

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Report: Bioenergy from Estonia may breach UK's biomass sustainability laws** *Groups call on UK to investigate evidence of destructive logging for biomass in Estonia*

LONDON, UK – AUGUST 4TH, 2022 – A new analysis published by Cut Carbon Not Forests exposes how the UK's demand for wood pellets to generate biomass energy is harming Estonia's forests and ecosystems, including protected nature reserves. The evidence suggests that wood pellets imported into the UK from Estonia to burn at power plants – primarily Drax – are sourced using such harmful practices that they may violate the UK's legally binding sustainability criteria for biomass subsidies.

The UK is the world's largest importer of timber for biomass energy, burning wood pellets from Estonia, as well as the U.S., Canada, Latvia, and other countries. Biomass is wood, crops, or wastes that are burned to produce heat and electricity. The UK is also Europe's top subsidiser of biomass energy, spending more than £2 billion per year of billpayers' money to prop up the industry. The UK Government is scheduled to release a new Biomass Strategy at the end of the year, which will lay out the country's plan for future reliance on this fake climate solution.

To try to ensure its imported biomass does not harm the environment in the countries where it's logged, the UK has sustainability criteria for biomass that require, among other things, that the wood pellet sourcing minimise harm to ecosystems and maintain biodiversity. However, this new report suggests that logging for biomass in Estonian forests could violate these legally binding standards by harming Estonia's forests, biodiversity, and ecosystems.

Even Estonia's most highly protected forests have not escaped the rampant logging for wood pellets, with UK imports from Estonia increasing significantly in recent years. This includes both areas protected under Estonian law (referred to as "Woodland Key Habitats") and Natura 2000 reserves, which are protected under European law due to their inclusion of habitat for Europe's most rare and endangered species.

Between 2001 and 2019, Estonia's Natura 2000 areas lost an area almost the size of Manchester, due in part to biomass production. While the Estonian government recently claimed to have suspended logging for just over two years in these reserves, this moratorium only covers forests specifically protected as rare forest habitats (about 11% of forested land in Natura 2000 areas). As such, the ban does not apply to logging in most (89%) Natura 2000 forests, meaning the biomass industry continues to pillage some of Europe's most prized natural areas.

"Given this startling report, the UK government should immediately conduct a direct investigation of biomass sourcing in Estonia for the UK energy market, to determine whether such imports comply with current biomass laws," said Lord Randall of Uxbridge, former Environment Adviser to Prime Minister Theresa May. "Further, the UK must halt all imports of wood pellets produced in or using wood from Estonia until this investigation has been completed."

"The UK's bioenergy sustainability criteria are supposed to help prevent harm to forest ecosystems including wildlife. The mounting evidence from Estonia suggests that the UK's hunger for biomass for its power stations is fuelling the destruction of precious forests full of wildlife," said Elsie Blackshaw-Crosby, managing lawyer at [The Lifescape Project](#), which recently supported a local NGO to file court proceedings to stop logging in all state-owned Natura 2000 sites in Estonia. "An independent investigation is urgently needed to determine whether Estonian biomass is in breach of the sustainability criteria. The Estonian Government's supposed 'ban' on logging in Estonia's most protected forests is nothing of the sort – it is temporary, and covers only a small percentage of forests in these protected areas."

This intensive and expansive logging is harming Estonia's wildlife, including rare species of birds, moss, fungi, and lichens. This includes species protected under both Estonian and EU law, like the three-toed woodpecker and the capercaillie, the latter of which has declined by 30% over the last 20 years. "The planet is facing a biodiversity crisis, and yet huge areas of Estonia's forests are being clearcut for bioenergy, driving birds and other animals closer to extinction," said Siim Kuresoo, [Estonian Fund for Nature \(ELF\)](#). "The UK must stop using its so-called sustainability standards to excuse these horrible practices."

"What is the use of sustainability standards if they allow the clearcutting of some of our planet's most treasured natural areas?" said Elly Pepper, Senior Advocate for [Cut Carbon Not Forests and the Natural Resources Defense Council](#). "The UK Government should be seriously concerned that it's allowing this kind of environmental destruction, and even more ashamed that it's paying for it by subsidising the biomass industry with over £1 billion per year."

"It would be an unforgivable double standard if so called 'green' biomass energy generated in the UK comes at the cost of nature-rich forests in Estonia. The potential destruction of key habitats under supposedly 'world-leading' sustainability standards raises big questions about the UK's environmental credibility," said Imogen Cripps, Policy Officer, Wildlife and Countryside Link. "As the UK works towards its targets to stop the decline of nature and cut carbon emissions, it is crucial that we don't outsource environmental destruction to other countries. The findings of this report show the UK government should review its biomass policies and ensure they are compatible with net zero carbon emissions, and a nature positive world."

The full report – 'Biomass sourcing in Estonia may violate UK sustainability standards' – can be downloaded here: <https://www.cutcarbonnotforests.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Biomass-Sourcing-in-Estonia.pdf>

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#### **About Cut Carbon Not Forests**

Cut Carbon Not Forests is a campaign to redirect dirty biomass electricity subsidies to true clean energy, coordinated by a coalition of UK and US-based NGOs. The bulk of biomass electricity subsidies are paid out via the Renewables Obligation Certificates scheme and can be redirected immediately. Join us and email your MP today