



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

The Rt Hon Edward Davey MP
Secretary of State

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My Department has been receiving correspondence asking that we "stop subsidising forms of bioenergy that are dirtier than coal" that I understand is a Friends of the Earth campaign.

Climate change is one of the most serious threats we face and we all need to act on it now. The UK has adopted ambitious climate change targets, committing to an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050 from 1990 levels. Emissions are already down by 29% on 1990 levels. The UK Government is taking action to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, whilst creating a prosperous low-carbon future with clean air, clean fuel, clean transport and more efficient use of energy.

The Government's aim, in line with the 2012 Bioenergy Strategy, is to support sustainably produced biomass that delivers real greenhouse gas savings, is cost effective and that takes account of wider impacts across the economy.

The Bioenergy Strategy concluded that we should take a cautious approach to biomass for electricity but that it has the potential to be a quick and useful way to get coal off the system; that is why we consider conversions of coal plant to biomass to be a transitional technology, helping us to meet our renewables targets until such time as other, lower carbon technologies become more fully deployed. For this reason, support for biomass conversions under both the Renewables Obligation and Electricity Market Reform will end by 2027 at the latest.

The UK has some of the toughest bioenergy sustainability criteria in the world. We are preparing to bring in mandatory sustainability criteria for those energy generators supplying biomass under our renewable energy support schemes from April next year. The criteria for biomass includes a greenhouse gas savings requirement and a requirement to source woodfuel from sustainably managed forests. These criteria will take into account a range of social, economic and environmental issues including protecting biodiversity, land use rights, sustainable harvesting and regeneration rates.

The DECC report referred to in the campaign is the Biomass Emissions and Counterfactual model (BEAC), which investigates the impact on carbon emissions of biomass sourced from North America to produce electricity. This model has made an important contribution to refining our understanding and has contributed to putting the UK at the forefront in developing a comprehensive policy and strategy for the sustainable use of biomass. We are committed to improving further the evidence base on the carbon impacts of bioenergy and we are already putting in place a programme of work to understand the likelihood of the various scenarios developed in the BEAC report.

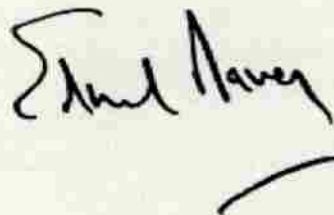
This approach, when sourced responsibly, can be used in a low carbon and sustainable way. As we made clear in our 2012 Bioenergy Strategy, biomass conversions can play an important, cost effective, transitional role in helping us to meet our renewable and decarbonisation goals.

Our support for sustainable biomass is part of our wider ambition for a mix of renewable energy sources. Around 19% of the UK electricity is now being provided by renewable resources and capacity is growing all the time; it has more than doubled since 2010, from 8.7 gigawatts (GW) at the end of June 2010 to nearly 19.7GW at the end of 2013.

Since 2010, an average of £7 billion has been invested each year in UK based renewable energy, compared to £3 billion a year in the previous parliament, helping up to meet our target of 15% renewable energy generation and creating up to 250,00 low carbon jobs by 2020. In fact, the UK is ranked as the best place in the world to invest in offshore wind and marine renewables; we are on track to deliver over 10GW of installed offshore wind capacity by 2020, enough to power almost 7 million homes.

Our decarbonisation efforts do not end there. The Government has also committed to preventing new unabated coal generating stations being built in the UK. The Government's has made available £1bn in capital funding to support the construction and operation of commercial scale CCS, to help reduce emissions from coal and gas by up to 90%.

I will be publishing this response on the Government website.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Davey', with a horizontal line underneath.

EDWARD DAVEY