

March 21st, 2021

President Charles Michel, European Council
President Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission
Vice President Frans Timmermans, European Commission

Dear President Michel, President von der Leyen, and Vice President Timmermans,

Today, on the International Day of Forests, 14 Swedish organisations and youth movements together with 44 indigenous communities, supported by 10 international partners, are reaching out and calling on you to unite behind the best available science and establish policies that keep carbon, where it belongs - in the ground and in the forests of Europe.

It is time to put an end to false climate solutions and distant climate goals that are lulling the public into a false sense of security when you, in fact, encourage policies that are literally cutting off the branch we all sit on.

Scientists and the environmental movement have for decades warned about the negative climate and environmental impacts of burning fossil fuels. There is no question - the fossil era is over and we must immediately phase out fossil energy. The goal, however, must be to stop combustion, and not to replace one carbon source with another.

Burning trees, or forest biomass residues, is neither 'carbon neutral' nor a climate-smart alternative to fossil fuels. When forest biomass is burned for energy, it actually emits *more* CO₂ than the burning of coal per megawatt hour.

Time is running out. We need a 45 % reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 2010 emission levels in order to not surpass tipping points and start irreversible chain reactions beyond human control. In Europe, it takes 60-100 years or more before a tree stand regrows and sequesters the carbon dioxide that was emitted from the forest felling. "Carbon neutrality" by 2080 or 2100 is simply too late.

Despite these facts, energy from burning biomass is incentivised and subsidised by the EU members under the Renewable Energy Directive II. As a result, biomass has become the *main source of "renewable"* energy in the EU with a share of almost 60 %. Not solar or off-shore wind power as one would imagine, given the importance of both healthy ecosystems and immediate emission cuts, clearly and repeatedly stated by the IPCC.

Also, keep in mind that natural forests are not renewable. Trees can be planted, but not forests. If you plant wheat, you get a wheat field, not a meadow. If you plant pine trees, you get a timber field, not a forest. Real forests are complex ecosystems, a bedrock of a multitude of life and home for many species. Biological diversity - a variety of different life forms - is the prerequisite for all living beings, including us humans.

The sad truth is that due to incoherent EU policies, forests - our natural climate solution - are systematically degraded and turned into environmental and climate-damaging industrial tree stands, plantations and products.

Sweden is the world's third largest exporter of products such as short-lived tissue, pulp, timber and single-use paper. The country promotes itself, not only as a producer of forest-based goods, but also as a paragon of what they call 'sustainable' forestry practices, which they export as a role model. Bioeconomy lobbyists have through aggressive marketing managed to deceive EU policymakers and consumers into believing that this type of forestry is carried out in a sustainable manner that contributes positively to the climate, safeguarding biodiversity and respecting indigenous peoples rights.

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But in reality the ‘Swedish forestry model’ is wreaking havoc. The forest ecosystem has changed so dramatically that not even the reindeer that have learned to survive on these lands since the ice age can live in the landscape that this type of forestry creates. [29 Sámi districts have sounded the alarm stating that forestry severely threatens their reindeer herding](#) and claiming that Protocol no. 3 in Swedish accession agreements to the EU is violated.

High logging rates lead to decreased carbon sinks, so even though Sweden to a large extent consists of forest land, its total net uptake is as low as 35.5 million tons of CO₂ equivalent. To compare, the annual emissions from forest harvest including the combustion of bioenergy in paper mills and heating plants alone, amount to about 80 million tons of CO₂.

Our carbon budget is shrinking by the minute, forest protection is a cost effective and immediate carbon capture and sequestration tool. But we are running out of natural forests. [With today's low levels of protection and rapid rate of logging in Sweden, virtually all unprotected natural forests are projected to be lost in the coming decades.](#)

This has EU-wide implications and needs EU-wide solutions. Allowing member states to log the EU's last remaining unprotected natural forests will continuously move carbon out of the forests and into the atmosphere, in a time when it is most critical to reduce emissions and maximize every possible carbon sink.

The EU cannot achieve its [ambition to protect 30% of all land ecosystems in Europe, nor the 1.5-degree goal within the Paris Agreement](#) without fundamentally changing its forestry policy cross-sectorally within both the environmental, climate and energy agenda.

It is of utmost importance for you to:

- immediately remove forest biomass from the Renewable Energy Directive II,
- politically address the drawbacks of the ‘Swedish forestry model’ (clear-cutting and replanting of tree stands),
- preserve the EU's natural forest heritage for future generations and maintain its ecosystem functions.

Increased forest protection leads to immediate reductions in emissions. Therefore your immediate intervention is required.

In the end, you will never be able to say that you did not know what you were doing if you instead allow continued forest degradation while hiding behind greenwashing words such as “renewable” and “net-zero”.

Are you ready to stop hiding behind these false excuses?

Sincerely,

Anton Foley, Fridays For Future Sweden

Andreas Magnusson, Fridays For Future Sweden

Alde Fermskog, Fridays For Future Sweden

Linnéa Henningsson, Fridays For Future Sweden

Lydia Rysavy, Fridays For Future Sweden

Isabelle Axelsson, Fridays For Future Sweden

Linna Gadde, Fridays For Future Sweden

Elleonora Ali Uddman, Fridays For Future Sweden

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Sanna Vannar, President of Sáminuorra

Åsa Larsson Blind, President Sámiid Riikkasearvi

Lars Anders Baer, chairman of the Sámi reindeer herding district Luokta-Mávas.

Jana Ballenthien, Forest Campaigner, Robin Wood

Maarten Visschers, board member Leefmilieu

Almuth Ernsting, Co-director of Biofuelwatch.

Fenna Swart, chairwoman. Comité Schone Lucht

Mads Kjærgaard Lange, Organizational Secretary NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark

Anne Petermann, Executive Director, Global Justice Ecology Project

Debbie Hammel, Deputy Director, Lands Nature Program, NRDC

Juana Vera-Delgado, Director, Water Justice and Gender

Coraina de la Plaza, Forest & Climate Change Campaign Coordination, Global Forest Coalition

Mary S. Booth, PhD Director, Partnership for Policy Integrity

Mikael Sundström, Chairperson Friends of the Earth Sweden

David Bennett, Chairman of the board, Transition Network Sweden

Robin Zachari, Executive Director at Skiftet

Tomas Hallingback, former chair and member of the IUCN Bryophyte Specialist Group

Johan Granstrand, President, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation Västerbotten County

Marcus Lidström, chairman, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation in Norrbotten.

Pia Björstrand, spokesperson Climate Action Network

Leo Rudberg, Chairperson, Nature and Youth Sweden

Jonas Bane, Chairman of The Climate Parliament Sweden

Gunilla Winberg, Chairman of the Future in our hands.

Alex Brekke, Secretary General Amazon Watch Sverige

Lina Burnelius, Project leader and international coordinator, Protect the Forest Sweden