



Biofuelwatch December newsletter, 2016

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Dear subscriber,

Welcome to our December newsletter, with information on our recent and upcoming events and campaigns. It's the darkest time of year and currently easy to feel pessimistic, but let's use 2017 to work towards a safer future for biodiversity and the climate.

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Interested in hosting a talk about



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. Tell the UK Government: Stop subsidising more polluting, forest-destroying biomass power

The government is asking for your views on subsidies for biomass electricity. Biomass generates about 9% of the UK's energy, and that proportion is steadily growing, largely because of the generous subsidies biomass is given - about A£817 million in 2015. [Biofuelwatch has a form you can use, with a letter to base your submission on](#) if you don't have time to write your own. **The deadline for this is 20 December.**

For more information on all the reasons why we want to end biomass subsidies, take a look at our [new webpage](#). We have uploaded a fully referenced version of the draft letter to the Government [here](#).



3. Still spaces left at the cross-party biomass briefing - Wednesday, December 14, 1-2.30

Wednesday 14 December 10.00-14.00
The Wilson Room, Portcullis House, Victoria Embankment, London,
SW1A 2JR

Hosted by **Glyn Davies MP**, member of the Environmental Audit Committee, **Tommy Sheppard MP** (SNP) and **Caroline Lucas MP**.

The briefing will cover:

- Why the EU's historic approach to bioenergy is wrong and how it can be fixed in UK policy
- The size of the bioenergy carbon loophole, and what it means for efforts to address climate change
- The sources and net greenhouse gas impacts of biomass currently burned in the UK, and what the future holds

Dr Mary Booth, PhD (Director of the US NGO Partnership for Policy Integrity) will discuss climate impacts and regulation of biomass burned in the UK, including North American wood pellets.

Duncan Brack (Associate Fellow, Chatham House) will discuss implications of bioenergy carbon accounting loopholes for current efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Please try and [let us know](#) you are coming. For people outside the Palace of Westminster we have set up an [eventbrite page](#) backed up by a [facebook event](#) page.

2. Coal Phase-out consultation

The government has announced plans to phase out coal by 2025, and has released a consultation paper about its proposals. This sounds like a good thing, right? However, permitting a decade of further coal burning for electricity is not in keeping with the severity of the climate crisis, nor with the disastrous impacts of coal mining on communities and their environments around the world. The government is actually proposing to **prevent a phaseout of coal before 2025**, even though without government intervention, several more coal power stations are likely to close earlier. Furthermore, they propose **loopholes which could allow coal to be burned indefinitely**. Those **include burning even more wood in coal power station**, despite the fact that Drax alone already burns more wood annually than the UK produces every year!

Coal burning for electricity should end as quickly as possible, not continue for a decade or beyond. We need to switch to lower energy consumption from more sustainable, genuinely renewable low-carbon sources as soon as possible.

You can read all about the consultation, and guidelines for making a submission, in [our joint briefing with the Coal Action Network](#). The consultation is open until 1st February 2017. The coal industry will doubtless respond to the consultation to push for the greatest loopholes possible. We can counter this narrative by responding to the consultation, and in public.



4. October's #AxeDrax demonstrations in London and Yorkshire

This October, we helped to organise two demonstrations in collaboration with the Coal Action Network, London Mining network and others:

First we went to London for a small protest against subsidies for Drax's biomass burning at the new department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), urging the department to turn over a new leaf and stop subsidising energy that damages the climate, forests and communities.

We heard speakers including visitors from coal-affected areas of Colombia and Indonesia, as well as members of Fuel Poverty Action, the London Mining Network and Biofuelwatch. We finished by delivering a petition signed by 145,000 people to BEIS, calling for an end to subsidies for biomass at Drax.

Then on October 22 in Yorkshire, about 60 people gathered at Drax power station itself, to commemorate ten years since the world's first Climate Camp at Drax and to name the work still to be done for climate justice, such as shutting down Drax.

There were a range of speakers and performers, reflecting the diversity of extreme energy problems - and possibilities for change - that we are currently experiencing.

More activities against Drax will be happening in the new year - please [contact us](#) if you would like to get more involved in making these protests happen. If you are based in Yorkshire we can put you in touch with other local campaigners there, and if you are in London you can get involved with [London Biomassive](#) to create the next London event.

If you missed this demo, see the [zine](#) that people collaborated to produce for it online.

See also new [Drax movie](#) by [Jo Syz](#), with footage of this demo and previous Biofuelwatch actions.



5. European Commission releases draft post-2020 Renewable Energy Directive: Lessons not learned

At the end of November, the European Commission finally published the long-awaited proposal for a new Renewable Energy Directive (RED), which would come into effect in 2020. Unfortunately, they seem to have learned nothing from the disastrous experience with the expansion of biofuels and wood-based bioenergy triggered by the EU's existing directive since 2010.

See [here](#) for a good article about the proposals, which refers to a joint press release by civil society groups including Biofuelwatch.

The overall renewable energy target is to be raised from 20% in 2020 to 27% in 2030. If by renewables the EU simply meant wind and solar power and other low-carbon, no-burn technologies, then the new target would simply be way too unambitious. But unfortunately, biofuels and biomass remain part of the mix.

And this means they'll almost certainly account for most of the additional 'renewables', since they already make up two-thirds of those across the EU.

The biofuel target for transport fuels is to be replaced with a much smaller one for waste based and 'advanced biofuels', even though the majority of 'advanced biofuels' proposed don't exist and aren't likely to become commercially viable in the foreseeable future. But biofuels made from food, including palm oil, soya and cereals, can still account for the equivalent of 7% of total transport fuel, which is a lot more than current production. Their share is to be gradually reduced - but too slowly, and way too late, given their

The use of biomass, which means mainly wood, on the other hand, is to be drastically expanded. Some extremely weak sustainability standards are proposed for biomass burned in larger power stations, but as with biofuel standards, there will be no external auditing and verification as to whether they are being complied with. And standards could never make a fundamentally unsustainable demand for wood (or anything else) sustainable. Interestingly, the proposed biomass standards closely resemble those introduced by the UK government last December. Both the UK government and the EU Commission have been lobbied strongly by industry, including by the Sustainable Biomass Partnership, set up and run by large European Energy companies and chaired by Drax's CEO.

The European Parliament, European Council and European Commission will be debating and finalising the proposal over the next two years.

6. Campaign to Stop GE Trees update

The Campaign to Stop GE Trees organized a Southeast Strategy Meeting in South Carolina from October 7-12, just days after hurricane Mathew passed through with devastating consequences to the region. The purpose was to build relationships with organizers in the southeast region to oppose the expansion of tree plantations, and introduction of genetically engineered trees to the southeast states. The Southeast USA is considered 'ground zero' - the source for majority of wood pellets exported to Europe, including Drax in the UK. Government and industry views the region as the area most suited to provide biomass not only for European pellet demands, the pulp and paper industry, but an entire bioeconomy. They cite favorable growing conditions, though the region has been suffering from multiyear drought and is currently experiencing the worst spate of wildfires in its recent history. The strategy meeting was a well organized and attended opportunity to share knowledge, build relationships, and plan future steps for building the campaign to stop GE trees. Among other activities, the group visited a 'supertree' farm belonging to GE tree company, ArborGen, as well as a loblolly pine plantation. Topics included the exploitation of migrant labor for industrial tree plantations promoted by South Carolina based GE tree company ArborGen, the dangerous impacts of toxic herbicides and pesticides used in tree plantations, and the links between GE trees, biomass energy and worsening climate change.



7. Gene Drives and the Convention on Biological Diversity, Cancun

The Convention on Biological Diversity is meeting in Cancun at the beginning of December. Among issues on the agenda is continuing process on synthetic biology. The collaboration to oppose gene drives that began in conjunction with the IUCN meetings in September, spearheaded by groups including ETC Group, Friends of the Earth US and Biofuelwatch, has been carried forward to Cancun including a [demand for a moratorium on the use of gene drives](#) put forward by 160 civil society organizations. In a [press released announcement](#), Ricarda Steinbrecher (Federation of German Scientists) stated: “We lack the knowledge and understanding to release gene drives into the environment - we don’t even know what questions to ask. To deliberately drive a species to extinction has major ethical, social and environmental implications.”

8. Briefing on Ecotricity's 'Green Gas from Grass'

Several people have contacted us with queries about Ecotricity's 'Green gas from grass' claims. Ecotricity has recently been granted planning consent for the UK’s first biomethane plant using grass as the main feedstock. The company claims that such 'green gas from grass' can replace 97% of natural gas for domestic heating and hot water by 2035, and remove the 'need' for fracking, whilst helping restore biodiverse flowering grasslands. While this sounds positive, we were curious and have produced [this briefing](#) to critically examine Ecotricity's claims.

Unfortunately, what we found on looking more closely at the proposal is not encouraging. Replacing all current domestic natural gas in the UK would require at least 10.2 million hectares of grassland, which is more than twice the area used for agricultural crops in the UK. It would inevitably lead to very significant and negative indirect land use change. There are also significant risks of methane leakage with biogas production and upgrading to biomethane.

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