

## BURNING FOREST BIOMASS UNDERMINES CLIMATE, HEALTH, AND NATURE GOALS

**The EU is destroying forests for no gain. Burning trees for energy harms climate, biodiversity, and air quality, costs billions, and threatens wood product manufacturing. EU leaders must stop treating forest biomass as renewable energy and get serious about real climate solutions.**

EU climate policy seeks to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions via the Renewable Energy Directive (RED), and increase CO<sub>2</sub> uptake by forests and other lands via the LULUCF Regulation. But logging and burning forest biomass ('primary woody biomass') for heat and power, which provides a significant share of the EU's renewable energy, *increases* emissions and *reduces* the forest carbon sink. EU data show burning trees and other wood for energy has more than doubled since 1990. Since 2002, when the EU first promoted burning wood for 'renewable' electricity, it has lost 25% of its land carbon sink. Most member states are losing or have lost their land carbon sinks. In several, this loss is related to biomass logging (e.g. Austria, Estonia, Finland).

**The EU must immediately act to reverse loss of the land sink, or most countries will fail to reach 2030 climate targets and 'net zero' by 2050. Policymakers must end perverse incentives that harm forests.**

Domestic heating, most of it in the poorest regions of Europe, accounts for the largest share of wood-burning in the EU. While still a necessity for many, wood-burning should be replaced with truly clean energy as soon as possible. But member states have no incentive to end dependence on forest biomass as long as they count it toward targets. To trigger a clean energy revolution, policymakers must end this loophole.

### **Burning wood for heating and in power plants is:**

**Expensive:** EU citizens provide around €17 billion per year in bioenergy subsidies each year. Countries should instead allocate these funds to big structural wins like insulating homes and ramping up wind, solar, and heat pumps. For example, a new analysis shows redirecting €856.5 million in biomass subsidies could insulate 25% of homes in the Netherlands (with 30% subsidy), delivering €132 per home in savings per year.

**Bad for other industries:** Wood products manufacturers are issuing increasingly sharp warnings that subsidies and special treatment of bioenergy is causing wood shortages and harming other industries.

**Bad for health:** As the EU's largest source of air pollution, wood-burning contributes to hundreds of thousands of deaths per year. The European Commission estimates reducing air pollution would not just save lives but would also yield health and environmental benefits of €38 to €123 billion annually and significantly increase GDP. But the EC's data show this can't occur without greatly reducing wood-burning.

**Bad for the climate and environment:** The forest carbon sink is shrinking, putting climate targets out of reach. Ecosystems and biodiversity are crashing; only 14% of the EU's protected forest habitats are in adequate condition. Counting forest biomass as renewable and subsidizing it monetizes logging so-called 'low value' wood, but it's exactly this kind of wood that provides habitat and carbon storage crucial for ecosystem function. However, proposed biomass 'sustainability criteria' in the RED don't prevent destructive harvesting, and wood burned for home heating is not subject to *any* criteria in the RED.

**Driving illegal and destructive logging:** An investigation by the New York Times showed biomass companies are illegally logging the EU's last ancient forests, grinding up ancient trees in protected areas for wood pellets. Another investigation showed how logging for pellets is destroying Estonia's protected forests. A BBC documentary exposed how Drax is clearcutting Canadian primary forests for pellets it sells in the EU.

**A tree can only be cut and burned once, but support for genuine clean energy is a long-term and truly sustainable investment that saves forests, the climate, human lives, and the economy.**

### **THE SOLUTIONS ARE CLEAR - THE TRILOGUE MUST:**

- Adopt a definition of primary woody biomass that is science-based and *implementable*
- Cap and phase out (by 2027-2030) primary woody biomass counted toward targets
- In the meantime, stop subsidies for energy from primary woody biomass
- Exclude primary and old growth forests, and wetlands, as biomass sourcing areas

**FOREST  
DEFENDERS  
ALLIANCE**