

To the Scottish Government,

Moratorium on the construction of large biomass power plants in Scotland

We, the undersigned, are writing an open letter to the Scottish Government, calling for a moratorium on the development of all large scale biomass plants in Scotland until truly independent research that confirms the sustainability claims made by developers of such plants, like Forth Energy, has been completed. Below we explain why.

The Scottish Government is currently considering proposals by Forth Energy to build four massive 'renewable' energy plants fueled by biomass, in Dundee, Edinburgh, Rosyth and Grangemouth. Yet research from the US seems to contradict the green claims made for the plants by Forth Energy.

All biomass plants start life with a 'carbon debt.' This is because carbon is released when the woody crops that fuel the plants are chopped down, processed, transported and burnt in the power stations as fuel. It takes many, many years for the trees to regrow and re-absorb the carbon emitted during this process, and therefore it also takes many, many years for a new biomass plant to 'pay off' its carbon debt. The latest research implies that for very large projects, that do not make efficient use of the heat produced during combustion, this carbon debt can take many, many years to pay off. Several decades in fact.

Forth Energy have been asked to provide detailed, specific, information on how long their proposed biomass plants will take to pay off the carbon debts associated with their proposed power plants. They have not responded, despite promising that they would release this information at a public meeting in Edinburgh. SISTECH, the 'independent' researchers hired by Forth Energy, have also been asked how long the proposed plants will take to pay off their carbon debts. They say they can't share this information because of 'commercial confidentiality.'

It is the Scottish Government who must decide on whether to give these plants permission to operate or not, yet we are not convinced that they can make this decision without having clear evidence that the Forth Energy proposals will deliver genuine carbon savings in the timescale that is demanded, both by the science of climate change, and the Scottish Government climate change legislation.

This decision is important. We urgently need carbon savings now - not many many decades into the future when it will be too late. Yet, if approved, these plants will attract hundreds of millions of pounds in public subsidies for generating 'renewable energy,' - just in their first few years of operation. If the Forth Energy Biomass power plants will only deliver meaningful carbon savings in 100 years time or longer, we believe that every tax payer in Scotland should be asking hard questions about whether the Forth Energy proposals will provide a good use of public money. Surely those hundreds of millions would be better spent on other projects that will deliver low carbon power straight away?

Given the current state of public finances, it is vital that taxpayers are not saddled with the costs of providing long term subsidies for projects that don't deliver when we need them to deliver. Only genuinely independent research, commissioned and paid for by the Scottish Government, and made publicly available, can provide a true picture of the carbon emissions associated with the Forth Energy proposals.

Until we have that information, we believe it would be irresponsible of the Scottish Government to make a decision on the Forth Energy biomass proposals. A moratorium must be put on the development of all large scale biomass plants in Scotland until we understand their true carbon impact in more detail.

Yours Sincerely,

Greener Leith
Friends of the Earth Scotland
Malcolm Chisholm MSP
Robin Harper MSP
Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP
Sheila Gilmore MP
Mark Lazarowicz MP
Cllr Gordon Munro
Cllr Rob Munn (Deputy Lord Provost)
Cllr Maggie Chapman
Ronald Reid (Secretary, Leith Central Community Council)
Jim Scanlon (Chair, Leith Links Community Council)
Leith Links Residents Association
Tower Wharf Residents Association
Friends of the Water of Leith Basin