

Scottish Government submission of 12 August 2022

PE1945/A: Ban the extraction and use of peat for horticulture and all growing media by 2023

Scotland's 2.3 million hectares of peatland are a significant natural carbon store, support unique habitats and biodiversity, improve water quality and reduce downstream flood risk. However, around 75% of Scotland's peatlands are degraded and net emitters of carbon. Peatland restoration forms a key part of Scotland's response to the climate change and biodiversity crises. It will play an important role in meeting the emissions targets set out in the Climate Change Plan, supporting Scotland's commitment to a Just Transition to net zero by 2045.

Scotland is committed both to restoring and to protecting our peatlands. We are investing £250 million to restore 250,000 ha of degraded peatland by 2030. Alongside our efforts to restore Scotland's peatlands, we are also working to protect them from the damage caused by extraction, development and poor management. In terms of protection, we are focusing on ending the use of peat for horticulture and strengthening the planning framework.

In the 2021-22, Programme for Government, we pledged to carry out a public consultation on a ban on the sale of peat-related gardening products as part of our wider commitment to phase out the use of peat in horticulture (including professional horticulture). The retail sector, covering gardening products, accounts for two thirds of all peat used in UK horticulture with the remainder used in professional horticulture to grow edible crops and ornamental plants. Hence this initial focus on gardening products should have a significant impact on reducing peat use.

Around 4 million cubic metres of growing media are used annually in horticulture in the UK. Ensuring this growing media is peat-free is not straightforward. The petition outlines some of the promising alternatives for replacing peat, but their success will depend on availability and suitability. There is good evidence that the horticulture industry is already significantly reducing its dependence on peat. The use of peat in the retail sector has declined over the past decade from 58% of growing media used by the UK public in 2011 to 35% in 2020. To support further

progress in Scotland, we have commissioned research on alternative growing media and on understanding barriers to transitioning away from peat. Regular discussion with key stakeholders (including the horticulture industry) is also informing our understanding of the barriers to progress and how these might be overcome.

We will shortly launch a public consultation on horticultural peat to inform the direction and speed of travel in relation to banning the sale of peat-related gardening products in Scotland. We are committed to setting a timescale for phasing out peat that is realistic yet ambitious, with introduction of legislation to support this. We will seek diverse views to ensure that our policy is right for Scotland with an emphasis on protecting Scotland's natural environment. We will need to ensure that any ban will not only cover peat extracted in Scotland but also cover peat-related gardening products that are sourced from the UK or imported from other countries (currently 61% of peat used in the UK is imported). We are committed not only to protecting Scottish peatlands but also peatlands elsewhere in the world.

We are also considering how we can use the planning framework to protect peatlands from extraction. Scotland has a number of active peat extraction sites, with extant planning permission, covering an estimated 1000ha. It is understood these sites extract peat for the horticulture, whisky and domestic heating sector. Current Scottish Planning Policy (SPP 2014) at paragraph 241 sets a high level of protection from commercial extraction, outlining that 'Policies should protect areas of peatland and only permit commercial extraction in areas suffering historic, significant damage through human activity and where the conservation value is low and restoration is impossible'.

However, a current review of our policy is set to provide further protection for peatlands. We laid our draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) in parliament on 10 November 2021 and alongside parliamentary scrutiny ran a public consultation inviting comments by 31 March 2022. Draft policy 33 set out support for the protection of soils, including peat and carbon rich soils, which have a critical role to play in helping us reach our net zero target by 2045. Under the proposals, new commercial peat extraction, including extensions to existing sites, should not be supported except in limited circumstances. We are pleased with the wide interest shown from across society and are carefully considering the broad range of views shared with us before finalising NPF4 for Scottish Parliament approval. SPP 2014 will remain in place until NPF4 is adopted by Scottish Ministers.

Our protection strategy combines measures such as our proposed legislative sales ban with introduction of planning policy that will significantly restrict extraction and our strategy will be shaped by our forthcoming consultation for which we welcome a diverse range of views.