



ICMSA

Submission

to the

Joint Committee

On

Agriculture and the Marine

on the

Rewetting of Bogs and the

Impact on Drainage for

Surrounding Farmland

March, 2021.

Mr. Chairperson, Committee members, ICMSA wishes to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on the rewetting of bogs and the impact on drainage for surrounding farmland. With Bord na Mona proposing to rewet 80,000 acres of bogs, there is genuine concern amongst landowners in these areas that there will be an adverse impact on the productivity of their lands and thus, their ability to earn a living from farming going forward. With Bord na Mona activities in peat production nearly at an end, ICMSA would make one very clear statement, the so called “Just Transition” needs to recognise the importance of agriculture in these areas and the impact of the changes in Bord na Mona land use needs to be properly recognised, recorded and measures put in place in the short, medium and long term to protect the agricultural economy and indeed rural residents in these areas.

ICMSA has engaged with Bord na Mona constructively on these matters and is meeting with them again tomorrow. We welcome this engagement and what is now required is a written agreement set down in legislation if required that will provide long term assurances to landowners impacted by Bord na Mona rewetting proposals.

The Background:

The following is the Press Release issued by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications on 24 November 2021.

Cabinet approves €108 million funding for groundbreaking Bord na Móna bog rehabilitation plan

- Minister Ryan also announces that 47 more projects in the Midlands, totalling €27.8 million, are approved under the Just Transition Fund

The Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan TD has announced two major funding allocations for the Just Transition

programme in the Midlands, designed to assist communities transitioning out of peat harvesting and into a new, green and sustainable economy.

The cabinet today approved funding of €108 million for [Bord na Móna's large-scale peatlands restoration project](#). The Scheme will protect the storage of 100 million tonnes of CO2 emissions, enhance biodiversity, create 310 jobs and will contribute to Ireland's target of being carbon-neutral by 2050. Through the implementation of the scheme, it is also estimated that over the period to 2050, 3.2million tonnes of CO2 emissions will be avoided (including an amount of future carbon sequestration), in comparison to a standard rehabilitation scenario. The Government funding, which will come from the Climate Action Fund, will be bolstered by an €18 million investment from Bord na Móna, who are committed to a "brown to green" transition.

Many of those employed in this project will be former peat harvesters who have an intimate knowledge and long history of working on our bogs.

In further good news for the region, provisional offers of funding, totalling €27.8 million, have been made today to 47 projects in the midlands under the Just Transition Fund. The projects represent innovative and inspiring plans from businesses, local authorities and communities in the midlands who are committed to creating a green and sustainable economy for the region. This dedication from the community and targeted support will make the region an attractive and sustainable place to live and work. It will fund training and reskilling so local businesses and communities can adjust to a low-carbon transition.

The successful projects, which have been offered funding greater than €100,000 each, include:

- The Empower Eco project which intends to deliver enterprise opportunities through the innovation hub in Lough Boora. The project's ultimate goal is to

mobilise the Midland's next generation of green-enterprise innovators and stimulate regional job creation.

- The Bord na Móna Medicinal Herbs Project, where Bord na Móna will become a supplier of certified organic, ethically, and sustainably-produced ingredients to herbal, cosmetic, food and beverage companies worldwide. The project has the potential to sustain up to 105 direct jobs and create a prominent industry for Medicinal Herbs in the Midlands region.
- A project to build a Further Education and Training Digital Learning Hub on the LWETB Longford campus. The Hub will encompass an online test centre, classrooms and practical workshop spaces. The Hub will be used by learners in the Wider Midland region to undertake skills programmes which will lead to specialisations in ICT, horticulture, aquaculture, construction and manufacturing in keeping with the ethos of Just Transition.

Minister Ryan, who is visiting Lough Boora in County Offaly, where he will meet representatives of workers and management at Bord na Móna, said:

“The government decision to commit €108 million in funding to the bog rehabilitation scheme for thousands of hectares of peatlands is a major milestone. The potential of our boglands to capture and store millions of tonnes of carbon over the years is phenomenal. Bog rehabilitation and remediation is a wonderful example of Just Transition in action, where workers who previously harvested peat for power generation will now be the custodians of our bogs. This project will turn carbon sources into sinks, restore biodiversity and help us meet our climate goals. Employing 350 people, it will also be a pilot project for the just transition we need to make as we adapt our society and economy to tackle climate change. I would also like to thank the Minister of State for Heritage Malcolm Noonan and our National Parks and Wildlife Service for their role in this project.”

Minister Ryan is also meeting some of the successful applicants for Just Transition funding:

“I am delighted to visit the Midlands today and see and hear first-hand about the kind of innovative projects that are being generated here. From the applications received to the Just Transition Fund, it is clear that the midlands region is ready and able to create a new, low-carbon future, developing sustainable employment for generations to come. I am inspired by the commitment from communities, individuals and businesses in the region to this journey and by the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit of the region. I very much look forward to these projects becoming reality and providing the opportunities that the people of the midlands deserve.”

Just Transition Commissioner, Kieran Mulvey commented:

“I welcome today’s announcement that further funding is being offered to these projects in the Midlands. Every funded project will play a key role in the Midlands successfully adapting to a Just Transition while also benefitting communities and individuals most affected by the move away from peat-harvesting. These innovative projects include sustainable retrofitting activities and carbon-neutral growing initiatives. The establishment of regional business hubs, supporting local business development and green enterprises, tourism, heritage and active mobility projects, re-skilling and training initiatives. All these projects have the ability to transform the Midlands region and its communities. They will bring new, innovative, green energy enterprises with the potential to boost the economy of the region and create jobs.”

Bord na Móna Chief Executive Tom Donnellan said;

"This is a major win for Ireland’s progress on Climate Action. Peatlands only cover 3% of the Earth’s surface but hold 30% of all the Carbon stored on land. They have a unique natural power to capture carbon and deliver significant wins for us and for future generations. Bord na Móna’s new Peatlands Restoration Plan

will work with nature to make this happen and will demonstrate its leadership role in climate action, delivering on government policy and national decarbonisation objectives.”

It is noteworthy that while the Minister met with the management and employees of Bord na Mona, he did not meet with the adjoining landowners to listen to their concerns and there is no reference to any communication with them in the press Release. In response to this Press Release, the following is a summary of the Press release issued by ICMSA on 25th November 2021:

ICMSA highlight farmer concerns on Bord na Mona ‘Rewetting’ plan for Midlands.

ICMSA has highlighted farmer concerns over the announcement that the Cabinet has approved funding for Bord na Mona’s ambitious peatlands restoration project. No one doubted the need to address climate change but it is hugely important that the position of individual landowners in these areas is taken into account and that these farmers can continue to farm their land in a productive way. Bord na Mona will have to provide clear assurances that privately owned farmland adjacent to the Bord na Mona sites will not be flooded or water-logged as part of the projected rewetting of the 80,000 acres.

ICMSA believes that the Government and Bord na Mona owe it to neighbouring farmers to explain what they’re doing and also commit in a binding way to make good any damage to the conditions of the land owned by these farmers caused by the project. We can’t have a situation where generations of work by farm families is destroyed by leakage from nearby Bord na Mona rewetting work. That’s not a lot to ask.

The message from our members has been consistent, they need assurances that following the rewetting by Bord na Mona of their bogs, that farmers lands will not be negatively impacted and should an issue arise, that Bord na Mona or its successor will immediately resolve the issues in question. Peatland rehabilitation guidelines should be published by the Government and only bogs that meet the relevant criteria should be rewetted, and any bogs that do not should be rehabilitated by other means which would not have the same negative impacts as rewetting unsuitable locations. The Bord Na Mona plan is a major land use change probably the most significant in fifty years and must be held to the same level of regulation and inspection as any private landowner would with such a substantial land use change. In order to maintain community support for project, a number of actions are required in ICMSA's opinion and they are as follows:

1. An independent baseline assessment of land adjoining the Bord na Mona project is required to establish the current condition of the land in question from a drainage perspective. This independent baseline assessment should be made available to the landowner in question for review and comment.
2. Bord na Mona should publish its plans for ongoing drainage works and its schedule for completion of same. This should include the frequency of same going forward.
3. Where a landowner finds his/her land have disimproved from the agreed baseline assessment, Bord na Mona must resolve the issue in question within an agreed timeframe. Where this timeframe is not adhered to or where crops losses, e.g.: grass silage, barley, occur as a result of drainage issues related to the bog re-wetting, compensation should be payable. Compensation for negative effects to land should be the last solution, as correcting of the source issue should be the primary method of resolution.

4. The impact on rural roads and dwellings also needs to be assessed and measures put in place to address the negative impacts.
5. The above items should be part of a written Code of Practice agreed between Bord na Mona and the farm organisations and the Code of Practice should become a charge on the land in question should the lands be transferred from Bord na Mona going forward.
6. The Code of Practice should be finalised before the project proceeds.

ICMSA and its members recognise the climate change challenge and farmers will play a constructive role in addressing. It is essential that the Government and state agencies such as Bord na Mona recognise the potential impact of bog re-wetting on individual landowners and the wider rural economy and commit to a written Code of Practice to address these concerns.

Thanks you.