

EU'S REVISED RENEWABLE ENERGY DIRECTIVE FAILS TO ADDRESS THE REALITIES OF THE CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY CRISIS

In the early hours of today, [European Union](#) (EU) negotiators concluded negotiations over the Renewable Energy Directive (RED). The outcome will not reduce the EU's **wood burning** addiction to comply with its renewable targets. It will continue to have dire impacts on forests, which will lead to increased climate breakdown and the destruction of nature. It remains painfully far from the stark realities of the climate crisis and failed to put a stop to rewarding the most destructive practices.

Martin Pigeon, Forests & Climate campaigner with Fern, said: *"When you're speeding towards a cliff and close to the edge, reducing your speed just a little won't save you. The **Renewable Energy** Directive will keep rewarding energy companies to burn millions of trees. Forests are our best chance of absorbing carbon dioxide, so today's decision will continue to worsen the climate and biodiversity crises, harm people's health, and actively undermine the EU's climate ambitions - all at the taxpayer's expense."*

Outcome of the negotiations

Once again, the biomass industry will get a free pass on the Emissions Trading System (ETS), releasing **millions** of tons of carbon into the atmosphere, that were stored in functioning carbon sinks, without having to pay a cent. Burning all biomass feedstocks, including the most destructive for climate and biodiversity ("Coarse Woody Debris", i.e. large pieces of dead wood), can still be counted by national governments towards their renewable energy targets.

In some aspects, the outcome is less ambitious than what the European Commission had proposed. The end of financial support to electricity from forest biomass has been considerably weakened, with loopholes like BioEnergy with Carbon Capture Storage (BECCS) confirmed. And the implementation of the 'cascading principle' (where wood is put into an order of value to create resource effectiveness) has been essentially gutted, meaning the principle will remain just a principle, without any teeth.

All the trees that do not have commercial value, but have immense climate and [nature](#) value, could remain game for the biomass industry, unless certain national legislations exclude certain primary or old growth forests.

A lack of public scrutiny leading to a negative compromise

The outcome strongly departs from the European Parliament's vote. Many Member States' officials used the Council and trilogue meetings' secrecy to defend their forestry sector and reward energy companies burning forests, despite the **climate** and biodiversity crisis.

"Who heard that Germany, Luxemburg and sometimes Belgium and the Netherlands actually defended forests during the negotiations? That Spain opposed capping the growth of the biomass industry? That twelve national governments endorsed a letter drafted by a

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*Finnish Energy official that repeated some of the lies of the industry's lobbyists? That Sweden, the Presidency, refused to even discuss the Commission's compromise proposals for a month, a position reflecting its own national interest more than that of all Member States? When the [European Parliament](#) debated these issues in public, its proposal ended up being much more in line with the emergency action warranted by the climate and biodiversity crisis. Secrecy defeats accountability, and for forests and democracy in Europe to have a **future**, this secretive way of reaching public decisions needs to stop,"* added Martin Pigeon.

A few positives

This revision of the EU's **Renewable Energy** Directive is, technically, an incremental improvement on the previous version. The one thing left in the European Parliament's initial mandate is the link made between national carbon sink targets (LULUCF) and their use of [bioenergy](#), which has been strengthened. But Member States will be fined for the collapsing of their carbon sinks, not industry: if reaching LULUCF targets is impossible, taxpayers will simply pay twice.

Still on the positive side, "direct financial support" will no longer be possible for energy from wood that is normally used by other industries ("industrial grade roundwood"), or roots and stumps, which was the one concession given to the environment, since the extraction of tree roots and stumps is hugely harmful to forest soils and carbon stocks.

"Member States have just created future problem for themselves: incentivising bioenergy to this degree will mean failing to reach their national carbon sink targets, jeopardising the EU's climate neutrality target," added Pigeon.

All eyes on national lawmakers

A striking feature of this revision of the [forest](#) biomass rules is the importance given to national legislation. From the cascading principle to the definition of industrial grade roundwood and the protection of primary and old growth forests, national legislation is given supremacy - which, in a Single Market context, will keep pushing environmental standards down. On the other hand, Member States can establish additional, stricter sustainability criteria for themselves as well, which is important.

*"The transposition of the directive in national law will give key opportunities to curtail the negative impacts of the **RED**. We call on national lawmakers to acknowledge the clear scientific evidence that burning trees negatively affects the climate in the crucial next decades,"* said Pigeon.

Source: [fern](#)

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