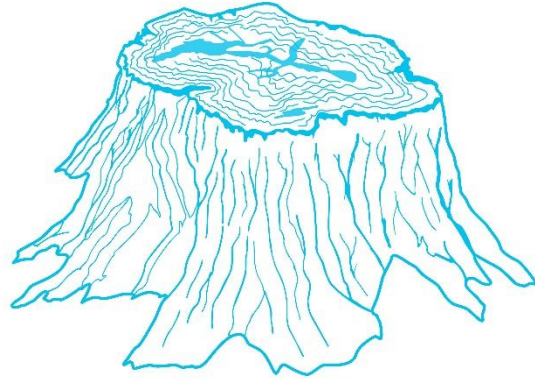


CUT CARBON NOT FORESTS



Cut Carbon Not Forest calls on the Government to end subsidies for woody biomass and instead invest in low-cost and truly clean and renewable energy. Help protect the world's forests and the wildlife that depend on them as we rebuild after the coronavirus pandemic by placing pressure on policy makers to support reform. [Ask your MP](#) to call for removing subsidies from companies that burn trees for electricity and mobilise others to do so as well.¹

Background

The UK spent roughly £1.67 billion in 2019 subsidising burning trees for electricity, of which £1.26 billion was distributed via ROCs and could thus be redirected. Much of the wood burned as fuel in UK power stations was cut down and shipped in from precious forests overseas. The UK's massive demand for wood-fuelled electricity is accelerating climate change, destroying forest habitats and endangering wildlife. The UK must stop pretending that burning forests for fuel is "green" energy.

Just like coal, burning trees to produce electricity makes climate change worse. Biomass electricity must not be subsidised if the UK is to be a true leader in tackling the climate emergency. As we work to get the country back on track, we must build a true clean-energy economy and end wasteful subsidies for dirty biomass energy.

Public support

YouGov polling from July 2020² found that:

- » Just 23% of Britons believe burning wood for electricity should be classified as 'renewable energy'
- » 82% of respondents think the UK must preserve recent improvements in air quality by switching to clean energy sources
- » Only 3% say the Government should help companies that burn wood sourced from forests overseas
- » 85% worried about the impact on wildlife if trees in forests are being cut down to generate electricity.

Impact on wildlife and biodiversity

The UK is degrading precious forests around the world to meet its electricity needs, threatening the habitats of many at-risk animals. Claims that wood shipped into the UK for electricity production is

¹ The Cut Carbon Not Forest campaign is focused on removing subsidies for wood-burning power stations under the Renewables Obligation Certificate (ROC) scheme and redirecting savings towards truly clean and renewable energy sources, like wind and solar. Under the Levy Control Framework, reduced spending on biomass electricity subsidies should automatically free up increased funding for new subsidies for different and cleaner renewable electricity.

² Total sample size was 2,283 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th-10th July 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

sourced sustainably are misleading; repeated investigations show that wood used to fuel UK power stations is routinely sourced from clearcuts of mature and highly biodiverse hardwood forests. The trees that might be planted in replacement are forests in name only; they support just a fraction of the biodiversity found in natural forests.

Transformative change, including putting an end to spending billions of pounds of billpayer subsidies to burn trees for electricity, is needed to help reverse the biodiversity crisis and must be at the core of how the UK rebuilds after the coronavirus.

- » In 2019, approximately 5.33 million metric tons of wood pellets were exported from the US to the UK. Supplying this demand required the harvesting of approximately 395km² of forests in the US Southeast³ – an area of woodland larger than the New Forest.⁴
- » Years of on-the-ground investigations show that wood entering the UK bioenergy market is routinely sourced from clearcuts of mature, biodiverse hardwood forests in the US Southeast (where the North American Coastal Plain has been designated as a global biodiversity hotspot).⁵
- » Photographic evidence (some of which is included below) also shows vast quantities of whole trees and other large-diameter wood—biomass feedstocks known to be high-carbon—entering the supply chain destined for UK power stations, including Drax. This takes place under existing governmental and corporate “sustainable sourcing” standards.
- » This practice degrades the habitats of a number of at-risk native species, including salamanders, the Louisiana black bear, the Venus flytrap and multiple songbird species. Yet, wood pellet manufacturing in the region is expected to continue skyrocketing.⁶

IMAGES FROM 2019 INVESTIGATION INTO SOURCING FOR ENVIVA, TOP SUPPLIER TO DRAX



In the early spring of 2019, investigators tracked logging trucks from a mature hardwood forest going to Enviva’s Northampton, North Carolina facility. The clearcut was located in the Tar-Pamlico River Basin, alongside Sandy Creek, feeding into the Pamlico Sound of North Carolina. Images: Dogwood Alliance.

Impact on climate

Building back better from the coronavirus pandemic means prioritising clean, low-cost and abundant climate solutions such as wind and solar. Burning forests for fuel instead of investing in real clean energy puts more carbon in the atmosphere for decades and degrades forest carbon sinks at the very moment when it is most urgent for us to cut emissions. This practice takes the UK even further away

³ In 2019, the US exported a total of 6.89 million tons, of which 5.33 million went to the UK. <https://rb.gy/gkbq2v>. This equates to roughly 11.9 million green tons, which in 2019 alone required the harvesting of roughly 394.83 sq. kilometres of forests in the Southeastern U.S. Calculation based on:

https://www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/publications/Biomass_Biodiversity_white_paper.pdf

⁴ <https://www.forestryengland.uk/forest-planning/new-forest-inclosures-forest-plan-2019-2029>

⁵ <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/global-markets-biomass-energy-06172019.pdf>

⁶ https://www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/maps/SELC_WoodPelletExportMap_2020_0117_map+table.pdf

from its “net zero” carbon emissions target and undermines any claim the UK has to climate leadership.

- » Numerous scientific studies show that cutting down trees and burning them for electricity is a dirty and destructive practice. Burning forest biomass worsens climate change for decades or moreⁱ and logging forests destroys the most efficient and powerful carbon-capture system on the planet.
- » “Sustainability” claims by industry are misleading and do not account for the full climate impact of forest biomass.
- » A 2019 study found the accumulated emissions of burning wood pellets from Drax’s own U.S.-based mills increases carbon pollution in the atmosphere for more than 40 years, well beyond the timeframe identified by the IPCC as critical for tackling climate change.⁷
- » According to Drax, in 2019 its facility emitted nearly 13 million tonnes of CO₂ solely from the combustion of biomass.⁸ This is almost 3 million tonnes more than what the UK’s Committee on Climate Change has recommended is needed in carbon reductions to meet the UK’s 4th and 5th Carbon Budgets (10 million tonnes/year reduction). Yet Drax is able to treat these emissions as if they don’t exist, and perversely, policymakers get to treat them as reductions in CO₂.

The cost of subsidies

As we rebuild our economy we must ensure government investment goes towards clean and climate-friendly growth. Burning wood in power stations is much costlier than genuinely non-emitting and renewable electricity technologies, such as solar and wind. Yet the UK continues to waste over £2 million a day subsidising fake solutions to climate change and increasing electricity costs for British people. Meanwhile, true renewables are already a more affordable option, and getting cheaper.

- » In 2019, the UK Government granted over £1.6 billion in renewable subsidies to biomass power stations, with more than half going to a single company: Drax Power Station in Yorkshire. Each year, Drax burns more wood than the UK produces in total, yet Britons get less than 0.9% of all energy used in the UK from burning so many trees.
- » These biomass subsidies are paid out of a surcharge on household electricity bills. The government should not be propping up an uneconomic and dirty energy source that increases overall electricity costs for British families.
- » Biomass electricity is also unnecessary to ensure UK grid reliability. A 2018 study concluded that, as soon as 2021, the UK can meet year-round electricity demand with a grid increasingly dominated by solar and wind and *no biomass*, even during the darkest, coldest, most windless days of the year.

As we work to get the country back on track, we must build a true clean-energy economy and end wasteful subsidies paid to companies that burn trees for electricity. We are calling on the UK Government to redirect biomass subsidies to real clean and renewable energy like wind and solar power.

This briefing has been prepared by a group of environmental NGOs campaigning for the end of biomass subsidies in the UK. Our members include: Biofuelwatch, Dogwood Alliance, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC).

If you would like any further information, or to speak to representatives of the Cut Carbon Not Forests coalition on this issue, please contact ccnf@cutcarbonnotforests.org.

⁷ https://www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/publications/2019-05-27_Drax_emissions_-_SIG_report_Phase_II.PDF

⁸ https://www.drax.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Drax_AR2019_Web.pdf