# UK Parliament committee questions sustainability and subsidies of biomass energy



A recent report from the UK Parliament’s Public Accounts Committee has raised significant questions about the sustainability of biomass energy, specifically the burning of wood pellets, which is currently classified as a renewable energy source. The committee cautioned that companies involved in biomass energy may be effectively “marking their own homework” on sustainability, suggesting that current certification schemes might not be sufficiently robust.

Published on Friday, the report scrutinised how biomass is certified as sustainably sourced in the UK. Biomass energy, which involves burning wood chips to generate electricity, has received substantial government support. The UK Government has allocated £22 billion in public subsidies to businesses and households using biomass, with £6.5 billion going to Drax, the operator of the UK’s largest power station based in Yorkshire.

The Government views biomass as a critical component in meeting its net zero targets, provided it is sourced sustainably and paired with carbon capture and storage technology — known by the acronym BECCS. BECCS aims to mitigate emissions by capturing carbon dioxide released during biomass combustion. However, deployment of BECCS has faced delays, and the Government has yet to confirm when the UK’s first operational plant will begin.

The Public Accounts Committee criticised the Government’s reliance on largely unproven approaches to verify sustainability. It pointed out that current monitoring depends heavily on self-reporting by biomass generators and third-party certification schemes, without clear evidence that these measures effectively ensure compliance. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and the energy regulator Ofgem reportedly do not have concrete assurances that these approaches are working effectively.

Moreover, the committee highlighted concerns about the future of biomass energy should BECCS technology prove unviable, urging DESNZ to provide contingency plans outlining alternative strategies for achieving net carbon removals. There is uncertainty regarding whether biomass truly qualifies as a low-carbon fuel without the carbon capture element, exacerbating concerns about the sector’s long-term sustainability.

Drax, the UK’s largest biomass power station operator, has been under increasing scrutiny regarding its sustainability practices. A recent report by KPMG, commissioned by Drax, found no breaches of sustainability rules. Nonetheless, public concerns prompted the Public Accounts Committee to call for the full KPMG report to be handed over for parliamentary scrutiny. The MPs also raised doubts about a provisional new subsidy deal for Drax, questioning whether it represents good value for taxpayers.

In February, ministers announced a new subsidy arrangement designed to reduce costs for consumers and guarantee that all biomass used by Drax comes from 100% sustainable sources. However, the committee noted that under this deal, Drax would still receive higher payments per unit of energy generated compared to many other renewable sources. The committee recommended that DESNZ consider modifying the agreement to encourage Drax’s transition towards BECCS technology.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, commented: “Billions upon billions of government support has been provided to the biomass sector over the past two decades. Rather than taking it on faith that the woody biomass burnt for energy is a sustainably sourced low-carbon alternative fuel, it is long past time a true assay was made of what taxpayers are getting for their money.” He emphasised the necessity of parliamentary scrutiny and expressed hope that Drax would cooperate by providing full access to the review of its supply chain and reporting practices.

Responding to the report, Samantha Smith, head of the trade body Heat And Biomass UK, expressed disappointment. She argued that the report “overlooks the critical role that sustainable biomass plays today in providing baseload power and clean heat, supporting the UK’s energy security and keeping bills down.” She highlighted that independent certification schemes such as the Sustainable Biomass Programme (SBP) are benchmarked by Ofgem and meet UK sustainability requirements, with similar standards recognised by regulatory bodies in the European Union.

A spokesperson for Drax stated: “Drax’s biomass is certified as sustainable through the Sustainable Biomass Programme (SBP), an internationally recognised certification scheme. Our regulator, Ofgem, has tested and benchmarked the SBP against the Government’s sustainability requirements for woody biomass, alongside other programmes.” The spokesperson also addressed the KPMG reports, noting that while they were provided under legal privilege to the Government and Ofgem for detailed scrutiny, no evidence was found by Ofgem to indicate breaches of sustainability obligations or justify withholding Renewable Obligation (RO) funding.

The issues raised by the Public Accounts Committee underline ongoing debates about the sustainability and value for money of biomass energy subsidies in the UK, the effectiveness of certification frameworks, and the strategic role of biomass and BECCS technology in achieving national climate targets.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8906/the-governments-support-for-biomass/> - This URL supports the claim that the UK Government has provided substantial financial support for biomass energy. The government has allocated over £20 billion in financial support for businesses and households using biomass for fuel since 2002.
2. <https://www.biomassconnect.org/news/public-accounts-committee-opens-inquiry-on-government-support-for-biomass/> - The Public Accounts Committee has launched an inquiry into the Government’s support for biomass, seeking evidence to ensure sustainability and effectiveness in meeting climate goals. This inquiry reflects concerns about the current certification and sustainability measures for biomass energy.
3. <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Report-the-governments-support-for-biomass.pdf> - This report by the National Audit Office highlights concerns about the sustainability and effectiveness of the government’s biomass support. It notes that while no UK biomass generators currently use carbon capture and storage, the government plans to implement this technology in the future.
4. <https://www.pfpi.net/2025/03/how-bureaucrats-are-trying-to-trick-uk-lawmakers-about-biomass-and-drax/> - This article discusses concerns about the UK's biomass sustainability criteria and the potential for misleading claims regarding the carbon neutrality of biomass energy. It questions the effectiveness of current certification schemes and the government's support for biomass.
5. <https://www.thequeenzone.com/uk-governments-biomass-claims-questioned-in-recent-parliament-hearing/> - This article supports the concern about biomass sustainability criteria, highlighting that current standards allow the logging and burning of primary and old-growth forests. It also questions the carbon neutrality claims of biomass energy, especially related to BECCS technology.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - This URL provides an overarching view of the UK Parliament’s Public Accounts Committee report on biomass sustainability, including government support and scrutiny of biomass energy practices, particularly those of Drax.
7. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/biomass-power-generators-could-be-marking-own-homework-on-sustainability-XA5VPRF4DZKOJEQDDZJBM4PYAM/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data