

Pro-biomass lobbying facts research part 1: the energy companies

In 2011 & 2012 I ([Jeroen Spaander](#)) worked as a freelance IT consultant for Electrabel in Zwolle, who were currently implementing the name change to GDF SUEZ and hired me to renew the digital workplace environment. During my work I spoke with several internal employees who indicated that they were ashamed of the company's extensive lobbying practices in order to induce the government to have more coal-fired power stations built, while at the time it was already known that this was from a financial point of view and for the goals we had suggested for the environment and climate, not advisable.

The three energy giants made the decision to build the brand new coal-fired power stations at about the same time, in 2008. However, soon regrets about the decision arose. In 2011, RWE CEO [Peter Terium said](#) that he would not build the coal-fired power station in Eemshaven "with the knowledge of today". The construction was nevertheless continued, after which the coal-fired power stations were put into operation in 2015 (RWE and Engie) and 2016 (Uniper).

On November 4, 2019, [Follow the Money published](#) an article in which they demonstrated with confidential internal memos from 2006 that the energy suppliers indeed relied on their lobby, but that this lobby failed due to the wrong assumption of the electricity companies that they had many more years of free CO2 rights. As a result, only 15 percent of emissions would actually have to be paid. In 2013, however, the government decided ([as was to be expected](#)) to stop distributing free CO2 allowances to electricity companies. Whereas coal-fired power stations previously received 85 percent of their CO2 allowances for free, they now had to pay for the whole amount since 2013. This wrong estimate had a huge influence on the profitability of the power stations. When coal is burned to generate electricity, an average of 798 grams of CO2 per kWh is released. When burning natural gas, this is less than half: an average of 396 grams of CO2 per kWh. [As extensively measured by science](#) and [brought into the news](#), burning woody biomass releases three times more CO2 per kWh hour than burning gas. The burning of woody biomass even produces one and a half times more CO2 emissions than the burning of coal.

Despite these poor prospects, billions of euros have been added to coal-fired power stations in the Netherlands in recent years. Uniper and Engie each built a new coal-fired power station on the Second Maasvlakte, which required an investment of around 1.7 billion euros each. RWE built a gigantic power station in Eemshaven in Groningen, which cost around 3.5 billion euros.

[Uniper has filed a claim for damages](#) with the government (which we as citizens will pay through taxes) of EUR 850 million (half of the costs of building the plant). Also in Gelderland there is a great fear within the municipality and the province of a claim for damages from Veolia if the Province would choose to close the plant. RWE saw the storm coming early on and has fully committed itself to the [pro-biomass lobby](#) and has been [very successful with that](#). In addition to the Amer power plant, where they have been burning woody biomass since 2001 [and have had a gigantic wood pellet factory built in Georgia \(America\)](#) to massively plunder the forests there, they have recently also switched [to burning biomass](#) in the Groningen Eemshaven. This means that the company receives billions in subsidy, again at the expense of our health, nature, the environment and our future.

RWE does not appear to be the only one to use the pro-biomass lobby on a large scale, according to the LobbyFacts database, the 5 largest energy suppliers in the Netherlands appear to spend millions to realize biomass burning in the Netherlands.

[LobbyFacts](#) is a project of the [Corporate Europe Observatory](#) and [LobbyControl](#) and collects information from official sources including [the EU transparency register](#). The LobbyFacts database indicates 120+ organizations involved in the paid pro biomass lobby in European institutions with a total amount [between 33 and 39 million euro's annually](#).

Examples of energy companies involved in the pro-biomass lobby in the Netherlands

- [Uniper](#) (E.ON), according to the lobby monitor, spends nearly half a million euros a year on lobbying activities in the European Union alone and has 3 full-time lobbyists at work. On top of that the costs for the extra lobbyists and lobbying activities in the Netherlands are added.
- [Vattenfall](#) (Nuon), according to the lobby monitor, spends nearly one million euros a year on lobbying activities in the European Union alone and has 4 full-time lobbyists at work. On top of that the costs for the extra lobbyists and lobbying activities in the Netherlands are added.
- [RWE](#) (Essent) according to the lobby monitor, spends at least one million euros a year on lobbying activities in the European Union alone and has 5 full-time lobbyists at work. The Dutch directors of the RWE are among the most active pro biomass lobbyists in the Netherlands, sit on several pro biomass lobby committees and initiatives and sponsor pro biomass reports.
- [Veolia](#) according to the lobby monitor, spends nearly a million euros a year on lobbying activities in the European Union alone and has 6 full-time lobbyists at work. On top of that the costs for the extra lobbyists and lobbying activities in the Netherlands are added.
- [ENGIE](#) (GDF SUEZ/Electrabel) according to the lobby monitor, spends more than two million euros a year on lobbying activities in the European Union alone and has 11 full-time lobbyists at work. On top of that the costs for the extra lobbyists and lobbying activities in the Netherlands are added.

In addition to the organizations lobbying in European institutions we have identified nearly 200 organizations actively lobbying in the Netherlands to promote the burning of woody biomass for energy generation, many of whom are involved in the paid pro-biomass lobby. Both [the Dutch government](#) and the [European Union](#) pay millions of euros per year (from our own tax money) to the pro-biomass lobby activities. Pro-biomass lobbying activities of the Netherlands and the European Union include: ADBE, AEBIOM, BBE, Bioenergie Realisatie Koepel, Biomass 2040, Biomass Policies, Biomass Trade Centers, BioTrade2020Plus, BioWKK, DIACORE, EUBCE, EUBIA, EUBIONET, IEA Bioenergy, IPBBE, PELLCERT, Platform Bio-energie, Platform Duurzame Grondstoffen, Platform Groene Grondstoffen, Platform Hout in Nederland, Projectbureau Duurzame Energie, S2Biom, SBP. We will return to this in detail in parts 2 and 4 of this study.

A notable lobbying issue concerns the [Sustainable Biomass Program \(SBP\)](#) certification for biomass for energy production initiated by the Netherlands in 2013. The SBP certification was intended to guarantee that the supply of biomass along the entire supply chain is processed in a sustainable manner. [According to the SBP LobbyFacts](#), the SBP program that is used by the Dutch government to reassure politicians and citizens biomass is sustainable, hasn't even spent ten thousand euros a year to get this program under the attention of the European Union. Less surprising therefore is that almost [the entire board of the SBP program](#) consists of people who have a financial interest in burning woody biomass for energy generation, including the Dutch president of the RWE.

This article is part of a research on the pro-biomass lobby and consists of the following 6 chapters that we will publish weekly on <https://www.biomassmurder.org/research/lobby-facts>.

Part 1: [Energy Companies](#)

Part 2: [Politicians and officials](#)

Part 3: [Scientists](#)

Part 4: [Consultants en lobbyists](#)

Part 5: [Certification and subsidies](#)

Part 6: [Banks and investors](#)