

Press release by World Rainforest Movement and Biofuelwatch

Maranhão Brazil: Traditional communities' livelihoods and Cerrado biodiversity under threat in from Europe's bioenergy boom

- For Immediate Release -

6th November 2013 - A new report [1] reveals that Europe's growing demand for wood pellets for power stations is intensifying land-grabbing and the destruction of highly biodiverse Cerrado forests in the Brazilian state of Maranhão. The Brazilian pulp and paper company Suzano Papel e Celulose is developing eucalyptus plantations for wood pellet production in Maranhão's Baixo Parnaíba region, following a Memorandum of Understanding with UK biomass company MGT Power. The new wood pellet plantations are intensifying pressures on traditional communities who live in harmony with the highly biodiverse Cerrado ecosystem. These communities have been struggling for many years to have their rights to the land recognised and protected.

For more than two decades the lands and livelihoods of traditional communities as well as the region's biodiversity have been under growing pressure first from large landowners growing soya. More recently, from pulp and paper companies, in particular Suzano, have been bulldozing forests and farmlands to make way for monoculture eucalyptus plantations. In response to Europe's fast growing demand for wood pellet imports, Suzano has begun diversifying into wood pellet production and has converted even more land into monoculture eucalyptus plantations as a result [2]. Many communities have been actively resisting the destruction of their lands and forests, but Suzano has nonetheless succeeded in converting 30-40,000 hectares of land to eucalyptus in the region – an area greater than the County of London - both for wood pellet and for paper production.

Winfriidus Overbeek, Coordinator of the World Rainforest Movement and co-author of the case study explains: "Rich savannah forests are being bulldozed, communities are forced off their land and streams and rivers are being depleted and polluted in the name of green, renewable energy production in Europe. The EU's new boom in wood-based bioenergy is beginning to replicate the large-scale forest destruction and land-grabbing for EU biofuels, witnessed across the global South."

As the report shows, the sustainability standards which are being introduced in the UK [3] and proposed in the EU would do nothing to stop deforestation and land-grabbing in Maranhão because they would rely on voluntary forestry certification schemes such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Suzano has already obtained FSC certification for its equally destructive eucalyptus plantations in the southeast of Brazil and is on track for receiving it for its Maranhão plantations, too.

Almuth Ernsting, Co-Director of Biofuelwatch states: "The only way to prevent more land-grabbing and forest destruction for wood pellets is for the UK and other European governments to stop subsidising large-scale biomass electricity. As this case study and our wider report show, burning wood in power stations is the very opposite of green energy."

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[1] The Case study "Eucalyptus Plantatons for Energy : A Case Study of Suzano's plantations for wood pellet exports in the Baixo Parnaíba region, Maranhão, Brazil, by Ivonete Gonçalves de Souza (CEPEDES) and Winfridus Overbeek (World Rainforest Movement) forms part of the new report Biomass: the Chain of Destruction, published by Biofuelwatch:

www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2013/chain-of-destruction/

[2] In 2010, Suzano Papel e Celulose announced investment in large pellet mill in Maranhão. The pellet plant is not yet operational, however the company has been already been establishing large areas of eucalyptus plantations which planted so densely that they are only suitable for bioenergy, not for paper production.

[3] The UK Government has announced biomass sustainability standards to be introduced from April 2014. For a link and a Biofuelwatch critique of the standards, please see www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2013/deccs-revised-biomass-sustainability-criteria-are-misleading-and-meaningless/