

Press release

Non-binding sustainability criteria: right incentives for sustainable biomass use

Brussels, 15 December 2009. The Consortium of European Biomass Associations (AEBIOM and EUBIA), European Forestry associations (EUSTAFAFOR, CEPF and NSF) and European Biogas Association (EBA) supports having non-binding criteria on sustainability for solid and gaseous biomass for heat and electricity. The Non-binding measures that are on the table at the moment, if proposed, would provide adequate guarantee for sustainability of biomass. Non additional burdens to the current challenge of adequate biomass mobilisation are needed.

The Directive for the promotion of energy from renewable sources [RES Directive] indicates that the European Commission, by December 2009, has to publish a report on sustainability criteria of solid biomass. The European Commission is now preparing such a report where it analyses whether sustainability criteria for biomass for heat and electricity are necessary.

Mr. Jean-Marc Jossart, Secretary General of the European Biomass Association (AEBIOM), says "It seems that the European Commission intends to provide an accurate analysis of the biomass use for heating, cooling and electricity and propose sensible measures such as the non-binding recommendations to the Member States on how to ensure the sustainability of biomass".

Only around 24% of biomass for energy comes from dedicated biomass from agriculture and forestry. The rest comes from agricultural and forestry by-products and residues – from other economic activities that take place despite the fact the residues are used or not. The forest area is steadily increasing by 500.000 hectares a year, which equals double the size of Luxembourg, and the growing stock in Europe increases with about 375 million cubic meters a year. Furthermore we are only using about 60% of the annual growth of our forests in Europe. This gives us possibilities to use more biomass from the European forests, which is produced in a sustainable way.

"In order to secure trade with sustainable biomass in Europe the most proportionate way to go is to make recommendations to Member States, based on existing criteria in the MCPE process", adds Mr Martin Lindell from the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFAFOR).

Mr Morten Thoroë, Secretary General of the Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) continues to support the European Commission ideas: "The risks of using unsustainable biomass are low. The EU biomass production is covered already by the existing framework for agriculture, forestry and environment. These include the cross-compliance rules, environmental legislation, sustainable forest management practice and voluntary forest certification scheme".

Furthermore, the consortium support the exclusion of small scale producers and users from the criteria (<1MW thermal and <1 MW electrical capacity) as the monitoring of those operators would be very costly and ineffective to implement. This ensures that the small scale producers do not have to bear costly administrative burdens that would have otherwise resulted into a switch to fossil fuels.

We understand the concerns about the growth of imports in the future. However, it is important to remember that less than 5 % of the current biomass consumption originates from imports. Furthermore, an increasing number of the third countries that lack an appropriate legislation for sustainability of biomass are introducing voluntary or mandatory schemes in the agriculture, forestry and energy sectors. We should support this development by encouraging the MS to import only biomass coming from sustainable agriculture and forests rather than restrict the whole European biomass sector due to the imports.

At present, the EU should focus on the efficiency measures, which are equally important to biomass for heating, cooling and electricity production as well as fossil fuels sectors. Any disadvantage towards biomass could lead to the switch from biomass to fossil fuels.

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