

Press release, 21 February 2013

Sustainably managed forests can save at least ten times more CO₂ than unmanaged forests

WBA, AEBIOM, ABA appeal to policy makers to take scientific results into account when establishing harmonised EU sustainability criteria and future bioenergy policy.

Professor Hubert Hasenauer from the Vienna University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (silviculture institute) recently published a paper, based on several years of research work, which highlights the major role that managed forests play in carbon emissions mitigation compared to unmanaged forests¹. One of his main conclusions is: *“the effect of the managed forest as a CO₂ sink is many times that of the primary forest” - in the example studied at least ten times²*. The results are based on carbon measurements in European unmanaged forests and sustainable managed forests.

These results can be explained by looking at the relationship between sustainably managed forests and CO₂ levels in the atmosphere: Carbon which would be released into the atmosphere during the unmanaged forests phase of decay is put in use in the form of fossil fuel substitution in the case of a managed forest.

The studied unmanaged forests emitted during their life cycle (300 years) almost as much CO₂ as they absorbed. As no wood was harvested, no substitution effect occurred. The effect as carbon sink of these forests was therefore minimal.

The managed forest absorbed and emitted more CO₂ over the same period of time (balanced result) but in addition, the harvested timber was used as a substitute for fossil energy carriers and allowed to avoid CO₂ emissions.

¹ Hasenauer et al [2012]: Die Bedeutung der Waldwirtschaft für den Kohlenstoffhaushalt, in: Energie aus der Region, Österreichischer Biomasse-Verband: www.aebiom.org/wp-content/uploads/file/Articles/Hasenauer%202012%20carbon%20balance%20DE.pdf

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² In this example, the substitution effects taken into account are those through the use of wood instead of heating oil is included ; In practice, this value can be much higher because the substitution effects through the use of wood as a material and intermediate carbon-storage effects in wood products have not been taken into account in this example.

Overall, unmanaged forests release the CO₂ they absorb because of natural degradation. The carbon stored in the wood harvested in managed forests is actually released into the atmosphere at the end of the product life but – and this is the important difference to the natural release of carbon in unmanaged forests – only after this carbon has served as material and / or fuel that substitute fossil energy.

The study also points out that changing sustainably managed forests into unmanaged forests does not necessarily cause the stored carbon to increase. The opposite can happen when huge amounts of carbon are released in the atmosphere due to natural damage (eg: insects' infestations or fungus diseases often followed by forest fires).

Need to increase the use of sustainable solid biomass without administrative burdens

Solid Biomass will still be the most important renewable energy source. *“The use of fossil fuels is responsible for 89 percent of global CO₂ emissions. Not using the bioenergy potentials now means to postpone the energy transition – from fossil to renewables – for decades. Time we do not have in view of the 2 degree target”*, says Heinz Kopetz, President of the World Bioenergy Association.

“Once again it is scientifically proven that it is favourable from a carbon standpoint to use sustainably managed forests also for bioenergy. This is why it is important to ensure that biomass used in Europe originates from forests that are sustainably managed. Given that European forest management is world famous for its sustainability, the introduction and implementation of EU sustainability criteria should support the European way of silviculture, and should not constitute a burden for European producers” says Gustav Melin, President of the European Biomass Association.

Associations supporting this press release:

The World Bioenergy Association (WBA) is the global organisation dedicated to supporting and representing the wide range of actors in the bioenergy sector. Its members include national and regional bioenergy organisations, institutions, companies and individuals. The purpose of the WBA is to promote the increasing utilisation of bioenergy globally in an efficient, sustainable, economic and environmentally friendly way.
<http://www.worldbioenergy.org/>

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The European Biomass Association (AEBIOM) is the common voice of the European bioenergy sector with the aim to develop the market for sustainable bioenergy such as bio heat, and electricity from biomass and biofuels, and ensure favourable business conditions for its members.

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The Austrian Biomass Association (ABA) is an association that advocates for sustainable, environmentally friendly energy supply. ABA was founded in 1995 with the purpose of creating an information and discussion forum for the introduction of measures to increase the use of renewable energy sources, with a focus on bioenergy. ABA is the common voice of the Austrian bioenergy sector and has about 1.000 private and 200 company members.

<http://www.biomasseverband.at/>

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