



Coastwatchers

Eurobodalla's environment group

BURNING NATIVE FOREST WASTE FOR ELECTRICITY. Update October 2009

Biomass and Biopower

- **Biomass** is material produced by photosynthesis, or is an organic by-product from a waste stream.
- It includes forestry wastes (woody biomass).
- The term "**biopower**" has been coined for electricity produced from burning solid biomass to produce electricity and heat.

The international push for biopower

- Imperial College London has produced a Biopower Blueprint which aims to achieve 15% of electricity from biomass in OECD countries by 2020 (www.panda.org/powerswitch).
- WWF and the European Biomass Association AEBIOM have produced another biomass blueprint for achieving the 15% target by 2020 ("Biopowerswitch", www.ecop.ucl.ac.be/aebiom) which suggests raw material should include:
 - small dimension roundwood from thinnings and felling operations in existing forests
 - dedicated plantations of short rotation eg poplars and willows
 - wood residues eg bark chippings and wood shavings.
- The OECD target would require each OECD country to dedicate 5% of crop, forest or woodland area to growing biomass for energy.

The national push for biopower

- The report "A Clean Energy Future for Australia; a study by energy strategies for the Clean Energy Future Group" (March 2004) concludes
 - that biomass could make a substantial contribution to electricity, heat and transport in Australia without competing with food production
 - this could be achieved **without** using residues from native forests
 - more detailed work is needed to evaluate the bioenergy potential of different climatic regions of Australia.
- Despite this report native forest waste has been included as an eligible fuel in the Rudd Government proposed Mandatory Renewable Energy Target Scheme (MRET).
- The Federal Government *White Paper on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme* classifies **ALL** biofuels as carbon neutral i.e. carbon dioxide absorbed by the raw material while growing is supposed to offset that generated during subsequent combustion.
- However, the European blueprint "Biopowerswitch" data for emissions per kilowatt hour of electricity are based on life cycle emissions.
- Electricity production from Australian native forest biomass is **NOT** carbon neutral if the whole life cycle of this fuel is taken into account.
- It is estimated that burning native forest biomass creates at least four times the amount of

greenhouse emissions than burning coal for electricity.

- The National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) is an ardent supporter of burning forest industry waste to produce electricity.

The local push for biopower

- The European "Biopowerswitch" blueprint has been distributed on the south coast by South East Fibre Exports (SEFE) in support of their proposal.

a) Bega Shire:

- SEFE has submitted a development application to build a 5 megawatt wood fired power plant on the Eden chipmill site, with an environment impact statement to be submitted early in 2010.
- SEFE claims that the fuel for the burner will be the waste the chipmill generates plus some waste from other sawmills.
- The proposal threatens our SE native forests because:
 - SEFE data presented to Bega Council revealed that 71% of the burner feedstock would be sourced from native forest wood.
 - The waste material from the chipmill is available only because SEFE is currently producing and exporting one million tonnes of native forest woodchips a year.
 - To keep this plant fed, woodchipping will have to continue at this high level even if the international markets for the low quality Eden woodchips decrease.
 - If the SEFE power plant is built, economic forces could lead to woodchips being declared an appropriate fuel for the power station.

b) Eurobodalla Shire:

- A briefing paper for Senator Christine Milne in July 2009 refers to a table headed "Proposals for other biomass energy schemes in Australia" taken from the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) website. It makes reference to a South Moruya Power Station listing woodwaste as the source of wood.
- The 2009 Draft Eurobodalla Local Environment Plan permits - with consent - electricity generating works on land zoned RU3 Forestry.
- The 2009 NSW Auditor-General's report recommends that "Forests NSW investigate the potential for developing commercial markets for forest waste".
- The scene appears set to allow the "waste" from Eurobodalla native forests, currently trucked to the Eden chipmill, to become convenient feedstock for a local power station.

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