

PRESS RELEASE

EU clings to doomed biomass policy

Brussels, 14 June 2018 - The European Union's new renewable energy policy damages its ambition to become the world's climate leader.

"In the face of [withering criticism](#) and growing [scientific evidence](#), the EU has failed to fundamentally change its destructive policy of burning wood for energy," said Linde Zuidema, policy advisor at forests and rights NGO, Fern. "The target it has set for overall renewable energy production is also disturbingly low."

The new Renewable Energy Directive agreed on today will apply for the period 2021 – 2030 and will continue to incentivise current destructive practices: increasing forest harvests, the burning of whole trees and stumps, and large scale use of biomass in inefficient electricity installations.

"When most people hear 'renewable energy' they think of wind or solar. But woody biomass is the EU's biggest source of renewable energy. It's a disgrace that policymakers have failed to ensure that it's used sustainably. By opting for 'business as usual' they are greenwashing the use of biomass as an energy source," said Zuidema.

As part of the new Renewable Energy Directive, the EU has adopted criteria on what bioenergy can count towards the EU's renewable energy target and receive subsidies. Rather than creating cross EU rules, it relies on existing Member State rules on sustainable forest management and accounting for emissions from forest harvests ([LULUCF](#)).

But neither of these rules can ensure that burning woody biomass reduces emissions compared to fossil fuels and is compatible with the EU's aims to use limited resources more efficiently. Incentivising biomass use will further increase forest harvests and distort the market for forest-based products.

"The revamp of the Renewable Energy Directive was the EU's chance to deal with some of the most egregious examples of biomass use which have been discredited countless times by scientists. On this, they have largely failed."

Today's decision also goes directly against the aims of the Paris Agreement that strives to keep global warming below 1.5 Degrees and recognises the important role of forests in removing carbon from the atmosphere, known as carbon sinks. The Agreement therefore requires that states maintain and enhance forest carbon sinks. Today's decision however encourages countries almost unreservedly to do the exact opposite: increase harvests, leading to decreasing forest carbon sinks.

"Biomass is the most glaring loophole in today's decision. It undermines the EU's commitments to the Paris Agreement and sends a bad international signal that converting coal plants to biomass plants is somehow positive."

"A few laudable forest champions fought hard for a strong policy, but they were outnumbered by those defending the forestry sector of the Nordic countries and vested interests of the energy sector. We are now stuck with an inadequate policy for ten years, so it is up to Member States to take additional measures to set things straight. At the same time, with its upcoming decision on the Governance Regulation, the EU should agree on strict reporting requirements on the use of biomass for energy," said Zuidema.