

To achieve the biomass goals of the Energy Agreement vision and policies are needed to mobilize biomass

Report of the workshop 'The Netherlands and the biobased economy'
Alterra Wageningen UR (Wageningen, The Netherlands)

3 July 2014, 12:30 to 18:00 hr

The entire concept of the *biobased economy* hinges on the continuous availability of sufficient woody biomass at acceptable prices, and under realistic criteria. In principle a part of the woody biomass required can be obtained from European forests, as there is a lot of forest biomass available that is not yet harvested. It is known that the wood harvest can be increased in a sustainable manner at many locations across Europe. Nevertheless, there are certain factors that need to be changed to ensure such increase in biomass mobilization from forests.

Increasing the woody biomass supply sustainably, continuously and at acceptable prices is a huge challenge. The EU supported Simwood project is seeking ways and removing barriers to increase wood mobilization from European forests. In a range of regional cases studies, that include the Dutch regions Gelderland and Overijssel, Simwood looks at how forest owners can be motivated to increase their wood harvest.

On 3 July 2014, 53 representatives from sectors such as research, forestry practice, policy, energy producers and NGOs came together to discuss this issue. In a workshop they focused on the questions how to mobilize the woody biomass needed to meet the objectives in the national agreement on sustainable energy growth (in short: Energy Agreement), and how to realize a higher production of bio-based products currently under development.

It is anticipated that due to the Energy Agreement the annual demand for biomass in the Netherlands will increase by approx. 10 million tonnes; the exact amount being difficult to establish because of different biomass applications and uses. This compares to a current annual wood harvest of 0.5 million tonne. The consensus of the meeting was that the level of wood harvesting needs to increase substantially in the future.

Besides woody biomass from forest, other biomass sources, such as agro-residues and biomass from landscape maintenance, can be mobilized. However, meeting participants underlined that their mobilization would increase only if there is a local demand for biomass.

The subsidy, currently available under the Dutch renewable energy support scheme (SDE+), on biomass co-firing in large electric power plants does not appear to lead to higher local demand for biomass or increased local biomass mobilization. Some meeting participants suggested that support to biomass co-firing disturbs the regular wood market and may stimulate inefficient feedstock use. We should aim for higher value added applications, before considering wood combustion for energy generation. Most participants shared this view, but it was also recognized that the increased wood demand leads to an increase in wood mobilization. Use of the mobilized wood resource would lead to increased use of biomass across all sectors, whereby wood cascading should be a leading principle. Public policy aiming for sustainable wood use, based on the principle of resource efficiency, remains therefore necessary although such wood use already partly happens as a result of market forces. After all, energy producers cannot afford to pay the prices that some producers of biomaterials and biochemicals may be willing to pay.

Nonetheless, the scarcity of supply causes problems for all biomass-using sectors with respect to setting up production chains with a lower carbon footprint.

The participants emphasized that it is important to consider – with a higher sense of urgency – what we can do within the Netherlands and across the EU to mobilize more wood from existing forests. The large Dutch energy producers currently mainly aim for the import of wood pellets from the United States. For the regional energy market and the regional biobased production capacity using the potentials in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe is important. For various reasons it is a challenge to turn these potentials into actual sources of supply:

- The forestry sector has not been, or hardly, involved in the Energy Agreement negotiations.
- A lot of forestry experience has been lost during the last few decades

In the Dutch forests it is already clear that production volumes from young forest stands will decrease in the future. Thus mobilization will become even more difficult in the future.

For public acceptance of the use of woody biomass it is highly important that the wood is produced sustainably. Realistic sustainability criteria are needed. Certification has helped here, but imposing too many criteria might even lead to a further tightening of the market and higher prices. The EU has established a sustainability platform, that is to provide clarity and guidance for all EU countries. In the Netherlands, negotiations about applying stricter sustainability criteria for biomass co-firing are ongoing. Various speakers were in favour of less strict certification criteria for biomass production that takes place in the Netherlands or at smaller scale.

Concrete actions are proposed in the “Sustainable Biomass 2020” action programme of Platform Hout Nederland (PHN) and the association of forest and nature owners (Vereniging van Bos- en Natuurterreineigenaren, VBNE). In “Sustainable Biomass 2020” the action programme initiators, who are also signatory to the Wood Covenant (Houtconvenant), propose several actions that wood covenant partners can implement jointly with the Dutch government. These actions cover both the increase of the harvest of sustainable biomass in the Netherlands, as well as the increase of sustainable biomass use in suitable conversion plants.

Programme

12.30: Registration

- 13:15 to 13:25 Gert-Jan Nabuurs (Alterra): Challenges in biomass mobilization
- 13:25 to 13:40 Dorette Corbey: Sustainability criteria: overview and policy
- 13:40 to 14:00 Peter-Paul Schouwenberg (Essent / TKI BBE): Experiences with the power station in Cuijk and TKI programs
- 14:00 to 14:20 Willem Wiskerke (Greenpeace): NGO perspective
- 14:20 to 14:40 Bart DeMuth (Nuon / Vattenfall): Opportunities and threats for local and international biomass markets

14:40 to 15:15 coffee / tea break

Practices in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the EU

- 15:15 to 15:35 Jaap van den Briel (Platform Hout Netherlands): Reinforcing the position of the use of wood(fibre) for the Dutch bio-based economy; connecting with wood producers
- 15:35 to 15:55 Fokke Goudswaard (Platform Bioenergy): The perspective of the bioenergy sector
- 15:55 to 16:15 Berien Elbersen (Alterra): Biomass availability in the EU
- 16:15 to 16:30 Wolter Elbersen (FBR): Importance of biomass mobilization
- 16:30 to 17:30 Discussion & identification of follow-up actions (led by Dorette Corbey):
- challenges for mobilization of wood from European and Dutch forests
 - developing long-term and sustainable markets: what incentives are needed
 - pathways for sufficient mobilization of woody biomass for the *bio-based economy*
 - follow-up actions
- 17:30 to 18:00 Cocktails

Organization / contact

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The **Simwood** EU project focuses on the mobilization of wood from European forests and resolving obstacles with regard to an increased mobilization.

Biotrade2020+ creates a tool to assess the availability and sustainability of lignocellulosic biomass from regions outside Europe