LETTER FROM SCIENTISTS TO THE EU PARLIAMENT REGARDING
FOREST BIOMASS
(updated January 14, 2018)

To Members of the European Parliament,

As the European Parliament commendably moves to expand the renewable energy directive, we strongly urge members of Parliament to amend the present directive to avoid expansive harm to the world’s forests and the acceleration of climate change. The flaw in the directive lies in provisions that would let countries, power plants and factories claim credit toward renewable energy targets for deliberately cutting down trees to burn them for energy. The solution should be to restrict the forest biomass eligible under the directive to residues and wastes.

For decades, European producers of paper and timber products have generated electricity and heat as beneficial by-products using wood wastes and limited forest residues. Since most of these waste materials would decompose and release carbon dioxide within a few years, using them to displace fossil fuels can reduce net carbon dioxide emissions to the atmosphere in a few years as well. By contrast, cutting down trees for bioenergy releases carbon that would otherwise stay locked up in forests, and diverting wood otherwise used for wood products will cause more cutting elsewhere to replace them.

Even if forests are allowed to regrow, using wood deliberately harvested for burning will increase carbon in the atmosphere and warming for decades to centuries – as many studies have shown – even when wood replaces coal, oil or natural gas. The reasons are fundamental and occur regardless of whether forest management is “sustainable.” Burning wood is inefficient and therefore emits far more carbon than burning fossil fuels for each kilowatt hour of electricity produced. Harvesting wood also properly leaves some biomass behind to protect soils, such as roots and small branches, which decompose and emit carbon. The result is a large “carbon debt.” Re-growing trees and displacement of fossil fuels may eventually pay off this “carbon debt’ but only over long periods. Overall, allowing the harvest and burning of wood under the directive will transform large reductions otherwise achieved through solar and wind into large increases in carbon in the atmosphere by 2050.

Time matters. Placing an additional carbon load in the atmosphere for decades means permanent damages due to more rapid melting of glaciers and thawing of permafrost, and more packing of heat and acidity into the world’s oceans. At a critical moment when countries need to be “buying time” against climate change, this approach amounts to “selling” the world’s limited time to combat it.

The adverse implications not just for carbon but for global forests and biodiversity are also large. More than 100% of Europe’s annual harvest of wood would be needed to supply just one third of the expanded renewable energy directive. Because demand for wood and paper will remain, the result will be increased degradation of forests around the world. The example Europe would set for other countries would be even more dangerous. Europe has been properly encouraging countries such as Indonesia and Brazil to protect their forests,
but the message of this directive is “cut your forests so long as someone burns them for energy.” Once countries invest in such efforts, fixing the error may become impossible. If the world moves to supply just an additional 3% of global energy with wood, it must double its commercial cuttings of the world’s forests.

By 1850, the use of wood for bioenergy helped drive the near deforestation of western Europe even when Europeans consumed far less energy than they do today. Although coal helped to save the forests of Europe, the solution to replacing coal is not to go back to burning forests, but instead to replace fossil fuels with low carbon sources, such as solar and wind. We urge European legislators to amend the present directive to restrict eligible forest biomass to appropriately defined residues and wastes because the fates of much of the world’s forests and the climate are literally at stake.

Initial signatories:

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<td>Research Scholar</td>
<td>Göteborgs universitet</td>
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<tr>
<td>342</td>
<td>Charlotte Kvarnemo</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>University of Gothenburg</td>
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<td>343</td>
<td>Micaela Hellström</td>
<td>Research Scholar</td>
<td>Stockholm University</td>
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<td>344</td>
<td>Perla Maiolino</td>
<td>Post-Doctoral Fellow</td>
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<td>345</td>
<td>Greg King</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>University of Alberta Augustana</td>
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<td>346</td>
<td>Erik E Stange</td>
<td>Research Scholar</td>
<td>Norwegian Institute for Nature Research</td>
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<td>347</td>
<td>Harini Nagendra</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Azim Premji University</td>
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<td>348</td>
<td>Håkan Hyteborn</td>
<td>Professor Emeritus</td>
<td>Norwegian University of Science and Technology</td>
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<td>349</td>
<td>Joshua Daskin</td>
<td>Post-Doctoral Fellow</td>
<td>Yale University</td>
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<td>350</td>
<td>Gabor L Lövej</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Aarhus University/ Fujian Agricultural &amp; Forestry University</td>
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<tr>
<td>351</td>
<td>Anna Boato</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Università di Genova</td>
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<tr>
<td>352</td>
<td>Els</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Ottawa University</td>
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<tr>
<td>353</td>
<td>Iulie Aslaksen</td>
<td>Research Scholar</td>
<td>Statistics Norway/Research Department</td>
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485. Petra Dvorak; Masters; Supsi
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500. Roylyn Nelson; No formal education just common sense; Friend of the forests
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739. Cristina Aponte, Research Scientist or Scholar, The University of Melbourne
740. Richard C. Brusca, Executive Director Emeritus, Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Tucson, Arizona
741. Javier Bustamante, Research Scientist or Scholar, CSIC
742. Stephen D. Hopper AC, Professor, The University of Western Australia, and former CEO and Chief Scientist, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
743. H. Jesse Dubin, PhD; Principal Plant Pathologist, CIMMYT [Retired]
744. Alicia Florit, Jefa del Servicio de Planificación en el Medio Natural de la CMAIP, Consejería de Medio Ambiente, Agricultura y Pesca (CMAIP) del Govern de les Illes Balears
745. Antonia Maria, Research Scientist or Scholar, Palma municipality
746. Carlos Ibáñez, Professor, Estación Biológica de Doñana (CSIC)
747. Juan Carlos Moreno Saiz, Professor, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
748. Sara Sánchez Moreno, Research Scientist or Scholar, National Institute for Agricultural and Food Research and Technology
749. Marta Rueda, Post-Doctoral Fellow, EBD-CSIC
750. Fátima Alves, Professor, CFE, Science for People and the Planet, University of Coimbra; Universidade Aberta, Portugal
752. LucÃ­a DeSoto, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Centre for Functional Ecology, University of Coimbra
753. Peter Horvath, PhD Candidate, University of Oslo
754. Christian Levers, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Humboldt-UniversitÃ¤t zu Berlin
755. Maria Jesus Beltran, Adjunct professor, Pablo de Olavide University
756. BelÃ©n FernÃ­ndez Santos, Research Scientist or Scholar, Universidad de Salamanca
757. RubÃ©n Torices, Post-Doctoral Fellow, EstaciÃ³n Experimental de Zonas Ã©ridas, CSIC, Spain
758. Mireia Llorente, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Universidad de Extremadura
759. Enrique de la MontaÃ±a, Professor, Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de ManabÃ­ (Ecuador)
760. Gerardo Moreno, Professor, Universidad de Extremadura
761. Laetitia Lenel, PhD Candidate, Humboldt-University Berlin
762. David Suzuki, Professor Emeritus; PhD, Professor Emeritus UBC
763. Eric W Crawford, Professor, Michigan State University
764. Miguel A. RodrÃ­guez-GironÃ©s, Research Scientist or Scholar, EstaciÃ³n Experimental de Zonas Ã©ridas (Spanish National Research Council)
765. Tommaso Anfodillo, Professor, Forest ecology group, Dept. TESAF, University of Padova - ITALY
766. Tim Beringer, Research Scientist, Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change
767. Exequiel Ezcurra, Professor, University of California Riverside
768. Adriana Afonso Spielmann, Professor, Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul
769. GregÃ©rio Ceccantini, Professor, University of SÃ£o Paulo
770. Giuliano Maselli Locosselli, Post-Doctoral Fellow, University of SÃ£o Paulo
771. Sir Alan Mark, FRSNZ, Professor Emeritus, University of Otago
772. Marie Tiffany Knight, Professor, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ)
773. Ádám Kőrösi, Post-doctoral fellow, MTA-ELTE-MTM Ecology Research Group
774. Mauricio Diazgranados, Research Scientist, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
775. Dr. Dieter Anhuf, Professor, University of Passau
776. L. Javier Palom, Professor, University of Málaga (Spain)
777. Verena Seufert, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)
778. Ben Phalan, Research Scientist, Oregon State University
779. Jorge Curiel Yuste, Professor, Basque Center for Climate Change
780. Günther Seufert, Senior Scientist (retired), EC-Joint Research Centre
781. Jenny Nelson, FRS, Professor, Imperial College London
782. Astrid Helena Huechacona Ruiz, Centro de InvestigaciÃ³n Cientifica de YucatÃ¡n
783. Patrick Gonzalez, Associate Adjunct Professor, University of California, Berkeley
784. Werner Arber, Emeritus Professor of Molecular Microbiology, University of Basel, Winner Nobel Prize.