# Drax power station faces scrutiny over sustainability claims and whistleblower allegations



The Drax power station, notable for its cooling towers that dominate the skyline of North Yorkshire, has been a significant player in the UK’s energy landscape since it began operations in 1974. Currently, the station generates approximately five per cent of Britain’s electricity, but its methods of power generation and associated claims of sustainability have become contentious topics in recent months.

Originally powered by coal sourced from nearby Selby, Drax has transitioned to using processed wood pellets, also known as biomass, since 2012. This shift has allowed the UK government to categorise Drax's electricity as “renewable.” However, critics argue this classification is misleading, dubbing the situation a "great green hoax." They contend that Drax, which has burnt the equivalent of 300 million trees since its conversion to biomass, is a substantial contributor to carbon emissions—more than any other industrial facility in the UK—due to its reliance on imported pellets predominantly sourced from North America.

In the past year, Drax's parent company received £869 million in government subsidies, an expenditure that translates to about £10 added to the energy bills of households across the UK. Proponents of the critics' viewpoint suggest that this financial support is unjustified given the company's substantial yearly profits, reported to be £850 million, alongside £97 million in dividends for shareholders.

This backdrop set the stage for a dramatic legal case at the London Central Employment Tribunal involving Rowaa Ahmar, who formerly served as Drax's head of public affairs and policy. After leaving her position amid controversy, Ahmar raised whistleblower complaints, asserting that she had been unfairly dismissed after warning the company about potentially misleading claims regarding its sustainability.

Ahmar's allegations included assertions that Drax management was “misleading the public, government and its regulator, Ofgem,” regarding the sustainability of the wood pellets it utilised. Her remarks came in the wake of a BBC Panorama documentary aired in October 2022, which accused Drax of using wood sourced from ancient forests in Canada, undermining its claims of using only sustainable materials. Despite Drax's efforts to refute the documentary's allegations, Ahmar maintained that many statements made by the company were false, leading to an internal crisis that reportedly threatened the firm’s market value.

She testified that the fallout from the Panorama episode resulted in "a level of chaos that I have never seen before" within Drax, where executives allegedly sought loopholes to mitigate the negative impact. As the company prepared its rebuttals, there were instances where misinformation was communicated to the government, including an email denying the receipt of materials from forests featured in the documentary, despite internal communications indicating otherwise.

A contentious aspect of the case revolved around the UK's regulations regarding "green" subsidies, which permit companies like Drax to source a portion of their biomass from potentially unsustainable sources. This regulatory environment complicates the narrative, allowing Drax to operate without violating rules even if some of their materials originate from non-renewable sources.

Amid the turmoil, Drax enlisted KPMG to carry out an internal investigation. Ahmar claimed that findings from KPMG supported her assertions about the company’s use of unsustainable wood. However, she stated that she was subsequently instructed not to discuss the interim findings with senior managers.

On November 2, 2022, Ahmar formally lodged a complaint with Drax’s CEO, Will Gardiner, accusing the company of legal breaches related to its misleading assertions about sustainability to obtain subsidies. Following her disclosures, which she classed as “protected,” Ahmar claimed to have been coerced into accepting a financial settlement for her departure, emphasising the dramatic nature of her dismissal against the backdrop of revelations about Drax’s practices.

Drax's defence included claims that Ahmar had created a “maelstrom of chaos” within the company and had lost the trust of her colleagues. The company rebutted many of Ahmar's assertions, suggesting that her account of events changed over time.

As the tribunal concluded, news emerged that Drax and Ahmar had reached a settlement, thus halting further judicial proceedings. This settlement meant no additional evidence would be revealed, leaving many questions unaddressed. The outcome provided a joint statement confirming that investigations had occurred regarding Ahmar's disclosures, but details concerning the nature of the settlement remain undisclosed.

The legal exchanges between Drax and Ahmar highlight ongoing debates surrounding corporate transparency, environmental accountability, and the complex realities within the green energy sector, which continues to evolve against a backdrop of scrutiny and public interest.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drax_Power_Station> - This URL provides detailed information about the Drax Power Station, including its history, operational capacity, and transition from coal to biomass. It supports the claims about Drax's role in the UK energy landscape and its shift to biomass.
* <https://www.drax.com/about-us/our-sites-and-businesses/drax-power-station/> - This Drax webpage highlights the power station's significant contribution to UK power, its capacity, and its conversion to biomass, corroborating claims about its renewable energy generation.
* <https://www.drax.com/energy-security-in-the-uk/> - This article discusses how Drax supports UK energy security through sustainable biomass, providing insights into the station's capacity to help balance intermittent renewables and contribute significantly to the grid.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-63278744> - This article might discuss the controversy surrounding biomass sourcing and sustainability claims by power plants like Drax, aligning with the narrative of disputes over green practices and subsidies.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/27/drax-biomass-forest-documentary> - This article likely covers the BBC Panorama documentary's allegations about Drax using wood from ancient forests, highlighting the controversy over biomass sourcing and its environmental impact.