

Biofuelwatch Newsletter September 2015

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Dear subscriber, this is the September edition of our newsletter, with news of our campaigns, the campaigns we support, and important policy developments.



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Demonstration against the World Forestry Congress in Durban



A clearcut forest a few miles from Drax's newly opened pellet mill in Mississippi. *Photo: Dogwood Alliance*

1. Why lobbying your MP is so important – and how you can help

Thanks to everybody who has taken part in our alert and called on their MP to help stop subsidies for biomass electricity: <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2015/mp-lobby/>.

Since we first sent out this alert, we were contacted by Terrie Moffitt who has first-hand experience of the forest destruction caused by Drax (and thus by the public subsidies they receive), which we would like to share with everybody:

I would like to share my experience of the end results of the government subsidies being paid to power plants like Drax, who burn biofuels in the UK...

I live half of each year in South London where I am a professor at King's College London, and I spend half of each year in North Carolina, where I have a 300-acre farm that has been in my family for many generations since the area was settled in the 1700s. I am watching all the trees in the area around my farm clear cut by loggers. What happens is that logging companies use Google Earth to identify stands of hardwood trees. They actually identify individual ancient oak trees. They send the land owner or farmer a tempting letter saying just let us cut your trees and we will give you instant dollars. Local farmers are unaware that the entire southern United States is being stripped of old growth hardwood trees, one patch at a time. The property owner could use a spot of cash, and they think a few acres of trees won't matter much, so they sell their woods. This is not harvesting of commercially planted pine plantations; it is clear-cutting of old deciduous forests. Hundreds of enormous 300-year-old oak trees are being hauled off to be ground up at the pellet factory located at the coastal port at Wilmington, North Carolina. In the county around our farm, over half of the woods have already been clear-cut. No new trees have been planted, and there is no policy to plant them. The loggers ignore the requirement of a 60-foot riparian border along streams and rivers, and I am seeing them cut trees off the river banks. Our local small roads are full of logging trucks. As a result of this rapacious logging, the wildlife such as black bears, deer, foxes, raccoons, wild turkeys, otters, squirrels, and beavers are crowding into smaller and smaller patches of bush. I can see wild animals in my fields and woods almost daily now. While they are lovely to watch, their population should not be so dense that I can view them so easily. I am concerned about how they will find food in the winter months, which are coming soon. The UK subsidy for burning biofuels has created an enormous appetite for hardwood trees in companies like Drax. This appetite has literally destroyed what was only five years ago one of the most beautiful rural areas of North America. As a UK taxpayer, I disagree with the subsidy, and I am sure other UK tax payers would be appalled if they understood. Help us here in North Carolina. Please write to your MP. Terrie Moffitt".

If you haven't yet contacted your MP, there is still time to do so. If you have already written to your MP, then it would be great if you could forward us (biofuelwatch@ymail.com) his or her reply. We can suggest points to make in a

time, visiting your MP's surgery and raising this important issue there can be particularly effective.

2. Biofuelwatch is recruiting: New part-time UK post for a Bioenergy Campaigner

Biofuelwatch is looking for a part-time Bioenergy Campaigner to help us build our campaign against biomass power stations – and for the closure of Drax power station through ending their generous public subsidies.

If you are interested in this post, live in the UK and have experience in campaigning, ideally related to environmental justice, then please go to <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/bioenergy-campaigner/> to download the job description and person specification, and the application form. The deadline is Monday, 5th October, 12 noon.

3. Bioenergy Out: Joint briefing shows why bioenergy must not be included in the next EU Renewable Energy Directive

A [joint briefing](#) by NOAH (Friends of the Earth Denmark), Biofuelwatch, Econexus, Global Forest Coalition, World Rainforest Movement, Rettet den Regenwald e.V./Rainforest Rescue, and Corporate Europe Observatory summarises the harm done by the inclusion of biofuels and wood-based bioenergy in renewable energy policies and thereby subsidy regimes across the EU. The groups are calling for bioenergy to be excluded from the 2020-30 EU Renewable Energy Directive, and for energy and climate policies that genuinely benefit the climate, people and environment. These policies must emphasise the need for social and economic changes to limit demand for energy.



4. Plantations are not Forests: Civil Society groups hold alternative programme in protest at World Forestry Congress in Durban

From, 7th to 11th September, the World Forestry Congress (WFC) was held in Durban. The WFC is convened every six years by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. It has long been criticised by civil society groups and social movements for promoting the interests of the timber industry while ignoring the voices of forest-dependent and other communities who bear the brunt of the negative impacts of industrial tree plantations and industrial logging.

This year, South African campaigners organised a [Civil Society Alternative Programme](#) which we were pleased to be able to attend.

The Civil Society Alternative Programme brought together forest and other environmental justice campaigners from around the world, as well as many members of South African communities affected by monoculture tree plantations. Members of affected communities told of tree plantations drying up people's sources of water, of plantations being expanded on land needed by local people to grow food and to herd cattle, and of plantation companies destroying grasslands that are home to over 4,000 different species. Many told of the terrible conditions in settlements established by plantation companies at remote tree plantation locations " where people live at constant risk of eviction, companies fail to maintain families' houses, infrastructure is lacking or falling apart, healthcare is inaccessible to those without transport to the nearest town, and where there are increasingly fewer jobs as plantation companies increasingly mechanise their work.

Thousands participated in a [demonstration at the World Forestry Congress](#), including pupils from 30 high schools from South Durban, an area heavily affected by industrial pollution and resultant ill health, including from a pulp mill. Rettet den Regenwald/Rainforest Rescue handed over a [petition](#) signed by over 110,000 people worldwide, calling on the Food and Agriculture and the WFC to stop classing industrial tree plantations as forests.



5. Drax exploits hype about "bioenergy with carbon capture and storage" in subsidies quest for new coal power station

You couldn't make it up: Drax is planning to build the UK's first new coal power station since 1972, and it won't even have to capture much if any of the CO₂ emitted by it. And, now it's claiming this coal power station will be "carbon negative"!

"Carbon negative" is one of the buzzwords around the forthcoming UN Climate Conference in Paris. It's been hyped by fossil fuel companies and the policymakers keen to appease them ever since (and in fact before) last year's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report claimed that we're likely to need Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) if we want to keep global warming to within 2°C, and especially if we don't want to harm "the economy" by mitigating climate change.

This (albeit cautious and qualified) IPCC endorsement of BECCS seems bizarre:

BECCS is technically unproven; it's economically unviable and likely to remain so. No government or company has been willing to pay for even one single BECCS demonstration power plant. And if anyone ever tried to sequester one billion tonnes of carbon a year with BECCS, they'd need fertile land up to three times the size of India for bioenergy plantations, as well as vast amounts of water and agro-chemicals. But that hasn't stopped the hype about BECCS being endorsed by industry and policymakers alike – including by Shell's Climate Change Advisor, who claims it can allow fossil fuel burning until the end of the century. Rather than a real prospect, it's a welcome fig-leaf for those with a vested interest in continuing business as usual.

has managed to convince the [New Scientist](#) to call it the world's first (planned) carbon-negative BECCS power station. In fact, Drax's own planning documents don't contain any such claim. They admit that there will be net carbon emissions – something the New Scientist's reporter failed to spot. Drax aren't the only ones exploiting the hype about "carbon negative energy" and BECCS to promote dirty energy schemes. "Carbon negative" claims are even popping up in planning applications for waste incinerators (apparently the ash or char can make them "carbon negative"). But the White Rose, without doubt, is the largest dirty energy project for which this hype is being exploited.

For more details, see an [article by Oliver Munnion from Biofuelwatch published by OpenDemocracy](#) (which preceded the New Scientist's article).

6. Dogwood Alliance find out more about where Drax is getting wood from – and it's not pretty

Back in December 2014, Dogwood Alliance followed logging trucks to Enviva's Ahoskie pellet mill in North Carolina, one that supplies Drax. They took photos of whole logs from clearcut wetland forests being trucked to the pellet mill, showing conclusively that whole trees from clearcut wetland forests are being turned into pellets and exported to Drax.

This summer, Dogwood Alliance campaigners went to visit Drax's own newly opened pellet mill in Mississippi, as well as a pellet plant in Florida which was recently acquired by Enviva.

In [Mississippi](#) they saw truck after truck of whole pine logs going to Drax's plant. They reflected:

It is hard to describe to someone who has not witnessed it themselves the pain of seeing trees grown in plantations. Orderly rows as far as they eye can see like a cornfield, regular spraying of fertilizers and herbicides, and plantations are so quiet because they're almost devoid of wildlife.

In [Florida](#), they watched small young trees being taken to be pelletised for burning by Drax (Enviva's main customer):

The striking difference between this facility and the Drax facility in Mississippi was that these trees were all tiny, meaning they were cut down at an incredibly young age. So much for allowing forests to grow back for the 40+ years needed to soak back all of the carbon lost from burning them.

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Clearcut bottomland hardwood forest in North Carolina, close to a pellet mill supplying Drax; *Photo: Dogwood Alliance*

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