

**Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture and Marine, 16
February 2021 – Opening Statement, Department of
Housing, Local Government and Heritage - Report on the
Review of the use of Peat Moss in the Horticultural
Industry**

Background

Action 5, set out in the National Peatlands Strategy 2015, provides for a Review of the use of Peat Moss in the Horticultural Industry. To undertake this review, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht established a working group comprised of representatives from:

- Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht - Chair
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
- The Environmental Protection Agency.

The working group produced an Issues Paper on the Review of the use of Peat Moss in the Horticultural Industry. This paper was published on 9 October 2019 and submissions were invited on the paper by 31 January 2020. 34 submissions were received from industry stakeholders, Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations and the general public. A report on the Review of the use of Peat Moss in the Horticultural Industry was prepared by the inter-agency working group on the basis of the submissions received. The review report was published by Malcolm Noonan T.D., Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, on 7 September 2020.

Report on the Review of the use of Peat Moss in the Horticultural Industry

The report concludes that there are significant positives and negatives arising from ending the use of peat moss in the Horticultural Industry. There are complexities in terms of the environmental benefits of ending horticultural peat extraction set against the economic consequences for the industry, food security, the lack of as effective an alternative to peat and the

economic and cultural impact on the local communities that would be affected.

Establishment of Working Group

Minister Noonan accepted a recommendation in the review report that a working group be established, to include representatives from relevant Government Departments and State Agencies, Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations and industry stakeholders under an independent chairperson to examine the issues which were identified during the review and, in particular,:

- Reducing and ultimately eliminating the use of peat moss in the amateur gardening sector in order to leave what remains in use for the industry sector to buy time to develop alternatives, enabling food security and to provide industry surety.
- Graduating the elimination of the use of peat moss in the horticultural industry over an agreed period of years with an agreed end date.

- Finance and support for those workers whose skills cannot be accommodated in proposed alternative industries.
- Investment in further research into the development, education and use of alternatives to peat moss, such as bark, wood fibre, coir, biosolids, bracken and green compost, perlite, vermiculite, rockwool, and horticultural clay and in new methods of farming such as paludiculture and sphagnum farming.
- Up-skilling the existing workforce to regenerate the existing bogs for use in paludiculture, eco-tourism, carbon farming, and tree farming as appropriate to optimise environmental outcomes.
- Quantifying the value of the existing viable peat lands as carbon sinks and then determine a carbon market to incentivise owners and operators of peat lands to preserve, rewet or restore their assets.
- Educating the public to the benefits of what would be proposed to include the climate and environmental

benefits, the economic, social, cultural and public health benefits.

The role of the independent chairperson will be to chair meetings of the working group and to issue recommendations to Minister Noonan arising from its deliberations.

Minister Noonan hopes to be in a position to appoint the chairperson of the working group shortly. When the chairperson has been appointed, invitations to nominate representatives to the working group will issue from the Department.

I would like to thank the Committee for inviting the Department to make this presentation and I am willing to try to answer any questions that members may have.