

Biofuelwatch April & May Newsletter

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Dear subscriber, this is the April & May edition of our UK newsletter, with details of recent news from bioenergy campaigns. April was a busy month with three protests against big biomass in England. Please let us know if you would like more information about particular campaign issues/news or if you'd like to find out about getting involved in any relevant campaigns.



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1. Upcoming events in London

Reel News released their **Biomass Emergency Film** last week. They will be showing it again this **Thursday, 15th April** at 7.30 pm in the Grosvenor Pub, 17 Sydney Road SW9 0TP. Please help to spread the word about this event via

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in touch with us if you are interested in a copy “ and also if you’d like to show it at a local event and might like one of us to come along for questions and answers afterwards.

On **2nd June**, from 5-8pm, several organisations are organising the **2nd Forum on Natural Commons**, opposing biodiversity offsets which are heavily promoted by the UK government both in this country and worldwide. In the UK, Biodiversity Offsets are being introduced into the planning system to allow developers to justify destroying precious ecosystems and habitat by financing an “offset”. For example, this could involve planting lots of trees somewhere else to “offset” cutting down biodiverse ancient forests for, say, a housing development, road or power station. Internationally, biodiversity offsets and similar schemes are making it easier for corporations to destroy nature by funding supposed conservation projects elsewhere and then claiming that there has been no “net loss” of biodiversity. You can find out more about the event at <http://naturenotforsale.org/>.





2. April Protests Roundup

Biomess Awards

On 9th April 40 campaigners gathered to award wooden spoons of shame in ascending sizes to the Biggest Biomass Baddies, the winners of our Biomess Awards. The ceremony took place at a European Biomass industry conference Gala Dinner, where the industry was giving itself awards for ‘sustainability’. Rhythms of Resistance kicked off the protest in highly audible samba fashion. At the last minute, conference organisers ran scared of our protest and moved their Gala Dinner to a different venue. Luckily, we found out just in time and made sure their night was not a quiet one!

The biggest wooden spoon was awarded to DECC for their disregard for scientific evidence on the impacts of big biomass and for kick-starting the industry with offers of lucrative subsidies for this dangerous false solution. In second place were Drax, arch-greenwashers and lobbyist for the biomass industry. Drax power station now burns more coal and more biomass than any other plant in the UK. The third biggest wooden spoon went to the UK Green Investment Bank who have invested more in biomass to date than in any other technology. They claim that 91% of their carbon savings for their first reported year came from a loan to Drax to convert to biomass, which actually saved them from having to close altogether.

Runners-up were the Renewable Energy Association with their Back Biomass campaign; Enviva, a major

cutting old growth wetland forest in the southern US; and finally the Canadian Wood Pellet Association, who have been lobbying heavily for EU/UK subsidies for pellets sourced from clearcut oldgrowth forests.

See full press release and photos [here](#).

Drax AGM

On 23rd April, more protesters gathered outside the Drax AGM in the heart of the city of London. Investors going in were offered a [Warning to Investors](#) and a [leaflet](#) explaining why big biomass is a false solution.

Three protesters attended the AGM as proxy voters and asked questions about biomass sourcing, Drax's refusal to acknowledge the science around carbon impacts of burning biomass and the changing political climate around biomass subsidies. At the end of the questions they disrupted the meeting by reading a prepared statement and asking the Board to accept their large wooden spoon of shame from the Biomess Awards. They were ejected from the meeting.

Outside, protesters were shouting slogans, holding banners, leafleting and interacting with passers-by. The disrupters later reported what had happened inside the AGM to the demonstration outside, and this was followed by speakers from the London Mining Network on the implications of the extended coal burning life of Drax and Econexus air quality implications of burning biomass. The demo ended with a rousing version of I'm a Lumberjack and I'm OK adapted especially in dishonour of Drax.

The protest was mentioned in the Guardian and the Financial Times as well as in articles in the Ecologist and Red Pepper.

Bristol's Big Bike Bash against Big Biomass at Avonmouth

On Saturday 12th April Avon Coalition Against Big Biofuels organised a Big Bike Bash to protest at plans

bikes and mostly wearing red trousers gathered at the Lloyds amphitheatre in the centre of Bristol. Molly Scott Cato, South West Green Party candidate for the European Parliament explained why big biomass is bad and wholly inappropriate for a city that will be European Green Capital in 2015. Pictures can be found [here](#).

Bristol's Independent elected Mayor George Ferguson, who wears red trousers, came out strongly against the planned Helius Biomass power station at a Mayor's question-time in late March. He has also written a strongly argued [letter](#) to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, objecting to a subsidy offered under the UK Guarantee Scheme where public money is pledged to guarantee private loans to private developers of key infrastructure projects. Bristol MPs, urged by their constituents, have also objected. Protesters called on the Mayor to be resolute and unequivocal in representing Bristol's complete opposition to these power stations.

The Big Bike Bash then proceeded via RBS â€“ the only potential investor other than the Green Investment Bank and the Treasury mentioned in Helius' recent financial statement â€“ to Avonmouth where they met local residents in Avonmouth Park.

The Big Bike Bash got coverage on BBC 'Points West' and in the Bristol Evening Post. The campaign continues, meeting every two weeks on Monday evenings to plan the campaign. A Campaign Strategy meeting will take place at 2pm on Saturday 24th May, venue tbc.

The Avon Coalition Against Big Biofuels is also holding a public meeting at Shirehampton, near Avonmouth, on Monday 9th June and a Big Green Week [event](#) titled 'Whatâ€™s wrong with Big Biomass at Avonmouth' on Friday 20th June 7-8:00pm. Email info@avoncoalitionagainstbigbiofuels.org.uk to get involved.



3. Contracts for Difference subsidy announcements support biomass generation growth

On 23rd April, DECC announced their first long-term subsidies guarantees under the new subsidy regime for renewable electricity, called Contracts for Difference. To find out more about what Contracts for Difference are please see our background briefing:

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

In this first round, DECC announced support for just two technology types: Big biomass and offshore wind. So far, DECC have guaranteed Contracts for Difference subsidies for burning 11.8 million more tonnes of wood a year for electricity, i.e. more than the UK's entire annual wood production (and that's just additional biomass burning on top of all that's already subsidised. Winners in this round were:

- MGT Power for a huge new biomass power station planned and already consented at Teesport;
- RWE for the proposed conversion of Lynemouth coal power station in Northumberland to biomass;
- Drax, for converting a second unit to biomass. Although they didn't get a guarantee for converting a third unit this round, that sadly doesn't mean that they won't get in the next one. Drax, who are used to getting everything they ask for from the Government, were not happy that they didn't get subsidy guarantees for their third unit conversion right away – they are now suing DECC, despite all the largesse DECC has shown them so far! For more on this see [here](#).

4. IPCC working group on Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change criticised for greenwashing false solutions, including Biomass with Carbon Capture and Storage

The IPCC published the third part of its 5th Report on 13th April. The first and second parts focussed on the science and the impacts of climate change and were put together by working groups that were dominated by climate scientists, ecologist and others with a high level of scientific expertise. The third working group, the one on Mitigation Adaptation, however, is dominated by economists, engineers and environmental managers. This Working Group 3 report uncritically classed a large range of contentious and dangerous technologies as “low-carbon”™ mitigation options, which was disappointing but not surprising given the professional backgrounds of the co-leads. Together with ten other organisations and networks worldwide we issued a press release denouncing the IPCC’s™ support for false solutions. These range from biomass with carbon capture and storage to nuclear power to waste incineration:

<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2014/ipccwg3-joint-pr/>.

Here is an article about the IPCC’s™ position on Biomass with Carbon Capture and Storage by Rachel Smolker from Biofuelwatch: <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/23228-ipcc-report-leaves-hopes-hanging-on-fantasy-technology> .

5. Concerns about Genetically Engineered poplar trees

A [recent paper](#) published in Science detailed a new method for engineering poplar trees to be more easily “deconstructed” for use in production of biofuels and pulp. The researchers, from University of British

Research Center. The engineered trait involved altering the structure of lignin, the compound that confers structural strength to wood, but also interferes with accessing carbohydrates necessary for biofuel and pulp applications. Biofuelwatch, along with The Campaign to Stop GE Trees, Center for Food Safety and Canadian Biotechnology Action Network issued a [press release](#) expressing serious concerns with the engineering of poplar lignin. They pointed out the potential for contamination of wild poplar species, of which there are at least 30 throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Contamination with a trait that affects the structural integrity of wood could be especially devastating, and once it occurs it would be irreversible. Rachel Smolker, (Biofuelwatch US) pointed out that while *“there is no question we must end our fossil fuel addiction, pretending we can simply substitute living plants is horribly misguided. We need to protect and restore forests while drastically reducing overconsumption.”*

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