

BIOFUELWATCH MEDIA ADVISORY: FOR IMMEDIATE USE

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Corporate lobby group Back Biomass publishes misleading claims about impacts of big biomass

A corporate lobby group backed by large energy companies including Drax, Eggborough, E.On, RWE and large North American exporters of pellets to the UK, has published misleading claims in response to new evidence highlighting the global impacts of the UK's biomass for electricity industry. [1] The report published by Biofuelwatch, *Biomass: The Chain of Destruction*, [2] provides evidence of the impacts that UK investment in large-scale biomass electricity is having on forests and communities in the southern US, Brazil and elsewhere around the world. It also puts forward evidence to show that there are serious impacts on communities affected by power station emissions, from burning wood in the UK.

The report includes evidence collated by the US conservation NGO, Dogwood Alliance, together with the NRDC (Natural Resources Defence Council), which shows that Back Biomass member Enviva has been producing pellets from the clearcutting of highly biodiverse and carbon rich ancient wetland forests in North Carolina for export to the UK. Drax and E.On, also Back Biomass members, are Enviva customers. The report further shows that a UK company's agreement to purchase pellets from eucalyptus plantations in the Brazilian state of Maranhão is linked to land-grabbing, the clearing of biodiverse savannah forests and the contamination of rivers and other freshwater reserves.

Biofuelwatch Co-Director Almuth Ernsting said: *"Back Biomass claims that our report ignores "Sustainability Criteria", but no such criteria have been introduced and their introduction has so far been delayed to April 2014. On top of this, the proposed Sustainability Criteria are meaningless - virtually all of the carbon emissions which scientists have shown to be associated with biomass electricity will be ignored. All other criteria can be met through voluntary certification schemes."*

Enviva, the company linked to wetland forest destruction, is certified by the widely criticised Sustainable Forestry Initiative. Consequently, all of their pellets will pass the proposed Sustainability Standards, including those derived from the clearcutting of ancient forests.

In Brazil, destructive and even illegal eucalyptus plantations similar to those established for pellet production in Maranhão, have been certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. Under proposed standards all of this wood will be rubber-stamped as 'sustainable'. [3]

Oliver Munnion, Biofuelwatch Campaigner said: *"Far from regulating the sustainability of new biomass power stations, the government has prohibited planning authorities and the Environment Agency from taking it into account. These criteria are merely a smokescreen for the industry to hide behind."* [4]

Back Biomass also disagree that government subsidies for biomass electricity are generous. Under current rules, Drax will be eligible for nearly £600 million a year until at least 2027 if they convert half of their capacity to biomass, as they intend. The power station for which the agreement for Brazilian eucalyptus pellets was signed will be eligible for around £150 million a year. [5] This for a technology which Back Biomass describes as relatively cheap and quick to build.

Notes:

[1] <http://www.backbiomass.co.uk/newsroom-story.php?id=326>

[2] <http://biofuelwatch.org.uk/2013/chain-of-destruction/>

[3] http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2012/biomass_myth_report/

[4] Planners are not allowed to consider the sustainability of a proposed biomass power station except by including a condition that, if the widely criticised proposed biomass sustainability are introduced, those must be met. This was a decision set out in the Secretary of State's planning consent for a biofuel power station by W4B Renewable Energy at Avonmouth, following the company's appeal against Bristol City Council's rejection of the application.

[5] This power stations is MGT Power's consented 299 MW Teeside biomass plant in Middlesbrough.