

Biofuelwatch Press Release:

Campaigners Denounce Subsidies for Bioenergy as Environmental Crime

For immediate release

25 July 2012

The Government today announced it would continue to heavily subsidise biomass as 'renewable energy' through 'Renewable Obligation Certificates' as part of its review on Renewable Energy (1). This is in spite of calls from top scientists including the European Environment Agency's Scientific Committee (2) that burning biomass on a large scale may worsen global warming, and in spite of growing evidence that the sourcing of biomass from overseas is leading to ecosystems destruction including the burning of trees cut for the purpose, and land grabbing for new monoculture plantations.

Campaigners warn that the ROCs banding on biomass is being used to push for greater amounts of biomass to be burned in fossil fuel power stations. They say that this will continue to see coal-fired power stations such as Tilbury and Ironbridge remain open when they should instead be decommissioned.

Emilia Hanna, Bioenergy campaigner at Biofuelwatch (3) said, 'Subsidising bioenergy in the name of renewable energy is the ultimate human rights and environmental crime. The Government assumes that burning biomass reduces carbon dioxide emissions, which is simply not the case. By giving the industry heavy financial backing, we will now see a rush of planning applications for new biomass power stations. This will mean more deforestation, more carbon emissions, and land grabbing overseas.'

'The overwhelming majority of consultation responses on ROCs for biomass raised concerns over land grabbing, increased carbon emissions, deforestation, and the inability of the UK Government's so-called 'sustainability' criteria to deal with these problems. Yet the Government has once again shown itself to be in the pockets of Big Industry.'

Liquid biofuels, commonly known as 'agrofuels' which allow for the burning of cheap palm oil as electricity, will also continue to be subsidised. Although a 'cap' will apply to the amount of bioliquids that can be burned, campaigners warn that cap would allow for a five-fold increase in the amount of palm oil used for biofuels in the UK today.

Andrew Butler, activist with civil society group Bioenergy Action (4), said, 'the cap on agrofuels is set catastrophically high. It would allow for around four large scale power stations to run on palm oil, burning over 350,000 tonnes of liquid fuel per year. This could mean more ecosystems destruction and land grabbing in South East Asia. It gives the financial backing to around five 50 MW bioliquids power stations across the UK. It could see the controversial plans for two power stations by W4B in Portland and Bristol back on the agenda. The British public has been betrayed, but we are just more determined to fight against industrial bioenergy.'

ENDS

PHOTO: Protesters hang a banner against biomass subsidies across the Mall. 23 October 2011. Courtesy of You and I Films.



Contacts:

Emilia Hanna (Biofuelwatch): 07595768349

Notes:

- (1) The Government response to the consultation on proposals for the levels of banded support under the Renewables Obligation for the period 2013-17 and the Renewables Obligation Order 2012 is available at <http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/consultation/ro-banding/5936-renewables-obligation-consultation-the-government.pdf>.
- (2) The European Environment Agency's Opinion of September 2012 found that 'legislation that encourages substitution of fossil fuels by bioenergy, irrespective of the biomass source, may even result in increased carbon emissions – thereby accelerating global warming.' The report can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/cfgfyzk>
- (3) Biofuelwatch is a civil society organisation which campaigns to raise awareness about the human rights and environmental consequences of industrial bioenergy. www.biofuelwatch.org.uk
- (4) Bioenergy Action is a portal for actions, alerts and news about the growing opposition to industrial biofuel and biomass power stations in the UK. <http://www.facebook.com/bioenergyaction/info>