

NGOs urge the European Commission to change unsustainable bioenergy policy

Civil society finally had the opportunity to officially voice its opinion about the sustainability of all forms of bioenergy as the European Commission in February opened a public consultation^[1] on a new EU policy on sustainable bioenergy for the period 2020-2030. BirdLife Europe's^[2] contribution to the consultation closing today stresses the fact that the current use of bioenergy in the EU is not sustainable and that new policy measures are urgently needed.

In its contribution^[3], BirdLife Europe acknowledges that sustainable bioenergy has a role to play in Europe's transition to a renewable and more efficient energy. However, as one of the first NGOs^[4] to flag the issues arising from bioenergy use, it also highlights the dangers. For example, increasing biomass use for energy could not only lead to a failure to cut CO₂ emissions but also to wider environmental damage through direct and indirect land use change, biodiversity loss and changes in forest management.

BirdLife Europe, together with other European NGOs call the EU to introduce four main safeguards for bioenergy use as part of the EU's 2030 climate and energy policies:

- introduce a cap to limit the use of biomass for energy production to levels that can be sustainably supplied;
- ensure efficient and optimal use of biomass resources, in line with the principle of cascading use;
- ensure carbon emission savings and apply correct accounting of all bioenergy emissions
- introduce comprehensive, binding environmental and social sustainability criteria.

Highest environmental risks are related to the use of crops grown on agricultural land and trees from additional harvests for bioenergy, driving increasing pressure on land and forests. BirdLife Europe calls for exclusion and phase out of these biomass sources from energy use and focus on the use of agricultural and forestry residues, bio-based waste streams and manure.

BirdLife Europe also highlights that measures promoting sustainable forest management or agriculture as such are not viable solutions to guarantee sustainable and climate friendly bioenergy and not the right starting point for a new policy. The policy should rather focus on what kind of biomass and how much is burned for energy.

Ariel Brunner, Senior Head of Policy at BirdLife Europe, stated: *"Bioenergy in the EU has gone badly wrong. Instead of wise use of waste streams we have been promoting everything from deforestation to conversion of natural grasslands to intensive monocultures*

to land grabs. It's time for fundamental change”

Trees Robijns, Senior Agriculture and Bioenergy Officer added: *“Biomass and land producing it are scarce resources underpinning the circular economy, and life itself. We cannot just burn it regardless of availability, environmental and social impacts and competition with other uses.*

Ariel Brunner will be presenting BirdLife Europe’s views on sustainable bioenergy at the European Commission stakeholder conference on 12 May. **ENDS**

For further information, please contact:

Ariel Brunner, Senior Head of Policy, BirdLife Europe

Ariel.Brunner@birdlife.org

+32 (0) 2 238 50 92

Trees Robijns, Senior Agriculture and Bioenergy Officer

trees.robijns@birdlife.org

+32 (0) 2 238 50 91

Notes:

[1] European Commission consultation: Preparation of a sustainable bioenergy policy for the period after 2020 <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/consultations/preparation-sustainable-bioenergy-policy-period-after-2020>

[2] BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 47 countries, including all EU Member States, and a leader in bird conservation. Through its unique local to global approach BirdLife Europe delivers high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people. <http://www.birdlife.org/europe-and-central-asia>

[3] BirdLife Europe’s contribution to the European Commission consultation is available here http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/bioenergysurvey2016_birdlife_europe_response.pdf

[4] You can read more about BirdLife Europe’s Bioenergy policy on

- Our website <http://www.birdlife.org/europe-and-central-asia/policy/bioenergy>
- EUBioenergy.com a joint project developed by BirdLife Europe, European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and Transport & Environment (T&E) –
 - Latest blogpost on our response to the European Commission consultation <https://eubioenergy.com/2016/05/10/its-crunch-time-for-the-eus-new-bioenergy-policy/>

Key publication:

- Joint NGO Paper – Pitfalls and Potentials: The role of bioenergy in the EU climate and energy policy post-2020
http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Bioenergy_post_2020_NGO%20Orecs.pdf