

IEA Bioenergy Response to Chatham House report “Woody Biomass for Power and Heat: Impacts on the Global Climate

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Over 125 academics join IEA Bioenergy urging Chatham House to reconsider flawed policy recommendations

Monday, 13 March 2017.

A recent [report](#) by UK think-tank ‘Chatham House’ on the impact of bioenergy on global climate adds to the increasing number of misleading statements in the context of EU discussions about its energy future. On Monday, the International Energy Agency Bioenergy Technology Collaboration Programme (IEA Bioenergy) attracted more than 125 academic signatories from both sides of the Atlantic who consider that this report does not present an objective overview of the current state of scientific understanding with respect to the climate effects of bioenergy.

With the upcoming EU-level discussion on the future of European energy, publications analyzing the contribution of bioenergy have proliferated, including the recent Chatham house report “[Woody Biomass for Power and Heat: Impacts on the Global Climate](#)”. IEA Bioenergy points out that this report does not present an objective overview of the current state of scientific understanding with respect to the climate effects of bioenergy. The report was analysed by members of the IEA Bioenergy Technology Collaboration Programme with globally recognised expertise in biomass production, carbon accounting and sustainability of biomass. They determined that the major conclusions and policy-specific recommendations are based on unsubstantiated claims and flawed arguments.

The IEA Bioenergy experts identified 3 major areas of concern:

- 1. Climate effects and carbon neutrality of bioenergy.** The report gives an inaccurate interpretation of the impact of harvesting on forest carbon stock, proposes a misguided focus on short-term carbon balances and overstates the climate change mitigation value of unharvested forests. It also assumes that forests would remain unharvested and continue to grow if no biomass was used for bioenergy, which is unrealistic.
- 2. Bioenergy and forest products markets and systems.** The report considers roundwood to be the main woody bioenergy feedstock, but the on-ground reality is that in the EU, by-products and residues from silviculture are the most common type of feedstock. Furthermore, bioenergy can prompt forest owners to plant more trees and invest in sustainable forest management practices. The report largely overlooks the role bioenergy can play in supporting the urgently needed energy system transition.

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3. Sustainability criteria. The report fails to acknowledge that forest bioenergy is not a single entity but an integral part of the forest management, forestry and energy-industry system that also produces material products. It is therefore unreasonable to expect that the maintenance of the carbon stock in forests would be guaranteed by sustainability criteria applied to the bioenergy category only.

In the report's general conclusion, it is proposed that "Sustainability criteria should be used to restrict support to mill residues that are produced from legal and sustainable sources". IEA Bioenergy, together with 125 scientists, strongly disagree with this recommendation, and urge Chatham House to reconsider their recommendations. "*We invite Chatham House to engage in a more thoughtful and substantive discussion with technical experts like IEA Bioenergy and review the recommendations. The development of bioenergy and the bioeconomy as a whole are critical in order to realise a low carbon economy*", said Kees Kwant, Chairman of IEA Bioenergy.

Sustainable production of biomass is possible and can be enlarged in an integrated way with food, and other human demands, as was presented recently by [FAO, IRENA and IEA Bioenergy](#). Long-term low carbon scenarios have been developed and are described in the IEA World Energy Outlook 2016. Biomass as a sustainable resource for products and energy is crucial to enable a low carbon economy to be established in a sustainable way.

- Summary of IEA Bioenergy response to the Chatham House report – see [Chatham House response 3pager](#)
- Supporting Document – see [Chatham House response supporting doc](#)
- Full list of all signatories Signatory – see [List of supporters for the IEA Bioenergy response to Chatham house report](#). In total, more than 125 academics supported the IEA Bioenergy response, of which 84 are Professors. In addition, support was received from over 80 non-academic signatories from amongst others forest land owner associations, forest products associations, bioenergy associations and policy makers.
- IEA Bioenergy letter to Chatham House – see [letter to Chatham House from IEA Bioenergy](#)

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About IEA Bioenergy

IEA Bioenergy operates within the IEA energy technology and R&D collaboration programme. This programme facilitates co-operation among IEA Member and non-Member countries to develop new and improved energy technologies and introduce them into the market. The work of IEA Bioenergy is structured in a number of Tasks, which include Task 38 on *Climate Change Effects of Biomass and Bioenergy Systems*, Task 40 on *Sustainable biomass markets and international bioenergy trade to support the biobased economy* and Task 43 on *Biomass Feedstocks for Energy Markets*. For more information see www.ieabioenergy.com



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