# Calls grow for full disclosure on Drax wood sourcing amid biomass subsidy debate



Calls for transparency surrounding the operations of Drax Power Station have intensified as MPs deliberate on the future of biomass subsidies. The owners of the North Yorkshire facility are being urged to reveal comprehensive details about their wood consumption amid rising concerns over the environmental implications of their operations. Current government plans may extend billpayer-funded subsidies for biomass generators, in which Drax is the leading market player, yet this move faces robust scrutiny from green activists and energy analysts alike.

The delegation reviewing the sustainability of Drax’s energy production claims that any extension of subsidies should be contingent upon the publication of a critical KPMG report that details the sourcing of the wood Drax burns. Although Ofgem concluded that there were no breaches of sustainability rules during previous investigations, campaigners raise alarms over past misreportings and procurement from questionable sources. Drax has previously incurred a £25 million penalty for misreporting data regarding the biomass used in its operations, which only adds to the issue of transparency.

Kingmill Bond, an energy strategist at Ember, highlighted the obsolescence of biomass as a technology in the context of the rapid advancements in solar and wind energy generation. "Burning trees for electricity is extremely inefficient and expensive, and is not effective at mitigating climate change," he remarked, pointing towards the dramatic drop in costs for renewable technologies over the past few years. This, he argues, raises pressing questions about the direction of future energy policies, especially if Drax continues to receive substantial financial support—more than £10 billion projected over the period from 2012 to 2027.

Activists warn that continued reliance on biomass could lead to increased carbon emissions and detrimental impacts on biodiversity, especially in regions like the southeastern United States, where logging has been linked to serious environmental degradation. Almuth Ernsting from the campaign group Biofuelwatch emphasised that approving new subsidies could exacerbate existing issues, including what some have termed "environmental racism," as local communities bear the brunt of pollution generated by pellet plants associated with Drax.

The current government proposals aim to halve biomass subsidies from 2027, though many doubt whether this will adequately address the core issues. Drax, which continues to argue that its biomass sourcing meets sustainability standards endorsed by prominent climate authorities, faces pressure to enhance accountability and clarify its wood sources. A spokesperson for Drax stated that reports showed compliance with the sustainability requirements of the Renewable Obligation scheme and emphasised the importance of their role in providing energy security.

Nevertheless, ongoing revelations, including recent findings that suggest Drax sourced wood from ecologically sensitive areas, raise significant concerns. Environmental experts warn that the destruction of old-growth forests could diminish vital carbon stocks, counteracting the benefits of carbon capture technology that Drax plans to implement by the 2030s.

Critics contend that the reliance on biomass power underscores a fundamental flaw in the UK's approach to achieving its climate targets. Mark Campanale, founder of the Carbon Tracker Initiative, summarised the dilemma succinctly: "At a time when renewables powered by wind and solar are growing exponentially worldwide, it seems remarkable that the UK still depends on the combustion of wood to meet its environmental goals."

As the delegated legislation committee prepares to vote on the proposed subsidy extensions, the landscape of energy policy in the UK may face crucial changes, pivoting on the balance of accountability, sustainability, and innovation in renewable energy solutions.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/jun/02/calls-for-drax-to-be-forced-to-fully-disclose-biomass-sourcing-renewables-subsidies-scheme), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/34550e7d-9d65-4756-8ffa-53f821dd14d0)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/jun/02/calls-for-drax-to-be-forced-to-fully-disclose-biomass-sourcing-renewables-subsidies-scheme), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/21cdb4d8-9118-4865-bdca-7bf9db6369f0), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/uks-drax-pay-33-mln-after-misreporting-some-biomass-data-2024-08-29/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/uk-power-group-drax-not-breach-sustainability-obligations-says-ofgem-2025-03-12/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/nov/04/drax-will-keep-raising-carbon-emission-levels-until-2050s-study-says)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/jun/02/calls-for-drax-to-be-forced-to-fully-disclose-biomass-sourcing-renewables-subsidies-scheme), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/uks-drax-pay-33-mln-after-misreporting-some-biomass-data-2024-08-29/), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/6c9e5d0e-4e7a-4e9d-bae7-11069a6bd238)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/jun/02/calls-for-drax-to-be-forced-to-fully-disclose-biomass-sourcing-renewables-subsidies-scheme), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/nov/04/drax-will-keep-raising-carbon-emission-levels-until-2050s-study-says)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/6c9e5d0e-4e7a-4e9d-bae7-11069a6bd238)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/jun/02/calls-for-drax-to-be-forced-to-fully-disclose-biomass-sourcing-renewables-subsidies-scheme> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/21cdb4d8-9118-4865-bdca-7bf9db6369f0> - In a 2024 investigation, the UK energy regulator, Ofgem, found that Drax Power Station lacked sufficient data on the sustainability of the wood it imported in 2021-22. Despite this, Ofgem concluded that Drax had not breached sustainability rules and ordered a full independent audit. Drax agreed to contribute £25 million to Ofgem’s Voluntary Contributions Fund. The findings may support government plans to extend subsidies to biomass power generators beyond 2027, despite environmental concerns about the carbon neutrality of burning imported wood.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/uks-drax-pay-33-mln-after-misreporting-some-biomass-data-2024-08-29/> - In August 2024, Drax agreed to pay $33 million to Ofgem's voluntary redress fund after misreporting data on biomass imported from Canada. An Ofgem investigation found that Drax lacked adequate data governance for the period from April 2021 to March 2022. Although the misreporting was technical and did not affect the subsidies received under the Renewable Obligation scheme, Drax will resubmit the data and undergo an independent audit. Drax claims to use wood byproducts from sustainably managed forests to increase forest growth.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/34550e7d-9d65-4756-8ffa-53f821dd14d0> - Internal emails from Drax, the UK's largest biomass power station operator, suggest that the company likely burned wood sourced from ecologically significant old forest areas in Canada. The company's pellet plants in British Columbia received wood from areas classified as high-risk by local authorities. While the use wasn't illegal, environmental experts emphasize the importance of protecting old-growth forests due to their ecological benefits. Drax faced scrutiny from a BBC Panorama investigation and an Ofgem inquiry, resulting in a £25 million fine for reporting inadequacies.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/uk-power-group-drax-not-breach-sustainability-obligations-says-ofgem-2025-03-12/> - In March 2025, Ofgem found no evidence that Drax breached sustainability obligations during an investigation into its compliance with renewable obligation certificates. Despite criticism from environmental groups regarding the sustainability of biomass power from wood pellets, Ofgem's review of over 3,000 documents prepared by auditor KPMG concluded that Drax had not violated the relevant reporting requirements. Drax welcomed the findings, reinforcing that their biomass generation meets established sustainability criteria.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/nov/04/drax-will-keep-raising-carbon-emission-levels-until-2050s-study-says> - A 2024 study found that Drax's plan to fit carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology to its plant by the 2030s would reduce the period of rising emissions but they would still be higher than they would otherwise be for decades. The study demonstrated that the impact of wood pellet sourcing on forest carbon stocks and flows was more significant than the CCS technology itself. Drax has claimed more than £7 billion in bill-payer-backed biomass subsidies since 2012 and is in talks to extend its subsidies until 2030 to fit CCS technology.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/6c9e5d0e-4e7a-4e9d-bae7-11069a6bd238> - Drax Power Station in North Yorkshire, once a coal-fired plant, was given government support to continue operating its biomass generation until at least 2031. Despite criticism from green campaigners and past conservative support withdrawal, the plant's operation is seen as necessary due to its current infrastructure and role in energy security. The plant's classification as a zero-rated biomass power source under UK and European carbon standards is contentious, as it has high emissions. However, shutting it down could jeopardize about 5% of the UK's generating capacity and increase reliance on gas and nuclear power stations.