



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES  
OF CALIFORNIA

March 14, 2023

The Honorable Cecilia Aguiar-Curry  
Member, California State Assembly  
1021 O Street, Room 6350  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 625 – SUPPORT  
As Introduced February 9, 2023**

Dear Assembly Member Aguiar-Curry:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we support your Assembly Bill 625, regarding biomass waste utilization. RCRC is an association of forty rural California counties and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from each of those member counties.

Assembly Bill 625 helps achieve the state's forest health and wildfire risk reduction goals by increasing the productive use of forest waste biomass through energy generation and wood products manufacturing. In doing so, AB 625 will: 1) help reduce future emissions related to the open burning or natural decomposition of forest residuals; 2) increase energy reliability and resiliency in those communities at greatest risk of losing power; and 3) create jobs and improve the economy in many of California's rural communities.

California is finally making progress on long-overdue forest health improvement and wildfire risk reduction projects. The need for continued progress cannot be overstated in light of the horrifically destructive nature of California wildfires that have occurred the last several years. In 2020, California's wildfires burned over 4 million acres and released over 90 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions. Another 2.5 million acres burned in 2021. Emissions from these wildfires undercut much of the state's progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and result in widespread hazardous air quality for extended periods of time.

It is vital to promote the productive use of biomass residuals resulting from forest health improvement and wildfire risk reduction projects, since traditional methods of disposal (open burning and natural decomposition) produce far greater emissions than would occur in a biomass facility. Residuals left in place for natural decomposition add to the fuel load and are increasingly likely to be consumed in a wildfire. A recent field

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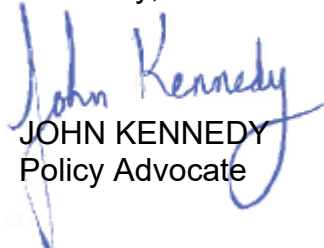
study indicates that biomass energy generation results in 98-99 percent lower PM2.5, carbon monoxide, methane, and black carbon emissions compared to open pile burning (along with a significant reduction in NOx and carbon dioxide equivalent greenhouse gas emissions).

AB 625 builds upon and incorporates the findings and recommendations of the California Forest Carbon Plan and Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan, which highlight the need for forest health improvement to achieve ecosystem benefits, reduce wildfire risk, and improve water quality and yield. It also helps improve the quality and integration of data related to wildfire, controlled burn, and pile burn emissions into the state's climate change planning efforts. AB 625 helps to drive workforce development to ensure there are skilled workers available to meet the demand in the wood products manufacturing, biomass, and vegetation management sectors. It will help improve local energy resiliency and overall grid reliability by trying to facilitate the use of forest biomass to support rural microgrids and to provide grid benefit and value to ratepayers.

AB 625 commendably seeks to clarify that the Bioenergy Market Adjusting Tariff (BioMAT) program shall continue until the full 250MW of capacity are procured. The BioMAT program requires utilities to procure electricity from small bioenergy projects, including biomass facilities that use fuels from high hazard zones. These smaller bioenergy facilities can be strategically placed close to the areas where the need for fuel reduction and forest health improvement is greatest – areas which often have lower electrical reliability than the rest of the grid. The program has no statutory end date; however, the CPUC is scheduled to sunset the program on December 31, 2025, regardless of whether the procurement requirements have been met. The rapidly approaching deadline could chill many of these smaller projects that will be instrumental to the state's forest health, climate change, and pollution reduction objectives. Furthermore, accelerating the BioMAT procurement of electricity derived from the use of forest biomass waste will complement the state's wildfire mitigation and forest restoration objectives and avoid air pollution associated with the open burning or natural decomposition of forest residuals. Finally, failure to clarify the program's fate could eviscerate much of the benefit that would otherwise result from your AB 843 of 2021, which allows Community Choice Aggregators to participate in the program (but which has still not yet been operationalized by the Public Utilities Commission).

For the above reasons, RCRC supports your AB 625. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jkennedy@rcrcnet.org](mailto:jkennedy@rcrcnet.org).

Sincerely,

  
JOHN KENNEDY  
Policy Advocate

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cc: The Honorable Eduardo Garcia, Chair, Assembly Utilities and Energy Committee  
Members of the Assembly Utilities and Energy Committee  
Laura Shybut, Chief Consultant, Assembly Utilities and Energy Committee  
Gregory Melkonian, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus