

## **Statement to Mongabay from Nicole Bockstaller, Press Officer for Energy and Climate Action, European Commission (delivered June 6, 2018)**

- The EU is advancing towards its 2020 and 2030 energy and climate targets. It also continues to build an Energy Union with secure, affordable and climate-friendly energy. Used sustainably, energy from biomass – today the largest source of renewable energy in the EU – can make an important contribution to such goal.
- At EU level bioenergy is used mainly for space heating and industrial heat production. Forest biomass is typically a by-product of forestry and wood-based industries. While imports of wood pellets from North America are projected to increase in absolute terms in the future, they will still play a relatively minor role (5-10%). Solid biomass for heat and power is and will continue to be sourced largely from EU farm and forest land (90-95%). It should be also reminded that the amount of carbon stocked in European forests (so-called carbon sinks) is tending to decline, typically due to the increased age of our forests.
- Bioenergy has many benefits: it a storable renewable energy that can be used in all energy sectors, including for stabilizing the electricity grid in a context of higher shares of variable renewable sources, such as wind and solar. Its production provides an additional income for EU farmers and foresters.
- This said, biomass production and use in the energy sector can be associated to a number of environmental risks which need to be effectively managed. For this reason, in 2009 the EU has established the world first and most developed binding sustainability criteria for biofuels, which were further strengthened in 2015 to address the risks of indirect land use impacts. In its 2016 proposal for a revised Renewable Energy Directive promoting renewable energy in the period after 2020, the Commission has further reinforced the EU sustainability criteria in order to ensure robust carbon savings and to minimize the risk of unintended environmental impacts.
- More specifically, the EU sustainability criteria are extended to cover all bioenergies, not only biofuels but also biomass use for heat and power generation. In addition, the proposed new Directive includes new risk-based criteria for forest biomass, aimed at minimizing the risk of unsustainable woodfuel production and ensuring that carbon stocks of forests supplying woodfuel are conserved. The proposal also requires that bioenergy for heat and power deliver at least 80% fewer lifecycle GHG emissions, compared to fossil fuels. Furthermore, in order to promote greater resource efficiency, as of 2021 only bioelectricity generated through efficient combined heat and power technologies would be eligible for public support and to be accounted against the EU 2030 renewable energy target and national contributions.

- Most importantly, the sustainability criteria for bioenergy should not be seen in isolation, as they are complementary to other horizontal environmental legislation, including on energy efficiency and air quality standards. In addition, recently the EU agreed a new Regulation on land use, land use change and forestry, (so-called LULUCF) to ensure that emissions from forests and agriculture are correctly accounted under the EU's climate and energy policy as of 2021. Under the new rules, carbon removals (from forest growth) or emissions (from harvesting) resulting from woodfuel production are not only recorded but also accounted in respect of each Member State's 2030 climate target.

- In summary, bioenergy can be an important part of the energy mix which will allow the EU and its Member States to meet cost-effectively its 2020 and 2030 energy and climate change goals. Through the proposed Energy Union Governance Regulation, the European Union and its Member States will regularly monitor the sustainability availability of biomass for energy use, its sustainability impacts, including interactions between energy and non-energy sectors using biomass.

- The Commission is confident that the EU has established a comprehensive policy framework aimed at both guaranteeing the sustainable development of bioenergy, while at the same time enhancing the role of land and forests as carbon sinks and incentivizing their productive and sustainable use.