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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR ENERGY

The Director-General

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By email: secretariat@easac.eu

Dear President,

Thank you for your letter of 8 January addressed to Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, who asked me to reply on his behalf. The EU is advancing towards its 2020 and 2030 energy and climate targets. It also continues to build an Energy Union with secure, affordable and climate-friendly energy. Used sustainably, energy from biomass – today the largest source of renewable energy in the EU – can make an important contribution to attain such goal.

At EU level, bioenergy is used mainly for heating production and it is sourced largely from domestic forest residues and wood waste, contributing to energy security, jobs and growth, particularly in rural areas. While imports of wood pellets from North America are projected to increase, solid biomass for heat and power will continue to be sourced largely from EU farm and forest land.

However, the benefits of bioenergy crucially depend on how the biomass is produced and used for energy, rather than on specific feedstock. For this reason, in its proposal for a revised directive promoting renewable energy in the period after 2020¹, the Commission has tabled a set of reinforced sustainability criteria in order to ensure robust carbon savings and to avoid environmental impacts.

More specifically, the Commission's proposal includes new binding criteria to minimize the risk of unsustainable woodfuel production and to ensure that carbon stocks of the forests supplying woodfuel are conserved. Please note that the amount of carbon stocked in European forests (so-called carbon sinks) is tending to decline, typically due to the increased age of our forests.

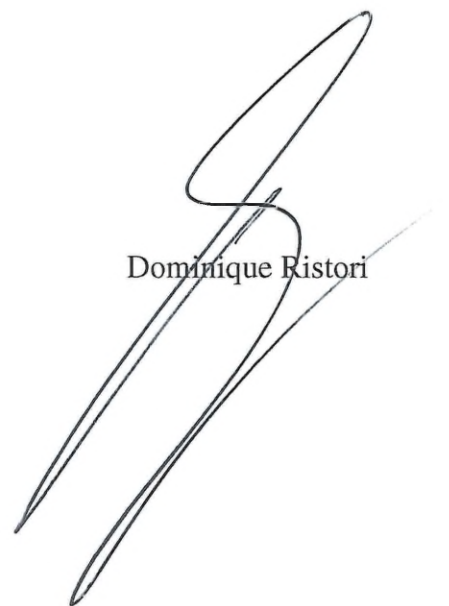
¹ COM/2016/0767

Furthermore, the proposal for a revised renewable energy directive requires that bioenergy for heat and power produces at least 80% fewer lifecycle GHG emissions, compared to fossil fuels. In order to promote greater resource efficiency, as of 2021, only bioelectricity generated through efficient combined heat and power technologies can be eligible for public support.

The sustainability criteria for bioenergy should not be seen in isolation, as they are complementary to other horizontal legislation. For instance, end of last year the EU agreed a new Regulation on Land use, Land use change and Forestry² - so-called LULUCF), which will ensure that emissions from forests and agriculture are correctly accounted under the EU's climate and energy policy as of 2021. Under the new rules, carbon removals (from forest growth) or emissions (from harvesting) resulting from woodfuel production are not only recorded but also accounted in respect of each Member State's 2030 climate target.

In a nutshell, bioenergy can be an important part of the energy mix, which will allow the EU and its Member States to meet cost-effectively its 2020 and 2030 energy and climate change goals. We are confident that the EU has tabled a comprehensive policy framework aimed at guaranteeing the sustainable development of bioenergy, while at the same time enhancing the role of land and forests as carbon sinks and incentivizing their productive and sustainable use.

Yours sincerely,



Dominique Ristori

² COM/2016/0479