



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

June 9, 2023

The Honorable Steven Bradford
Chair, Senate Energy, Utilities, and Communications Committee
1021 O Street, Room 3350
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 998 (Connolly) – SUPPORT
As Amended April 17, 2023**

Dear Senator Bradford:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we support Assembly Bill 998 (Connolly), regarding biomass facilities. 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 998 requires the Energy Commission to prepare a report on utility-scale biomass combustion facilities, including the capacity of those facilities to process forest biomass, the role they play in achieving the state's forest health and wildfire risk reduction objectives, and ways to maximize the environmental benefits of those facilities. The report must recommend strategies on how to upgrade those facilities, associated costs, and financing opportunities. Importantly, the report is also tasked with requiring an evaluation of how any loss in capacity would be addressed by the future closing of any of those facilities.

Biomass facilities are vital to local economies in many parts of the state and integral to the state's efforts to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk. 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. Biomass facilities help address the residual materials from forest management projects that seek to restore forests to more natural densities where low-intensity fire can be reintroduced to promote fuel reduction and biodiversity.

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Importantly, AB 998 also requires the Energy Commission to evaluate the practicality and cost-effectiveness of upgrading shuttered biomass facilities to determine whether they can help the state increase its capacity to manage forest and excess biomass waste. Many rural communities have suffered as these facilities shuttered over the last few decades, both in terms of lost capacity to deal with local fuels and lost jobs. A recent field 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). Given the state's pressing need to increase capacity to deal with forest waste, upgrading and repowering some of these shuttered facilities could help the state achieve its forest health improvement, wildfire risk reduction, and greenhouse gas emission reduction goals.

It is important to note that these biomass facilities provide baseload renewable energy generation. While the power provided by biomass facilities may be more expensive than other sources of electricity, they also provide a magnitude and diversity of local and statewide benefits that cannot be matched by other generation sources.

Finally, RCRC appreciates AB 998's requirement for the Commission to engage with and solicit feedback from the communities in which these facilities are located and the applicable local governments.

For the above reasons, RCRC supports AB 998. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at jkennedy@rcrcnet.org.

Sincerely,



JOHN KENNEDY
Policy Advocate

cc: The Honorable Damon Connolly, Member of the California State Assembly
Members of the Senate Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Communications
Nidia Bautista, Chief Consultant, Senate Committee on Energy, Utilities, and
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Kerry Yoshida, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus