American experts alert EU politicians of bioenergy policy risks

Title

In November BirdLife Europe and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) hosted Dogwood Alliance, an American NGO and Greenpeace Canada in Brussels. The purpose of the visit was to present evidence of damages to the climate and environment the EU renewable energy policy is driving in North America. The visit provided an opportunity to discuss the risks that the upcoming EU climate and energy package present.

North America hosts amazing forests, which are home to a rich biodiversity. In the last decade the continent has become the biggest exporter of wood pellets in the world and the market demand is dominated by the EU. A key reason is the EU's commitment to source 20% of its energy from renewable sources, where biomass makes up more than half of the target. However, as explained by different green NGOs, biomass is not an optimal source. It is responsible for driving fast degradation of forests in the EU and in North America (USA and Canada). Cutting down forests not only leads to the destruction of habitats of threatened species and the loss of biodiversity, but it also releases CO2 emissions. Indeed, biomass is wrongly seen as CO2 neutral, while in practice C02 emissions are released when cutting forests to produce pellets and when burning pellets to produce heating. The balance, if all these elements are properly accounted for, is that biomass can in some cases emit more C02 than traditional fossil fuels.

Sini Eräjää, EU Bioenergy Policy Officer at BirdLife Europe stated, "If we are to mitigate climate change, we definitely need ambitious targets after 2020, higher than the current ones. But we also need to carefully look at the evidence collected within the current renewable energy policy. For the next policy to meet its sustainable objective, the role of biomass must be limited within the EU energy mix."

The Brussels visit brought together Members of the European Parliament from different political groups, representatives from Permanent Representations to the EU, AEBIOM - the European bioenergy producers association and American and European green NGOs. After a meeting with AEBIOM a mutual understanding was reached stating that "Biomass plays a role and will continue to play a key role in the energy supply beyond 2020. Our responsibility is to make sure it happens under a sustainable framework.