

**Meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture and Marine, Tuesday 25th
May 2021**

**Update to the opening statement supplied by Mr Brian Lucas for the
Joint Committee meeting on 16th February 2021 on the supply of horticultural peat**

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 then Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht established a working group comprised of representatives from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (now the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) (which chaired the working group, the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Communications, Climate Action and Environment (now the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications) and the EPA.

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. Some 34 submissions were received from industry stakeholders, environmental non-governmental organisations and the general public and all of these are available to view online. 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 Deputy Malcolm Noonan, Minister of State with responsibility for heritage and electoral reform, on 7 September 2020.

The review 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 an effective alternative to peat, and the economic and cultural impact on the local communities that would be affected.

The Minister of State, Deputy Noonan, accepted a recommendation in the review report that a working group be established, to include representatives from relevant Departments and State agencies, environmental NGOs, and industry stakeholders under an independent chairperson to examine the issues which were identified during the review. In particular, these are as follows: the reduction and ultimately the elimination of 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; the graduation of the elimination of the use of peat moss in the horticultural industry over an agreed period of years with an agreed end date; the financing and support of those workers whose skills cannot be accommodated in proposed alternative industries; providing 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; the upskilling of 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; the quantifying of the value of the existing viable peat lands as carbon sinks to then determine a carbon market to incentivise owners and operators of peat lands to preserve, rewet or restore their assets; and educating the public to the benefits of what would be proposed to include the climate and environmental benefits, and the economic, social, cultural and public health benefits.

In February, 2021 Minister Noonan appointed Dr Munoo Prasad to the role of independent Chairperson of the Working Group. Invitations to nominate representatives to the working group issued on the 18th of February with receipt of nominations completed on the 25th of February 2021.

Since the Chairman has been appointed and the Working Group established, there have been four meetings of the Working Group, the first was held on the 4th of March, the second on the 18th March, the third on the 22nd April and the fourth on the 30th April. The current legislative provisions in relation to horticultural peat extraction and the potential of alternatives to the use of peat moss in the horticultural industry have been discussed at these meetings.

It is envisaged that the recommendations of the Chairman, arising from the deliberations within the Working Group, will be issued to Minister Noonan around in several weeks. In the meantime, an Interim Report of the Chairman of the Working Group on proceedings to date has been completed and submitted by him to the Minister.

**Peatlands Issues and Land Designation Section
National Parks and Wildlife Service
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage**

21 May, 2021