⁸ and should remove subsidy already granted for biomass under the Renewable Obligation (ROCs) scheme⁹; and further calls on the Government to instead direct funding towards renewable, low-carbon electricity sources including solar and wind.

See Briefing for MPs at <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2018/biomass-subsidies-mp-briefing/>

¹ 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 CO₂ 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 <https://www.pfpi.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Searchinger-et-al-2009.pdf>. Also disregarded are soil emissions from logging and land-use change, emissions from biomass used in processing eg drying the pellets and the 'foregone sequestration' ie the carbon that remains in the atmosphere because the forest is no longer there to draw it down. Result – climate impacts at least as great as from coal.

² 800 scientists recently wrote an open letter to the EU Parliament warning that biomass is high-carbon: *'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."*

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/>

³ 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

And resultant biodiversity loss:

https://www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/publications/Biomass_Biodiversity_white_paper.pdf

⁴ 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 bloodstream and lodge in intercellular spaces,

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

⁵ See note 1

⁶ IPCC 1.5 degree report, summary for policy-makers http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf

⁷ See <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wcDkAORvDIxe4d-wiQep3KjWsjOETKlBjwD3HD8pAU/edit#>

⁸ <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2018/cfd-press-release/>

⁹ See our fully referenced briefing: http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/subsidies_briefing_update.compressed.pdf and

<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/axedrax-campaign/#>