

P-06-1190 Ban the use of peat in horticulture and all growing media by 2023

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 4 Hydref 2020
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Reference: SR21/0837-1

Petition Number: P-06-1190

Petition title: Ban the use of peat in horticulture and all growing media by 2023

Text of petition: Peat bogs and moors are extremely important in the fight against the climate emergency; sequestering carbon better than many natural landscapes, reducing flooding and providing biodiversity. We need to ban the use of peat in horticulture and all growing media by 2023, including imports.

Peat currently makes up 40% of growing media used by the public, and over 60% of that used in the professional sector. There are other materials such as coir, composted wood and leaf mould which can be used. Peatlands should not be mined but protected and restored.

The Senedd should protect and restore all Welsh peat bogs and moors and crucially ensure that all growing media sold and used in Wales is peat free.

- 3 million cubic metres of peat sold for horticultural use annually in UK, $\frac{1}{3}$ from UK peatlands (IUCN <http://bit.ly/peat-extraction-horticulture>)
- 20 million tonnes carbon dioxide lost to atmosphere annually from UK's damaged peatlands (IUCN <http://bit.ly/peat-climate>)



- Peatland destruction releasing vast amounts of CO₂ (New Scientist <http://bit.ly/peatland-destruction>)
- Peatlands support many important species & unique ecosystems (IUCN <http://bit.ly/peat-species>)

1. Background

Soil is an important carbon store. The vast majority of carbon in the terrestrial environment is stored in soils rather than vegetation. Welsh soils are estimated to contain 410 million tonnes of carbon. Peaty soils have a high carbon and organic matter content. Deep peat soils make up over 4% of Welsh land area, and shallow peaty soils cover an additional 17.3%.

The 2020 State of Natural Resources Report states that the majority of the peat resource in Wales is in poor condition, and that:

...maintaining the carbon content of these soils is a key priority in limiting overall greenhouse gas emissions in Wales as well as managing water resources in the face of inevitable climate change.

The Welsh Government's Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales states that:

..peatland is currently not well represented in our carbon budgets or within the current emission pathways advised by the UKCCC

Environmental groups say that the rate of restoration is too slow, and have been campaigning for a ban on the sale of peat in compost. The Horticultural Trades Association say that an immediate ban is not realistic as “access to the amount and quality of alternative materials needed is not yet in place”, and that:

Success is dependent upon government recognising the need to support the industry to bring to market new and novel alternative materials

The UK Government previously set a voluntary target for the horticulture sector to stop selling peat compost to gardeners by 2020, however this approach has been unsuccessful.

A [similar petition](#) has been considered by the UK Parliament and is now closed. In response the UK Government highlighted the [England Peat Action Plan](#) which commits to “a full consultation on phasing out the use of peat in horticulture in 2021”. The action plan also recognises “that the voluntary approach has not delivered”.

In response to this petition, the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd, Lesley Griffiths MS (the Minister) says that the Welsh Government is “working with the UK Government with a view to launching a consultation on a sales ban for peat and peat containing products”, and that:

Whilst there is no current peat extraction in Wales, preventing sales of peat compost is in line with our Well-being of Future Generations Act commitment to be globally responsible

The UK Internal Market Act 2020

The UK [Internal Market Act 2020](#) established new rules for the regulation of goods across the UK. The Act established the principles of mutual recognition and non-discrimination, and enshrined them in UK law as Market Access Principles.

Under the mutual recognition principle, if a good complies with the rules relating to its sale in the part of the UK in which it was produced or imported to, then it can be sold in any other part of the UK without having to meet the standards in those other parts, even if they are different.

Under the non-discrimination principle, any rules regulating how goods must be sold in one part of the UK which discriminate directly or indirectly against providers from other parts of the UK do not generally apply.

Banning the sale of growing media containing peat may come within the scope of the Market Access Principles in the Internal Market Act 2020. This means that the effect and enforceability of the petition’s proposal may be impacted in practice.

2. Welsh Government action

The [UK Peatland Strategy \(IUCN\)](#) calls upon the four UK governments to develop and coordinate country-level action plans and programmes to deliver a series of objectives and outcomes.

In November 2020 the Welsh Government launched its National Peatland Action Programme 2020-2025 - “Wales’ first national action programme for peatland restoration”. It is being delivered by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), and targets peatland bodies most in need of restoration with the aim of delivering 600-800 hectares of restoration per year.

In response to this petition, the Minister highlights that the programme “is just the starting point when meeting our ambition”, and has “a capital budget of £1m/yr and a dedicated delivery team in NRW”.

Welsh Government peatland restoration has previously been delivered through a number of different mechanisms, including the Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS), Section 106 agreements and the EU LIFE scheme.

Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales outlines action the Welsh Government aims to take to ensure all Welsh peatlands are brought into sustainable management (Policy 66).

3. Welsh Parliament action

On 16 June 2021 Joyce Watson MS asked the Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS (the Deputy Minister) “what steps the Welsh Government are taking to encourage Welsh gardeners and horticulturalists to go peat-free”. In response the Deputy Minister highlighted the five-year National Peatland Action Programme, and said that “there will be a full review” of the programme.

In response to this petition, the Minister states that the review will take place within 18 months of the end of the five year programme, which is expected to be delivered to Welsh Government “by the end of period 3 of the 2024/25 financial year”.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.