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Dear subscriber, this is the December edition of our newsletter, with a report back from our participation in the Paris COP, details of new biomass power station plans in Wales, a new alert, and news from our campaigns.

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Interested in hosting a talk about the impacts of biomass power stations, biofuels or large-scale bioenergy in general? Please contact us and we will try and get a speaker.

You can also [make a donation](#), and get in contact with us [here](#).



1. Biofuelwatch report back from Paris COP21

At long last, an international agreement on climate change has been struck, where countries will be forced to take action to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Good news, right? But whilst the Paris COP has done wonders for the public image of the politicians attending and the multinational companies sponsoring it, the conference was a big step backwards in terms of providing the world with a realistic chance of avoiding the worst impacts of climate chaos.

The [Indigenous Environmental Network](#) described the Paris deal as “œa trade agreement, nothing more. It promises to privatize, commodify and sell forested lands as carbon offsets in fraudulent schemes”œ, whilst [La Via Campesina](#) said that “œ...multinationals are the main beneficiaries. It was essentially a media circus. However, states know how to make binding commitments when it comes to signing free trade agreements...Once more, it is clear that money dictates the law, even taking precedence over the future of humanity.”œ

According to [the Guardian](#), just days



2. New biomass plants planned for Wales

If you live in Wales, particularly in Anglesey or Port Talbot, please [contact us](#) to discuss what we can do together to stop these new biomass power plants.

In October, plans were announced for two huge (299MWe) [new biomass plants in Wales](#), one in Port Talbot and one in Holyhead, Anglesey. They would both be Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plants, using some of the waste heat to farm seafood and grow vegetables “œ under UK rules, biomass power stations can be subsidised as CHP even if they are just 35% efficient and make use of a very small proportion of waste heat. Both would burn virgin wood.

According to media articles, the total cost is Â£2bn, with some of the money coming from Chinese company Sinofortone. The company behind the plants is Orthios Eco-Parks, run by Sean McCormick, an architect from Chester who appears to have no background in this kind of project.

These are not entirely new projects. Planning permissions for large, albeit not identical biomass power station

looked into the polices needed to hold global warming to 1.5C, and will instead ask a UN climate science panel for advice involving “negative emissions” technology. As we [described in a blog during the COP](#), these so-called negative emissions technologies, such as Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS), are pure wishful thinking “they were the Phantom of the COP Opera. The final version of the Paris agreement talks about achieving “a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases”. This is essentially a long-winded way of saying that “net zero” emissions can be achieved through “negative emissions” technologies, in combination with emissions reductions, and will allow countries to keep emitting greenhouse gases in the false hope that, one day, these technologies will miraculously suck the carbon back out of the atmosphere.

Despite the pessimism with which we regard the agreement, we valued our time in Paris greatly. Biofuelwatch participated both inside and outside the COP throughout the two weeks. We spoke at numerous events and workshops as part of the civil society mobilisations, including a workshop and film screening with the [Global Forest Coalition](#) and [Fern](#) at the People's Climate Summit, and a talk with [ETC Group](#) at the Climate Action Zone. We supported events organised by groups we work closely with, and participated in the [Climate Space](#), a

ago at both sites. Those permissions remain valid but it is not clear at this point whether or how far the new proposals (especially the one in Port Talbot) would be covered by the existing permissions.

Port Talbot

The Port Talbot project is a partnership with Associated British Ports. Planning permission for a biomass plant on this site was first given in 2007, to Prenergy Power. There was a huge local campaign against the project, with campaigners citing carbon emissions, fire risks from wood storage and air pollution as key concerns. Port Talbot is a heavily industrialised area, and has an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in the area where the new power station is planned because of the already poor air quality.

In September 2012, Prenergy applied for a change in planning permission to burn wood pellets as well as wood chips at the plant. Under pressure from local campaigners, Neath Port Talbot council deferred a decision, and Prenergy then withdrew the application. Prenergy went into liquidation in 2013.

Holyhead

Planning permission was granted to Anglesey Aluminium in 2011 for a 299 MWe biomass plant on the site. In February 2015, the company signed a deal with Lateral Eco Parks (another company owned by Sean McCormick, the director of Orthios Eco Parks) to buy the site. Orthios has stated that it

change, not climate changeâ€” banner.

Inside the COP negotiations, we teamed up with the Global Forest Coalition to disseminate our new [Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage report](#) and to do press work around it, as well as [GFC's new Biomyths report](#). We attended side events, briefings and press conferences, and through them tried to push alternative views on bioenergy and on carbon capture and storage, and counteract some of the greenwashing that energy companies and lobby groups were responsible for.

For a good round up of the failures of COP21, we invite you to read Nnimmo Bassey's article ["COP21 agreed to a climate changed world"](#).



3. Tell DECC: Stop Subsidising Forest Destruction!

The Department of Energy and Climate Change will be making decisions on the next round of subsidy (Contracts for Difference or CfD) awards for new renewable electricity projects sometime between now and the end of 2016, but possibly very shortly.

We need to act urgently to stop more subsidies being awarded to biomass

Last-ditch climate option, or wishful thinking?

Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage
A report by Biofuelwatch



4. Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS): new report

We have long been alarmed by the promotion of Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) as a way of mitigating climate change. BECCS would involve capturing CO₂ from biomass burning power plants or biofuel refineries and pumping it underground. BECCS forms part of the UK's Bioenergy Strategy and has been endorsed by different governments, institutions and energy companies (such as Shell) worldwide - although nobody is actually investing in it.

At the recent Climate Conference in Paris, many interest groups hyped the idea of BECCS as a last-ditch climate hope, i.e. as a way of scrubbing billions of tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere. And worryingly, the International Panel on Climate Change said in their latest report that most models rely on BECCS for keeping global warming within 2C. We therefore decided to research the science and debate around BECCS in detail and have now published the first

pollution – such as the two huge proposed power stations in Wales or another biomass unit at Drax.

If you haven't already done so, please [take part in the alert](#) – it only takes a minute.



5. 'Threatened forests' film premiere and public meeting

Over 70 people gathered at the Friends of the Earth offices in London on 17 November for the UK premiere of ['Threatened Forests'](#), a film showing the impacts of UK/EU biomass energy policies on the native forests of the southern US.

Speakers at the event included Danna Smith, Director, and Adam Macon, Campaign Director, both of Dogwood Alliance; Sami Yasser, chief scientist at Natural Resources Defence Council; and Duncan Law from Biofuelwatch.

The UK is pumping huge subsidies into burning biomass in power stations, even though the UK government's own analysis shows that burning biomass can be worse for greenhouse gas emissions than burning fossil fuels.

[Last-ditch climate option or wishful thinking: Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage](#)

The report examines whether large-scale carbon negative bioenergy could be possible in theory. It highlights serious flaws and omissions in the studies cited by the International Panel on Climate Change as 'evidence' of BECCS potentially being capable of sequestering large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. It then looks in detail at the different BECCS technologies that have been proposed.

The only (very small scale) BECCS projects that exist involve capturing some CO₂ from ethanol refining. Those projects can't possibly be called 'carbon negative' because the CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels burned to power the refinery are greater than the amount of CO₂ captured. In relation to carbon capture from power plants, we have carefully examined the experience with coal-fired Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) projects. Only one commercial-scale power station unit with CCS worldwide has been opened (in Canada) and that has been beset by serious problems and has never yet operated successfully. A flagship CCS coal power station which is currently being built with government subsidies in the US has seen its cost explode from \$1.8bn to \$6.4bn and counting. A biomass plant with CCS will be even costlier and technically more

destruction of carbon-rich and biodiverse forests in the US, which are clearcut to make wood pellets to be burnt in British power stations. It uses Drax power station in Yorkshire – the world's biggest biomass plant, which sources much of its wood fuel from the southern US – as an example. The filmmaker is not currently publicly available, but you can see the trailer [here](#).

6. Biofuelwatch reaction to recent coal phase out announcement

Amber Rudd's recent announcement that the government aims for a gradual replacement of coal power stations with ones burning gas, without any firm commitment on the timescale, has been condemned by environmental groups in the UK and US. Campaigners are also dismayed that Amber Rudd commits the Government to further curbing support for onshore wind and solar power, but not for biomass electricity, which is linked to high carbon emissions and forest destruction.

Read the [Biofuelwatch press release](#).

Clearly, BECCS is not technically and economically viable and there are no indications that this will change in the foreseeable future. Finally, the report looks at studies about carbon sequestration and finds that new evidence shows that the long-term fate of CO₂ pumped underground is far less certain than had been thought. And if carbon sequestration is combined with getting more oil out of the ground - widely promoted as a way to make CCS more affordable - then the overall greenhouse gas balance can be worse for the climate than not capturing the carbon at all.

Two articles discussing BECCS and the report:

[Techno-Optimism and Bad Science in Paris: The Problem with Carbon Capture and Storage](#). Almuth Ernsting, *Truthout*, 3 December 2015

[Climate Techno-fix: Weaving Carbon into Gold and other myths of "negative emissions"](#). Rachel Smolker, *Independent Science News*, 1 December 2015

7. Biofuelwatch funding appeal: can you help?

The UK is burning more imported wood pellets for electricity than any other country in the world. Many of those pellets come from the southern US, where [biodiverse native wetland forests are under threat](#) from the rush for biomass.

plant and animal species, some of them found nowhere else on the planet, are being clearcut at a rapid pace and pellets made from those clearcut forests are being burned by Drax power station in England. Yet Drax is on track to getting Â£1.8 million in subsidies every single day - paid by all of us via our electricity bills.

Biofuelwatch has been working hard to end this madness but we rely on support and funding to be able to do so.

Please consider [making a donation](#) to Biofuelwatch, to help us campaign against big biomass, and to push for subsidies to be granted instead to genuine low-carbon renewables.

Thank you very much!

[See here](#) to read about our work in **2015.**

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