

Biofuelwatch February Newsletter

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# biofuelwatch



Dear subscriber, this is the February edition of our monthly 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.

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### 1. **Vote for the Biggest Biomass Baddie!**

On the 9th and 10th of April a conference bringing together the biggest corporate names in biomass will take place in London. Representatives from key organisations in the global biomass industry will be attending to discuss how to further increase their profits from environmental destruction and social injustice. They will be treating themselves to a gala dinner and awards ceremony designed to recognise 'outstanding contributions' to the biomass industry.

Join us in showing contempt for this celebration of the profits of a few at the expense of many, by participating in our Alternative Awards Ceremony. You can do this by [voting](#) for the Biggest Biomass Baddie from our short-list of conference attendees, including: [Drax](#), [The Green Investment Bank](#), [The Department for Energy and Climate Change](#), [The Renewable Energy Association](#), [ENVIVA](#) and [The Wood Pellet Association of Canada](#). Then join us on Wednesday the 9th of April outside the Gibson Hall in London, when we will be announcing the winner at our Alternative Awards Ceremony. This Alternative Awards Ceremony is part of a month of



Want to get in touch, or get involved in one of our campaigns? Please email [biofuelwatch@ymail.com](mailto:biofuelwatch@ymail.com)

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else is going on in April, including a demonstration outside the Drax AGM.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/biomess-awards/>

If you belong to an organisation which would like to show your support for this and other events, then please let us know and we will add your name to our list of supporters on our website.

Please help us promote this vote and protest through our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/825673764115966/> and

by tweeting with #biomessawards . Thanks!



## 2. Update on Public Loan Guarantees

Thanks to all who have taken part in our alert and asked the Treasury not to give public loan guarantees for big biomass at Avonmouth (Helius Energy), Eggborough (Eggborough Plc) and Tilbury (Tilbury Green Power). Those projects remain on the shortlist for such guarantees but have as yet not been awarded them. This means there's still time to try and stop them from getting loan guarantees.

### *Replies from the Treasury*

You may have had a response from the Treasury pointing to supposed UK biomass sustainability standards. This information is wrong. DECC has announced such

them twice so far, currently to April 2015, with no guarantees theyâ€™ actually be introduced then. Right now, companies only have to declare where the feedstock comes from and whether it would meet criteria, but theyâ€™ get subsidies regardless. And the Treasury has confirmed to an MP that sustainability doesnâ€™t feature into their â€˜assessment and due diligenceâ€™ under the Guarantee Scheme!

<http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2014/treasury-guarantee-scheme-response/>

### *European Commission looking into the Guarantee Scheme*

So far, Drax remains the only company to have received a public loan guarantee â€˜ for Â£75 million â€˜ under the governmentâ€™s Guarantee Scheme (for their partial conversion to biomass). We were pleased to hear that the European Commission is now carrying out a preliminary investigation into this award to Drax. According to the Financial Times, this could result in a full investigation as to whether the Guarantee Scheme might breach European State Aid rules. This is in response to a complaint submitted by Friends of the Earth and the Bristol Energy Co-Operative.

### *Avon Coalition Against Biomass*

As a result of the South West Extreme Energy Gathering on 1 February the Avon Coalition Against Biomass has formed and begun campaigning against Helius Energyâ€™s plans for a 100MW biomass power station at Avonmouth. The website will go live imminently but until then information on the campaign can be found [here](#) including details of 2 public meetings in Bristol and Avonmouth on 10 and 11 March. They are also planning campaigns against banks planning to invest, meetings with the City Council and a public demonstration in March. Their next campaign planning meeting is this Sunday 2 March, 7pm, at Kebele, 14 Robertson Rd, Easton.

scheme is ongoing working with local MPs.



### 3. The Department for Transport reviews the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation

The Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) was introduced in April 2008 and currently mandates 4.5% biofuel blending with all diesel and petrol for road transport. It also implements EU biofuel greenhouse gas and sustainability standards (criticised as deeply inadequate by NGOs and scientists). The Department for Transport has just closed a [consultation](#) about the RTFO to which Biofuelwatch has submitted a detailed [response](#), pointing out why the RTFO should be scrapped and why biofuel targets must not under any circumstances be increased further.

There is a striking admission hidden in the consultation document: *“One consequence of providing additional incentives for biofuels derived from waste materials is an increased risk of fraud. Following RED [EU Renewable Energy Directive] implementation the Administrator noted that the volumes of used cooking oil (UCO) derived biofuel being reported as coming from the Netherlands were implausibly high based on the population size.”*

The background to this is that, since 2011, the EU has allowed waste-derived biofuels to count double towards

slaughter houses) than palm oil, soya or other virgin plant oils in biodiesel. Note that most biofuels are still made from crops rather than waste, because most biofuels are now ethanol (mainly from maize) rather than biodiesel. But still, it's a striking shift away from tropical feedstocks. At least on paper. As the quote above proves, there's nothing to stop companies from falsifying data. The Department for Transport claims there's nothing to worry about now because they have written to suppliers to point out the "risks" of not verifying their data. But there's nothing to suggest there's any risk to companies committing fraud.

This sums up much of what's wrong with biofuel (or future biomass) sustainability standards: For all we know, "Used Cooking Oil from the Netherlands" could be palm oil from Indonesia. Just as "sustainable wood" could be anything but sustainable.

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#### 4. Fire at Ironbridge Power Station

Ironbridge Power Station "one of two operational coal-to-biomass power station conversions in the UK" experienced a major fire on 4th February. Fortunately nobody was injured, but it is one of a series of accidents involving coal power stations that burn large quantities of biomass. These include a major fire at Tilbury B two years ago (that power station is now closed), two explosions at Danish power stations and one at a Dutch one in 2012 as well as a fire at a converted coal power plant in Oregon. We therefore issued a press release: [Biomass industry "playing with fire" say campaigners as Ironbridge power station suffers blaze](#). The cause of the Ironbridge fire is not yet known and the power station [remains closed](#) while E.ON is investigating. Given that companies do not generally publish their incident reports, we cannot know how many of those accidents are linked directly to explosive or self-igniting wood pellets/dust, or how many are the result of the extended life-spans that biomass conversions mean. But the number of accidents at such plants is striking given that, as Drax say, ["You can almost count on one hand the number of converted units](#)

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## 5. Bad news for Trafford residents and local democracy

We were very disappointed to hear the news from Trafford that the local authority has lost a High Court bid against planning consent for Peel Energy's 20 MW waste wood incinerator. Local residents have been actively campaigning against this proposal for several years through the [Breathe Clean Air Group](#). Legal nitrogen dioxide levels are already being exceeded in Trafford. It belongs to an area where the Supreme Court has found the Government to be breaching EU air quality legislation, resulting in the European Commission finally [launching legal proceedings against the UK government](#). Following a strong local campaign, Trafford Borough Council's planning committee unanimously rejected the planning application but had their decision overturned by the Secretary of State following an appeal by Peel Energy. And now the High Court has thrown out the Council's legal challenge. We showed in our report [Biomass: The Chain of Destruction](#) that this case illustrates how planning policies have made it virtually impossible for residents and local authorities to protect public health from dirty developments. The Breathe Clean Air group has pledged to continue their fight against this highly polluting development:

<http://www.breathecleanairgroup.co.uk/trafford-lose-high-court-battle-%E2%80%A2-incinerator-to-proceed/>

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## 6. Campaign Success in Vermont, USA

The small state of Vermont in the USA and home state of Biofuelwatch staff member Rachel Smolker, took a big step in declaring that the North Springfield Sustainable Energy 35 MW biomass facility was not a "public good". The state's Public Service Board (PSB) must review proposals for large developments in the state and either grant or refuse developers the "certificate

tonnes of wood harvested from the “Green Mountain” state not far from Rutland, Vermont, which suffers the highest asthma rates in the entire country. Local citizens worked diligently to oppose the facility and succeeded in impressing upon the PSB that the facility would increase emissions of greenhouse gases and pollute the local air. This decision is one of the first cases where a permit was denied on these grounds, rather than on economic concerns. See here for a Huffington Post article about it: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rachel-smolker/vermont-the-little-state-\\_b\\_4858004.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rachel-smolker/vermont-the-little-state-_b_4858004.html)

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