

BURNOUT 2020:

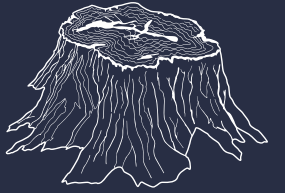
The UK Is Now the Top Subsidiser of Bioenergy in Europe

Despite new government commitments to combat the climate crisis, invest in a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and prioritise tree planting and forest protection, new data reveals that the UK is now the top subsidiser of bioenergy in Europe. It spent more than £1.9 billion in 2019 on bioenergy subsidies, primarily to burn wood imported from overseas forests at Drax Power Station. One in every five pounds the UK spent on renewables subsidies in 2018 went to bioenergy, rather than to wind, solar and other true clean energy. In all, every man, woman and child in Britain paid on average £30 to support the UK bioenergy industry.

The data presented here, compiled by research firm Trinomics,¹ is an update to the 2019 report, *Burnout: E.U. Clean Energy Policies Lead to Forest Destruction*, which provided the most complete and up-to-date accounting of how European countries subsidise bioenergy.² While the UK stands out in the overwhelming size of its subsidies for this polluting industry, nations across Europe are, unfortunately, also increasing their support for bioenergy under the misapprehension that it is a green energy source. It's not. Subsidies flow under programs designed to support renewable energy, despite clear evidence that burning wood for electricity exacerbates climate change and degrades forests.

The UK also stands out in that it continues to rely most heavily on the most environmentally damaging form of bioenergy. Unlike other European countries, more than 55% of total solid biomass use in the UK—and most of its billions in bioenergy subsidies—goes towards biomass-burning for electricity production in highly inefficient, electricity-only power plants. Such plants rely primarily on burning trees and other carbon-intensive forest biomass for fuel and burn millions of tonnes of imported wood each year.

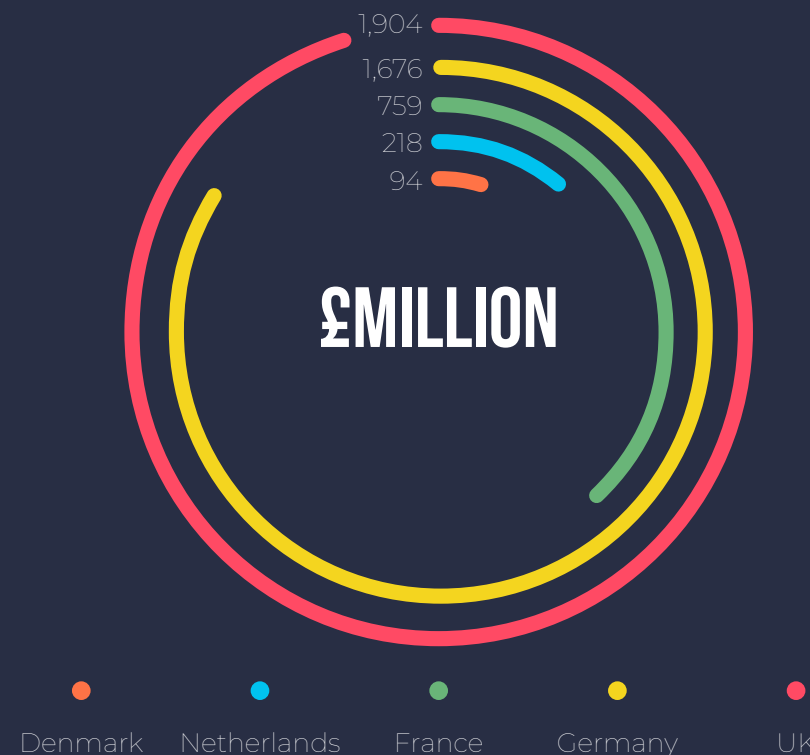
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KEY FINDINGS

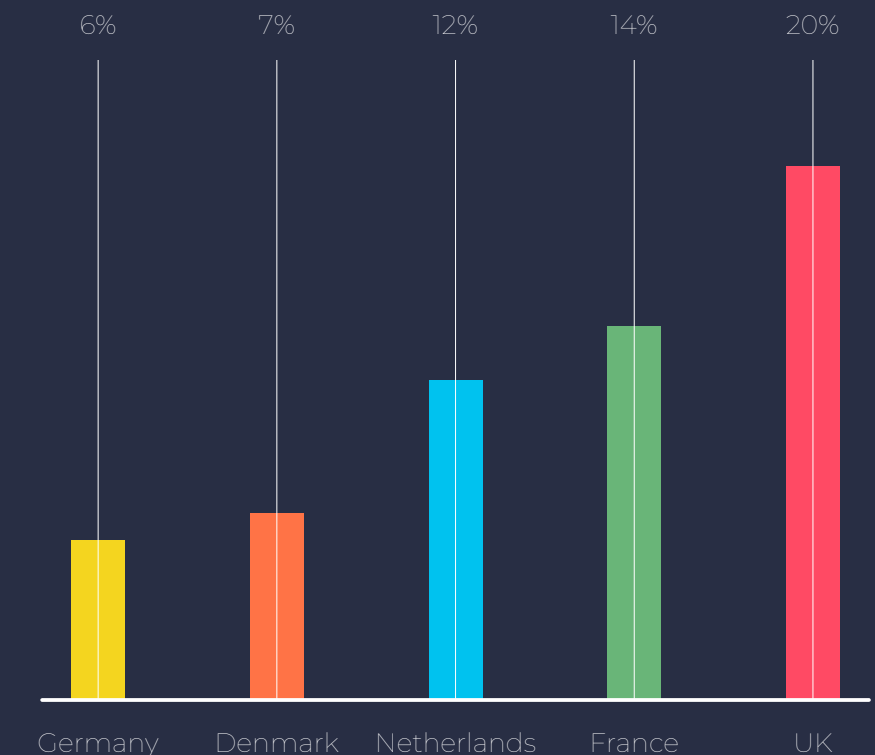
1 In 2019, the UK overtook Germany to become the top subsidiser of bioenergy. **UK biomass subsidies totalled £1.9 billion across all bioenergy end use sectors, an increase of nearly 60% since 2015.**

Bioenergy subsidies 2019



2 The UK spent the greatest share of its overall renewable energy subsidies on bioenergy in 2018; **one out of every five pounds the UK spent on renewables subsidies went to bioenergy.**

Bioenergy subsidies as a share of total renewable energy subsidies (%) in 2018



RECOMMENDATIONS

Bioenergy proponents argue that so long as biomass is sourced “sustainably,” UK policymakers can assume it to be no-or low-carbon. Yet biomass “sustainability” claims are misleading and do not account for climate impacts. UK biomass imports are routinely sourced from clearcuts of mature and highly biodiverse hardwood forests. This biomass is known to be high-carbon and contributes to forest degradation, yet it takes place under existing UK and corporate sustainability standards.

Addressing the climate emergency means prioritizing the clean, low-cost and abundant climate solutions the UK already has, such as wind and solar. It also means protecting forests, which are the most efficient and powerful carbon-capture system on the planet. No technology that pumps more carbon into the atmosphere or destroys forests should be receiving government subsidies.

The bulk of UK biomass electricity subsidies are paid out under the Renewables Obligation Certificates scheme and can be redirected immediately at the Government’s discretion.³ **Wherever possible, the UK Government should immediately phase out all subsidies for large-scale biomass use for electricity production and redirect the savings to true clean and renewable energy sources like wind and solar.**

For complete data tables, please email ccnf@cutcarbonnotforests.org

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1. Trinomics B.V. carries out research and delivers policy advice related to energy, environment, and climate change. See: <https://trinomics.eu/>
2. In 2019, Trinomics looked at 15 European countries most heavily reliant on bioenergy from 2015-2018. Here, Trinomics updates data for 2018-19 for the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Denmark. See Appendix for updated data tables and key charts. For research methods and more details on bioenergy impacts, see: <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/burnout-eu-clean-energy-policies-forest-destruction-ip.pdf>
3. 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.

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3 The UK’s per capita bioenergy subsidy spending has been on the rise. **In 2019, every Briton spent (on average) nearly £30 subsidising bioenergy.**

Per capita bioenergy subsidies in 2019



4 **The UK continues to rely on the worst form of bioenergy.** Unlike other European countries, more than 55% of total solid biomass use in the UK in 2018 was for electricity generation in power plants, which relies primarily on burning the most carbon-intensive types of biomass (e.g., trees and other vegetation taken directly from forests) in the least efficient way.

Share of total solid biomass use for electricity generation in power plants and for combined heat and power (2018)

