

## For the sake of people, nature, and the climate, it's time to take forest biomass out of the Renewable Energy Directive

The majority of energy the EU counts toward renewable energy targets isn't clean – it's

highly polluting heat and power from burning wood and other biomass. Energy from burning biomass is three times the energy from wind, and six times the combined energy of solar thermal and photovoltaic. Biomass burning emits more than 400 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> each year, yet this carbon pollution is counted as “zero” under the RED and the ETS. Increasing wood demand means the biomass and wood pellet industry no longer relies on industrial wood waste, but increasingly burns trees (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

European Commission scientists have warned that logging and burning forest biomass is undermining the EU's efforts to mitigate climate change and restore nature. Burning forest biomass is not “carbon neutral.” Logging and burning forests emits carbon pollution quickly, while growing trees to re-sequester CO<sub>2</sub> takes decades to centuries. Meanwhile, the EU's forest and land carbon sink is shrinking (becoming less negative; Figure 2), a disaster for nature and climate.

EU taxpayers pay around €17 billion a year in renewable energy subsidies for bioenergy, money that mostly goes to inefficient and polluting biomass power plants. Because the EU counts energy on an “input” basis toward renewable energy targets, it rewards the most inefficient technology: biomass. Thus, while only about 26% of the energy contained in wood is converted to electricity in a biomass power plant, 100% of the energy in the wood burned, all of which emits CO<sub>2</sub> and air pollution, is counted as renewable energy. Wood-burning is also the largest source of fine particulate pollution in the EU, accounting for more than half the air pollution that sickens and kills many thousands of EU citizens each year.

Already, more than half the wood harvested in the EU is burned for energy, putting forests under unprecedented stress. Billions in bioenergy subsidies are driving a sharp increase in clearcutting and ecosystem destruction both the EU (Figure 3), and in North America and Russia, which export wood pellets to the EU. Some argue the EU can replace Russian fossil fuels with wood – even though replacing just 10% of fossil fuels imported from Russia would require a 60% increase in wood burning. Increased logging will kill any hope of increasing forest stocks for climate mitigation and restoring degraded ecosystems. The EU's progress toward renewable energy targets must not be undermined by a new surge in wood-burning driven by the war in Ukraine.

**It's time for the EU to stop counting forest biomass, which is driving forest destruction and increasing emissions, toward the EU's renewable energy targets.**



Figure 1. Cycleenergy CHP and pellet plant, Erndtebrück, Germany, 50.994581, 8.319079. Photo: Celine Grommerch, FDA

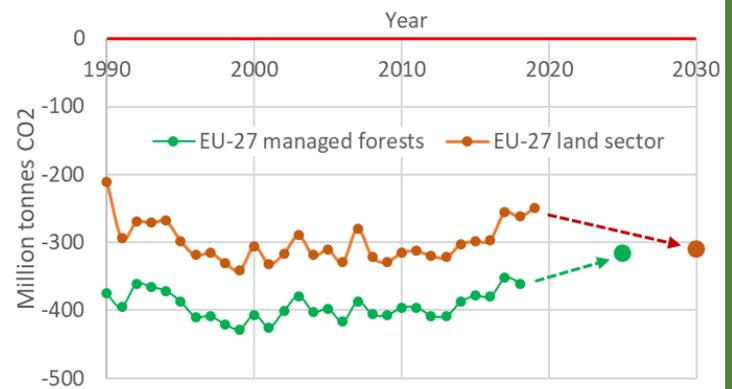


Figure 2. Decline in the EU's land and forest carbon sink (including harvested wood products). Less negative values (upward tilt) show a *decline* in annual carbon uptake. The EU's 2025 Forest Reference Level (green dot) allows further loss of forest carbon, meaning the EU is unlikely to achieve its 2030 land sink target of -310 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> (brown dot).



Figure 3. Clearcut in Jarva County, Estonia, at 58.753007, 25.761585. Photo: Almuth Ernsting, Biofuelwatch.

<sup>1</sup> [https://forestdefenders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FDA-Future-on-Fire-April-5-2022\\_final.pdf](https://forestdefenders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FDA-Future-on-Fire-April-5-2022_final.pdf)