



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
Secretary of State

Department of Energy & Climate Change
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Our ref: [REDACTED]

Rhea Suh
President
Natural Resources Defense Council
40 West 20th Street
New York
NY 10011
USA
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17th November 2015

Dear Rhea Suh,

I am writing to you as you are head of the organisation leading the campaigns 'Our Southern Forests Aren't Fuel' and 'Save Our Southern Forests'. I wish to thank you and those that have contacted my Department, for bringing your concerns to my attention.

The UK will need to replace around a fifth of our existing electricity generation over the next decade – and as such we need to call on all the tools at our disposal to keep powering our economy. This means having a balanced energy policy, comprising of a mix of fossil fuels, such as oil and gas, and clean energy, as well as being more energy efficient.

Sustainable, low carbon bioenergy can help us to decarbonise, increase our energy security and keep costs down for consumers. Our support for biomass is part of our wider ambition for a mix of renewable energy sources.

To supplement UK supply, the UK industry has indeed built sustainable biomass supply chains with countries with forestry sectors, including in the United States. However, we do not believe that biomass is driving deforestation in the United States for the following reasons.

I am very aware of the importance of forests as a home, as a habitat, as a carbon store, as a natural protection from floods and hurricanes, as well as being an economic resource. This is why the UK only supports biomass that meets our greenhouse gas emissions savings requirement, which is sourced from sustainably managed forests. We were the first country in Europe to bring mandatory sustainability criteria into our legislation. Our criteria are designed to protect certain habitats from exploitation and take into account a range of social, economic and environmental issues including protecting biodiversity, land use rights and sustainable harvesting. The criteria require that biomass should only come from forests that have plans to be regrown, whether through natural or planted regeneration.

Furthermore, it is against the law to sell or use illegally logged timber anywhere in Europe. Together these legality and sustainability requirements counter the use of fuels derived from deforestation. To provide assurance that these sustainability processes are happening, generators must have their sustainability evidence audited annually.

As well as the legality and sustainability requirements, evidence shows that economic factors also make it unlikely that forests would be cut down for the sole purpose of biomass – it would not be affordable for a forester to do so. High quality wood such as saw logs and timber production command a significantly higher market price than residues, which makes high quality wood unattractive and unaffordable for use as fuel. Therefore market forces, both here and abroad, should mean mixed use of wood continues, with only lower value and low quality wood residues being commonly used for energy.

My Department is conducting a study that will help us understand whether or not certain high carbon scenarios are or could be happening in North America. The study will also consider whether UK demand for biomass is altering existing forestry practices in North America. I hope this study will be published before the end of the year and answer some of your concerns.

I intend to publish this response on my Department's web pages at www.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



AMBER RUDD