

Media advisory

New report reveals drivers of UK biomass expansion as Brazilian Suzano Papel e Celulose gain approval for largest GM tree plantation trial

London/Barcelona 14 May 2012: Earlier this month Brazilian pulp and paper giant Suzano Papel e Celulose gained approval for the world's most advanced trial of genetically modified (GM) trees to meet the global demands of biomass energy expansion [1].

A new report from Carbon Trade Watch, "Nothing Neutral Here: Large-scale biomass subsidies in the UK and the role of the EU ETS", raises critical concerns over the UK's unprecedented plans to increase biomass consumption as part of efforts to promote a 'green economy'. The report links the demand for biomass in the UK, the role of the EU's Emissions Trading System and the destructive expansion of industrial monoculture tree plantations around the world.

On 26 April the UK government launched its new bioenergy strategy, claiming that energy from biomass can make an important contribution to the decarbonisation of the economy [2]. Carbon Trade Watch reveals how the British biomass boom is set to benefit polluters and cause widespread environmental destruction through land grabs and deforestation.

The author of the report, Joseph Zacune stated: "The British government seems determined to lock the country into a dirty energy pathway that fuels climate chaos, arguably the greatest modern day threat to human survival. Campaigners are warning that the government's new bioenergy strategy will require around 80 million tonnes of wood for biomass energy that would unleash land grabs and cause major emissions from deforestation. Why should we continue to subsidise polluters in favour of appropriate energy solutions like wind, solar and tidal energy?"

UK-based power companies use the biomass carbon neutrality myth in the EU Emissions Trading System to justify their shift towards biomass and greenwash their polluting activities. This deceptive accounting undermines analysis that places emissions from biomass on a par with fossil fuels [3]. Across the UK, local communities and activists have been campaigning to stop biomass-fuelled power plants. The new report aims to help link these UK campaigns with campaigns against supplier companies specifically in the US, Canada and Brazil.

Tamra Gilbertson co-director of Carbon Trade Watch added: "Climate justice struggles bring together grassroots networks, groups and individuals that are demanding tough action against the root causes of climate change and for a truly sustainable, affordable and democratic energy system. To continue the same over-production and over-consumption of energy is a dead-end but governments continue to ensure that profit-seeking corporations control the energy systems and pollute our skies."

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This is the first of three in a series of reports from Carbon Trade Watch to be launched ahead of Rio+20 that links the role of the EU ETS with the green economy debate <http://www.carbontradewatch.org/articles/nothing-neutral-here-large-scale-biomass-subsidies-in-the-uk-and-the-role-of-the-eu-ets.html> *

Notes to editors:

[1] Geiver, S., 03 May 2012, Eucalyptus developer begins final field trial, Biomass Power & Thermal, http://www.biomassmagazine.com/articles/6317/eucalyptus-developer-begins-final-field-trial?utm_source=Copy+of+GE+Trees+Appeal+4%2F25%2F12&utm_campaign=GE+tree+s+appeal+3%2F22%2F12&utm_medium=email

[2] UK Government Department of Energy and Climate Change, UK Bioenergy Strategy 2012, 26 April 2012 <http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/meeting-energy-demand/bio-energy/5142-bioenergy-strategy-.pdf>

[3] According to the Massachusetts Environmental Energy Alliance, based on statistics from the US Environmental Protection Agency, 'smokestack' carbon dioxide emissions from biomass are estimated to be on average 50 per cent higher than those of coal. <http://massenvironmentalenergy.org/docs/MEEA%20biomass%20briefing%20October%20update.pdf>

Scientists, including those from the EU's European Environment Agency (EEA), have also shown that bioenergy can substantially increase the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, just like burning coal, oil and gas if harvesting takes place on an industrial scale.

<http://www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/governance/scientific-committee/sc-opinions/opinions-on-scientific-issues/sc-opinion-on-greenhouse-gas>