

Biofuelwatch January Newsletter

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Dear subscriber, Happy New Year to you from all of us here at Biofuelwatch. This is the January edition of our monthly Biofuelwatch UK newsletter, with details of recent news from bioenergy campaigns. 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. If you are looking for news about biomass campaigning in the US, then please see <http://energyjustice.net/biomass/monitor>

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1. Sign the alert to say no to more subsidies for biomass electricity.

The UK Government is introducing new subsidies for energy classed as renewable, called 'Contracts for Difference'. Their subsidy rules and proposals are a major boost for power stations that burn large amounts of mainly imported wood.

Most of the UK's wood imports for power stations come from the southern US and British Columbia. In both regions, highly biodiverse and carbon-rich forests are being rapidly clearcut, a trend made worse by the new demand for wood pellets. Pellets sold to Drax, for example, have been directly linked to the destruction of ancient swamp-forests in North Carolina, one of the world's most diverse freshwater habitats. Yet the Government continues to ignore all of the mounting evidence that large-scale electricity from biomass is bad for the climate, for forests and for communities.

[Take Action](#) to Stop New Subsidies for Big Biomass



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give greater long-term incentives to burning millions of tonnes of wood in power stations than to onshore wind and solar PV, both of which have a fraction of the land and carbon footprint of big biomass. Now they are consulting on proposals to further advantage biomass “combined heat and power” (CHP) plants (and possibly coal-to-biomass conversions) as a “less established technology”, whereas onshore wind and solar PV will be considered “more established”.

While most people associate biomass CHP with small-scale, efficient district heating systems, this is not what’s being promoted here. The “CHP” plants which the subsidy rules favour are big, centralised power stations with just 35% efficiency (i.e. wasting almost two out of every three trees cut down entirely), which use a very minimum amount of heat, possibly even for drying their own pellets or woodchips. Three large and import-reliant power stations have already been approved as “CHP” with no credible plan for delivering heat whatsoever!

You can read the full briefing on the new Contracts for Difference scheme [here](#)

You can respond to the Government consultation by taking part in [this alert](#) before the 15th February.

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for every **3** trees fed into a biomass power station

2 are lost to the atmosphere

and **1** is turned into electricity

Coal-to-biomass conversions will operate at up to 37% efficiency while dedicated biomass plants operate at around 35%. The Government calls 35% efficiency "good quality CHP". These figures are just over 1/3 - meaning that for every 3 trees burned, only 1 is converted to electricity. This is old, inefficient and polluting technology. Not renewable energy.

No subsidies for big biomass
Take action here: biofuelwatch.org.uk/2014/CfDalert

2. Take action to oppose a proposed public loan guarantee for a new biomass power station in Avonmouth

The Treasury announced the Capital Guarantee Scheme in July 2013, with the declared purpose of boosting growth and jobs through public loan guarantees for developments, particularly in the energy and transport sector. Under the scheme, the Treasury guarantees that if anything goes wrong with a developer's investment and they are at risk of defaulting on private loans, then these will be paid out of general taxation (up to a set level).

So far, only one public loan guarantee has been made under the scheme: £75 million to Drax for their partial conversion to biomass, which reporters and environmental NGOs have shown is linked to the clearcutting of ancient wetland forests in the southern US. Then, in October, the Treasury published a shortlist of 17 projects that have been prequalified for a guarantee under this scheme. It includes three large

Avonmouth.

Helius Energy received planning permission for this power station from DECC, bypassing the normal local planning process, in March 2010. If built, it will burn around 850,000 green tonnes of imported wood a year. Without a public loan guarantee it seems unlikely that Avonmouth power station would ever have been able to be built, since it has failed to attract investment since it was consented to in 2010.

Biofuelwatch has been campaigning to get biomass projects dropped from the UK Guarantee Scheme, and supporting a local campaign opposing the Avonmouth development. Biofuelwatch also spoke at the December meeting of Bristol FOE attended by Bristol Rising Tide, Frack Free Bristol, and Bristol Greenpeace.

Take Action

Participate in a Friends of the Earth petition to ask the Government not to back Helius and other biomass power stations [here](#)

Attend the **South West Extreme Energy Gathering** on Saturday the 1st February in Bristol.
Full details of the event [here](#)

3. Update from the Battersea Power Station campaign

In 2010 the Battersea Power Station Development Company was granted planning permission to develop the site as a commercial centre with more than 3000 flats. They planned to light, heat and cool the building using 'low carbon bio-oil', almost certainly palm oil. In response, a local group supported by Biofuelwatch formed and have been actively campaigning against the development for the last 6 months. They have participated in a public

owned by a consortium including Sime Darby, the worlds largest producer of palm oil) have applied to amend the planning permission, excluding bio-oil from the fuel mix.

In an "Energy Statement" they write that *"In particular, concerns have been raised about the environmental performance of the bio-oil CHP, given the wider impacts that can occur in the production of the fuel"* and *"there is at present considerable debate about the sustainability of using such fuels, eg creating demand for bio-oil will create conflict with other land uses such as food production or protection of existing forest cover. There are further issues around liquid bio-oils being diverted away from transport systems where there are fewer low-carbon alternatives to the use of fossil fuels."* So instead they have now applied for a "district heating and cooling served by gas-fired CHP

Whether or not Sime Darby will listen to their subsidiary's concerns about bio-oil, remains to be seen. However, the fact that they have proposed gas-fired CHP as a possible alternative, suggests that they do not take environmental concerns seriously.

Say NO to Biofuels at Battersea Power Station, sign our petition [here](#)

4. A betrayal of promises: Rosyth Biomass plant approved by the Scottish Government.

Scottish Ministers announced their approval of Forth Energy's 100MW biomass power station in Rosyth last Friday. The announcement has been met with dismay from campaigners, who say that the plant is a betrayal of rules put in place to limit the impact of biomass power stations and that it will cause more forest destruction, carbon emissions and local air pollution. The plant will burn 1 million tonnes of wood each year, most of it to be imported from the Americas.

The decision follows on from the Scottish

faced major local as well as national opposition. The Grangemouth plant was approved based on Forth Energy's claims "disputed by campaigners" that they could supply a lot of heat to the Ineos refinery. No such claims could be made in Rosyth. Nonetheless, Forth Energy could receive as much as £64 million a year in subsidies.

An application by Forth Energy for a similar biomass power station at Dundee was opposed by Dundee City Councillors later last June, on the basis of concerns about local air pollution and visual impacts. Forth Energy has yet to announce whether it will take this to a Public Local Inquiry.

Oliver Munnion, Biofuelwatch co-director said: "With this decision, the Scottish Government has dropped all pretences of wanting to limit the amount of inefficient biomass electricity and they are betraying promises made to the Scottish Parliament. Together with other campaign groups, we have long warned that the Scottish Government's claims about only supporting larger biomass plants that are CHP is a scam. The Rosyth decision fully confirms our fears. This plant will be a polluting, non-renewable, electricity-only power station. Ministers are cloaking it in green but it is about generating electricity regardless of the cost to people, climate and the environment."

Friends of the Earth Scotland spokesman Andrew Llanwarne, who campaigned against the Dundee proposal, also highlighted the blatant contradictions in Scottish Government policy:

"The Electricity Generation Policy Statement was finalised only last June, and set out clearly the reasons why the Scottish Government wished biomass to be used "in small heat-only stations and those fitted with good quality CHP, off gas-grid where possible, the better to contribute to meeting the Scottish Government's target of 11% of heat demand to be met from renewable sources by 2020". Yet once again ministers are backing a project which satisfies none of these criteria and will provide expensive electricity rather than heat."

the inefficiencies of burning biomass for electricity, yet thatâ€™s what the Government is prepared to support. Do ministers read their own policies? What is the point of a Policy Statement if ministers ignore it? What is the point of CO2 emission reduction targets if ministers are prepared to subsidise biomass power stations which would add to Scotlandâ€™s emissions over the coming decades?â€

5. Coal to Biomass Conversions Campaign Update

A great deal of uncertainty still surrounds coal to biomass conversions, with recent announcements of closures on the one hand and generous new subsidy levels on the other. Hereâ€™s a summary of the situation to date:

Drax are forging ahead with their 50% conversion and have so far completed one of three boiler conversions. They have been given an early guarantee of a new Contract for Difference which, added to current support under ROCs, means theyâ€™ll be eligible for up to almost Â£700 million a year in subsidies.

There has been no announcement yet on the future of **Ironbridge**, operated by E.On, which is fully converted but needs to apply for long-term planning consent to keep it open as a biomass power station beyond 2015.

RWE have announced that they will decide the future of **Lynemouth** in the next few weeks. It has permission to convert and has, like Drax, been guaranteed new subsidies, but as yet no work has started at the site.

Eggborough is likewise awaiting a decision from operators as to whether they will proceed with a

Difference allocations.

And finally, operators of **Rugeley** power station recently announced that they will not be proceeding with a conversion, despite having applied to do so.

Annual wood requirements for Drax, Ironbridge, Lynemouth and Eggborough, assuming they all become operational, will be up to 39 million green tonnes a year, that's almost four times the UK's annual wood production. And what kind of support will they get for this? All guaranteed and current levels of subsidy for coal-to-biomass conversions (excluding Eggborough) so far announced come to up to £1.153 billion per year.

For more info on new subsidies please see our briefing [here](#)

