

Scientists highlight carbon risk from Biomass energy

Title

On 29 March 2012, BirdLife Europe, the European Environmental Bureau and FERN organised a breakfast event about correct carbon accounting. Several top scientists, amongst whom a member of the Scientific Committee of the European Environment Agency, told the audience that burning biomass for energy could release more carbon emissions than it saves.

Increasing amounts of biomass are being burned in Europe because it is the cheapest way to fulfil the EU 2020 renewable energy target. By then, biomass is likely to constitute over half of the renewable energy mix in Europe. However, at the event hosted by Linda McAvan MEP (UK, S&D), Bas Eickhout MEP (Netherlands, Greens) and Fiona Hall MEP (UK, ALDE) the audience heard that biomass is not actually carbon neutral as currently assumed by EU policies and that this 'accounting error' could seriously undermine the EU climate goals.

A recent [US study](#) found that it takes at least 35 to 50 years for emissions from biomass to be re-absorbed while a lot of wood pellets from the US are being exported to Europe to fill our growing demand for biomass. Burning wood often releases as much, if not more, carbon than fossil fuels, and it can take many decades for this to be reabsorbed by new growth. This casts a shadow over the usefulness of biomass as an energy source over the period in which emission reductions are vital.

Different biomass feedstocks have very different carbon footprints; therefore, environmental NGOs urge EU decision makers to account for all emissions of biomass and to only stimulate biomass that truly reduces emissions without harming biodiversity and ecosystems.

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