



The REA has identified several errors in a *BBC News* article (['Biofuels: MPs to consider subsidies for power stations'](#) – 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013) on the use of biomass and bioliquids to generate renewable power in the UK. The issue was also discussed, with a disappointing lack of balance, on BBC Radio 4's *Today Programme* of the same day.

REA Chief Executive Gaynor Hartnell represented the industry viewpoint in an interview with BBC Radio 5 Live at 07:24 this morning (listen again until 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013 [here](#)).

The first three points listed below are presented as fact in the article, when they are in fact misleading. The latter three points are presented as viewpoints from commentators with which the REA disagrees.

**1. "MPs are due to decide on Wednesday"**

There was nothing new on which MPs were deciding. The Renewables Obligation tends to be amended every year and this year the amendment implemented revisions to support levels for all renewable generation technologies.

**2. "The policy was shaped hurriedly, and failed to take into account many factors, especially under-estimating the value of intact rainforests in mitigating climate change."**

This is incorrect. Both the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (for transport biofuels) and the Renewables Obligation (which covers the use of liquid biofuels for renewable power, as well as solid biomass and other renewable power technologies) have robust sustainability criteria built into the policies, which DfT and DECC regularly review to keep up with the latest science and legislation from the European Commission.

Rainforest clearance is expressly prohibited under these sustainability criteria. In fact, demand for woody biomass for power generation actually drives up sustainable forest management, improving the carbon capture and biodiversity properties of forests.

**3. "Using land for biofuel palm oil would simply increase global demand for palm oil overall, and that would lead to more rainforest being felled to meet demand elsewhere."**

Regrettably deforestation has been taking place long before policies were developed to encourage the use of biofuels. The REA recommends that all forms of undesirable land use change are controlled.

**4. "DECC says power plants should not gain more than 4% of their power**



**from palm oil, but campaigners say that will still double the UK's annual imports of the oil."**

[DfT figures](#) show that less than 0.1% of biofuels used for UK transport are derived from palm oil, and this palm oil must be from sustainable sources. According to [Ofgem figures](#), a small quantity of palm kernel expeller (PKE) is currently used for UK power generation, but at present, no palm oil. PKE is a waste product from the production of palm oil for food and other uses.

One company has reportedly received consent for two palm oil fuelled power stations in Bristol and Portland. This palm oil will have to be certified by the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil 'Green Palm' programme in order to count towards the UK's binding 2020 renewable energy target and/or receive support under the Renewables Obligation.

**5. Quote from European Environment Agency: "using land to produce plants for energy typically means that this land is not producing plants for other purposes... The potential consequences of this bioenergy accounting error are immense."**

Generally speaking the growing of energy crops results in increased investment in agriculture, brings more land into productive use and increases yields. To qualify as renewable energy, it is not possible to plant on ecologically significant land such as rainforest or land important for its biodiversity characteristics.

As previously stated, biomass makes forests more economically viable, not less, and hence actually reduces the rate at which they are cleared for other land uses. The developer is incentivised to increase overall forest cover to increase revenues in the long term, hence increasing the carbon abatement properties of that forest.

**6. "The firm says the pellets are waste – mainly from US timber production – but Drax alone will burn more wood than the entire output from the UK's timber industry. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds says the scale is too huge to support."**

There is massive excess capacity in the world's forests, partly because of declining markets for pulp and paper. Energy is an important new market which helps ensure these forests are managed properly. Well managed forests sustain livelihoods, jobs, biodiversity and carbon capture. Unmanaged forests are a fire and disease risk and are not net absorbers of carbon. When managed sustainably, forests absorb more carbon and encourage biodiversity. Biomass is another revenue stream to help pay for that management. Biomass can therefore bring swathes of forests in the UK and abroad under management, to everyone's benefit.