

Biomass fuel: The Great Carbon Con



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I'd be very surprised — and very impressed if contradicted — if one in 100 readers of this newspaper, even intelligent and informed as they are by definition, would be able to name the biggest generator of so-called renewable energy in Europe, which is climate central for the cult of carbon dioxide fear and loathing.

I'd be even more surprised if one in 1000 of our Down Under adherents of that anti-CO2 cult, unintelligent and uninformed as they are by definition, could do so.

Even fewer, I suggest, in both groups would be able to specifically name the single biggest so-called renewable energy power station in Europe.

Surely, it's one of all those so-called "wind farms", sprouting like metallic weeds all over the European landscape, and increasingly offshore as well, and which collectively must be the biggest source?

Or maybe even the only real — as in reliable and functional — renewable energy we've ever had and still only have: hydro power? But surely not solar in, apart from the Mediterranean countries, sun-challenged Europe?

Well, there are some clues in the words I have used very advisedly: "generator" of energy and "power station". For you see, the answer is plain and simple: burning wood.

Yes, it is dressed up — and intended to quite deliberately deceive as that's the European Union way — with the fancy all-green sounding name "biomass". And yes, it includes burning municipal waste and charcoal. But it is mostly burning wood and, in part, shipped across the Atlantic from the US.

Exactly just like we used to do, from the prehistoric discovery of fire to well into the 20th century, until we switched to mostly coal-fired power stations. And still do in large parts of the developing world, including in India, killing tens of thousands of people every year. And which the opponents of the Adani coal mine want to keep doing.

Sure, in "clean, green Europe" they don't burn the wood — sorry, biomass — in the open air so it doesn't pump out the people-killing dirty bits of grit and other unpleasanties. But it still pumps out that gas — what's it called? — oh yes, CO₂.

Except, that the EU and especially EU central in Brussels, the European Commission, has decreed that the CO₂ being pumped out by the burning of wood and other materials, in "biomass power stations" is non-existent.

That is to say, it's "carbon neutral". The CO₂ pumped into the air — just like a coal-fired station, except a biomass station pumps out about 50-100 per cent more CO₂ for the same amount of electricity — is deemed by the EC as cancelled by the CO₂ which will become embedded in the new growth of plants as a consequence of the increased CO₂ in the atmosphere.

We used to think that was a good thing: who wouldn't want to green the planet and dramatically increase the production of wheat, corn and all other food crops. Some real scientists such as the great Freeman Dyson — as opposed to the charlatans and poseurs that now infest the academy — still do.

The more specific point, of course, about this utter so typically EU "renewable" absurdity is that the CO₂ coming out of a wood-burning plant is coming out now; the removal of that CO₂ in new plant growth might take up to 100 years.

This also goes to the ludicrous suggestion that we could "square the circle" of our proposed CO₂ cuts by buying so-called "emission permits" from overseas and most particularly from — where else? — Europe.

It has, of course, utterly escaped what passes for the public policy elite in this country that the only point in Australia reducing its CO₂ emissions is if the entire world similarly embarks on that task.

We'll put outside the absolutely fundamental point that the world is not.

At best, China — the biggest emitter by the length of the Flemington straight — and third-placed India have crossed their hearts and promised to start cutting after 2030. Until then, they'll keep increasing.

Put that aside and fantasise of a world where everyone wastrying to cut their emissions. What do you think would happen to the price and, even more, the availability of such emission permits — which would only be created by a country cutting its emissions by more than the world required and having the surplus to sell?

This also, by the bye, is why Bill Shorten was actually — if utterly unintentionally and even more unknowingly — telling the truth when he said the cost of Labor's 45 per cent reduction policy was impossible to determine. It is impossible to cost infinity.

Let me finish with some detail about Europe and so-called biomass.

According to Eurostat — that's the official EU statistical body — 65 per cent of EU renewable generation in 2016 came from biomass: wood and charcoal, biogas and biofuels, and municipal waste.

Burning wood was easily the biggest, at nearly half all so-called renewable generation in Europe.

The biggest biomass station is Drax, in the north of England. It switched from burning coal to burning wood. The CO₂ it emitted as a coal station was causing climate change; the increased CO₂ it now emits from burning wood is defined by the EC bureaucrats as not existing.

Under the EC rules, Drax — and all other biomass plants — only have to count the CO₂ generated by the processing of the wood into pellets and its transportation; they do not count the overwhelmingly much larger CO₂ emissions from the actual burning.

Even some Greens in Europe, who have not lost all touch with reality, realise this is a classic and simply insane EC con. A case was launched in March seeking to have the EU General Court rule that biomass could not be counted as a renewable.

But let's hope they lose. Then we can convert Liddell to burning wood and all but instantly reach Labor's renewable generation target.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/biomass-fuel-the-great-carbon-con/news-story/6e787f862793225a4e4622a35620b44c>