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Biomass leaders call for change following UK Government pledge for net-zero emissions by 2050



Chairman of the UK Pellet Council and Managing Director of LC Energy Mark Lebus

Following the Government's announcement to make the UK the first G7 nation to legislate for net-zero emissions, biomass industry leaders are now calling on ministers to urgently take heed of key findings from the Renewable Energy Association's (REA) newly-published *Bioenergy Strategy* report, and recognise biomass as the most fit-for-purpose, proven solution to deliver heat decarbonisation when the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) ends in 2021.

With a legally binding agreement now expected to put the UK on course to end its contribution to climate change in around 30 years, the UK Pellet Council (UKPC) and Wood Heat Association (WHA) are urging the Government to acknowledge biomass heat as the best way forward to meet carbon emission targets (as set out in the 5th Carbon Budget), and the preferred, most proven and commercially-viable option available to deliver future savings.

Supported by findings from the REA report, the two trade bodies will deliver *Biomass Heat Works*, a targeted, industry-backed campaign to propel biomass to the forefront of ministers' agendas, in particular, for decarbonising heat in rural and off-gas grid areas.

It will highlight the need for bioenergy, in particular biomass heat, to play a much more prominent role in the country's total energy mix, especially post-RHI, given the impact it has had on the UK's decarbonisation targets. It is often the lowest carbon option available to rural homes and businesses, and provides decarbonisation opportunities for on-gas grid applications such as hospitals, schools and heat networks.

Mark Lebus, chairman of the UK Pellet Council and managing director of LC Energy, explained, "The evidence is compelling. Bioenergy could, as part of a longer-term vision, continue to play a highly-

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effective role in cutting UK carbon emissions, become the preferred option when shaping future policy and see consumer demand increase from 5.5% in 2020 to 15% in 2032*, creating over 100,000 jobs. Looking ahead, biomass heating must be at the centre of all rural economic and energy initiatives given that the RHI scheme ends shortly.” He continued, “In the context of a climate emergency, ministers cannot afford to solely rely on as yet unproven technologies which are years away from commercialisation. Biomass is already a well-established energy resource in the UK, especially in rural areas, so it would be ludicrous not to consider it in future policy. We have made a promising start transitioning to low carbon with the RHI scheme but with only 20% of targets achieved, ministers simply have not got time to deliberate our country’s future. We need to drive change quickly using biomass heat as a proven technology. Our campaign will stimulate discussion with Government and provide a real case for sustainable biomass within the UK’s future heat decarbonisation strategy.”

No proposals have yet been forwarded by Government to succeed the current RHI scheme. At a time when the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has confirmed that the UK is not on track to meet its 4th and 5th carbon budgets, action is desperately needed.

Both the UKPC and WHA agree that bioenergy technologies, like modern biomass boilers and fuels, would offer an immediate, high-impact and affordable route to tackling these challenges. And, like many other leading European countries who have seen huge success supporting their biomass industries, it could stimulate new business growth in the UK’s rural communities.

Neil Harrison, chairman of the WHA and director of re:heat added, “Biomass is the most workable, commercially-viable and cost-effective means to meeting carbon emission targets, but the UK Government, whilst having seen some development and a shift towards sustainable biomass over recent years, still has a lot of ground to make up. Europe has, for a long time, considered biomass as its first choice, go-to resource and it’s essential that our own MPs follow suit. The UK should be achieving much higher levels of renewable heat than it currently is, and we can address this by specifying biomass. Whilst we aren’t clear as to future decarbonisation strategies, now is the time to deliver a positive and targeted campaign and call for biomass to be recognised.”

Biomass, and the wider bioenergy industry, have become two of the UK’s fastest growing economies over the last decade with an estimated 46,000 jobs across the wood heating supply chain. The second interim *Bioenergy Strategy* report states that potential employment for UK bioenergy could reach approximately 80,000 by 2026 and over 100,000 by 2032, with biomass heat equating to 7,500 and 13,400 respectively*.

References:

- <https://www.bioenergy-strategy.com/publications> (The report builds upon bioenergy’s already impressive credentials by outlining its potential contribution to the UK’s energy mix in 2032 and beyond. The delivery of the outlined vision would see the demand for bioenergy’s overall energy contribution increase from 5.5% in 2020 to 15% in 2032 creating over 100,000 jobs.)



18 June 2019



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Richard P. Vlosky, Ph.D.

Director, Louisiana Forest Products Development Center

Crosby Land & Resources Endowed Professor of Forest Sector Business Development

Room 227, School of Renewable Natural Resources

Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803

Phone (office): (225) 578-4527; Fax: (225) 578-4251; Mobile Phone: (225) 223-1931

Web Site: www.LFPDC.lsu.edu

