

EU renewable energy policy and the pressure this is putting on forests

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- **Scale of activity:** European
- **Actor/s:** NGO
- **State of the activity:** started in 1995, ongoing
- **Keywords.** bioenergy, impact of EU policies on forests, campaigning,



Summary

Fern was founded in 1995 to ensure EU policies are working in service of forests and the people that depend on forests. Fern works to achieve environmental and social justice with a focus on forests and forest peoples' rights in the policies and practices of the European Union

Description of activities

The need to reduce fossil fuel use is clear, but alternatives such as land-based biofuels and large scale biomass can be just as bad for the environment, the climate and people. Wood has always been an important source of local small-scale energy, but in recent years industrial use of biomass has been promoted by the EU as a 'renewable energy source'. This has put an increasing pressure on forests and people in Europe and globally, as shown in this [report](#).

EU renewable energy policy currently drives increasing demands for biomass, but land and forests are already under pressure from increasing hunger for natural resources for the production of food, feed and materials. If the EU is to meet its aim of halting deforestation and forest degradation by 2030, it cannot continue to subsidise demand for yet another commodity that drives deforestation: biomass.

Fern investigates the impacts of woody biomass production and use in Europe and globally, and explores how EU policies should respond to concerns. Fern promotes civil society dialogue on how to achieve a socially and environmentally sustainable EU climate and energy policy.

Outlook

Challenges. The EU is considering how it can meet a new target of having at least 27 per cent of energy from renewable sources by 2030. Great caution will need to be applied if biomass is to be considered as part of that energy mix. Forests have an important climate function and wood is a scarce natural resource which emits greenhouse gases when burned for energy. This negative effect is not matched by the climate benefits that the biomass sector claims. On top of this, partly because of a lack of EU rules, the sourcing, production and use of biomass currently cause negative environmental and social impacts.

Next steps. The EU is currently discussing new sustainability criteria for bioenergy, which would help ensure that the renewable energy directive does not put unsustainable pressure on forests and land. Fern is working to ensure that the new EU climate and energy package limits the use of bioenergy to sustainable levels and only uses feedstocks and methods that reduce emissions. We also aim to ensure that targets for emissions reductions in other sectors are not compromised.

Source and contact

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