

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

14th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
26 October 2022

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

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner Elizabeth Otway

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to place a legal ban on the extraction of peat, peat imports, exports, and sales in order to protect peatlands both in Scotland and worldwide.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1945>

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 8 August 2022.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 670 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

6. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

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

Petitioner

Elizabeth Otway

Date lodged

8 August 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to place a legal ban on the extraction of peat, peat imports, exports, and sales in order to protect peatlands both in Scotland and worldwide.

Previous action

I have emailed Mairi McAllan, Minister for Environment and Land Reform about this issue. Sandra Carey of the Peatlands and Land Quality Team in the Scottish Government replied but was unable to confirm that a ban on peat would go ahead.

Background information

Protecting peatlands are vital in addressing the climate and nature emergency. Peatlands store vast amounts of carbon, reduce flooding and support unique biodiversity. The Scottish Government's investment in peatland restoration is undermined by continued peat extraction and use of peat in horticulture. Decades of voluntary measures have failed. A legal ban on horticultural peat imports and sales is urgently needed. We welcome the Government's pledge to 'ban the sale of peat related gardening products' but ask that this is reinforced by a 2023 deadline. Peat-free compost materials include: green waste, coir, wood, wool, bracken, comfrey, manure. A ban on peat by 2023 will help Scotland benefit from the economic opportunities of sustainable industries.

The Government should immediately review all peat extraction licences. All growing media must be peat-free by the end of 2023, at the latest.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe (The Information Centre) is a purple rounded rectangle with a gradient. The text 'SPICe' is in white, bold, sans-serif font.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1945: Ban the extraction and use of peat for horticulture and all growing media by 2023](#)

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petitioner is concerned about the extraction and sale of peat material for use in compost products, in the context of the role of peatlands in carbon sequestration and storage.

- The petitioner wishes to prohibit “the extraction of peat, peat imports, exports, and sales”.
- The UK Government notes that [70% of the peat sold in the UK is retail sales of bagged growing media](#) (e.g. compost).
- Government commitments to phase out the use of horticultural peat have been made for several years:
 - The [2013 Climate Change Plan \(the Second Report on Policies and Proposals\)](#) stated that the Scottish Government “are working with the other UK Administrations to reduce and eventually phase out the use of peat in horticulture.”

- The vision set out in the [Scottish Government's 2015 National Peatland Plan](#) states that “The public will embrace peat-free composts.”
- The [2018 Climate Change Plan \(the Third Report on Policies and Proposals\)](#) set out that work on peatlands “includes supporting the phasing out of peat in horticultural compost.” It further notes that “This is a global challenge, as most of the peat used for this purpose is sourced from outside Scotland. The Scottish Government is supporting industry led work to develop and promote alternative sources of compost, and demonstrate their effectiveness. This is work which the National Peatland Group will continue to support and pursue.”
- The Scottish Government committed to “seek to phase out the use of horticultural peat by increasing uptake of alternative growing media substrate” in the [2019-20 Programme for Government](#).
- A [Climate Change Plan Update, published in December 2020](#), stated that in 2021, the Scottish Government would produce a “Delivery plan and timetable for phasing out horticultural peat developed and produced following engagement with stakeholders.” A plan has not been published; the 2021-22 Programme for Government stated that the government “will take forward work to develop and consult on a ban on the sale of peat related gardening products as part of our commitment to phase out the use of peat in horticulture”.
- The petitioner states that previous voluntary initiatives to phase out the use of peat compost have failed. While the Scottish Government has not explicitly set an end date for phasing out the use of peat for horticulture, the [UK Government set a target in 2010](#) to phase out peat for amateur use by 2020 and for the commercial sector by 2030. Since 2011, as a proportion of all growing media sold in retail, peat use has declined from 58.2% to 35.5%. Total volumes of growing media used have increased, however, particularly during the pandemic. The [Horticultural](#)

[Trades Association notes that](#) “Peat as a proportion of growing media fell from 48% in 2019 to 41% of total volume in 2020. This was due to the industry sourcing one million more cubic metres of peat alternatives than in 2019. However, the volume of peat used rose 9%, due to a 36% increase in the volume of amateur growing media to meet huge demand for gardening during the Covid-19 lockdown.”

- Industry, NGO and government initiatives have been established over the last decade to work towards meeting voluntary targets. For example, a UK Sustainable Growing Media Task Force was established in 2011, and [produced a roadmap, “Towards Sustainable Growing Media” in 2012](#). A Responsible Sourcing Scheme was established in 2016 by the Horticultural Trades Association, retailers, NGOs and Defra. [The scheme rates different products according to seven sustainability criteria](#). Most recently the Growing Media Taskforce made [a commitment in 2021 to remove peat from the retail market by 2025-2028](#), and from professional horticulture between 2028 and 2030.
- The [UK Government held a consultation in early 2022](#) regarding ending the retail sale of peat in horticulture in England and Wales. The consultation states that the UK Government aims to end the retail sale of peat and peat containing products in England and Wales by the end of this Parliament and by 2028 in the professional horticulture sector. The UK Government highlighted industry-led targets but noted that “while these proposals by the industry are promising, further government action is needed to ensure the entire industry continues to make progress in switching to peat alternatives, thus ending the use of peat and peat containing products.”
- Is it estimated that [60% of the UK’s peat extraction occurs in Scotland](#). However, [there are information gaps](#), including on the scale of extraction and existing permissions, and the emissions from the extraction. Though up-to-date figures are difficult to find, [a 2014 report suggested that around 94% of the peat extracted in Scotland was used for horticulture](#), and the remainder for “other

uses” ([e.g. whisky production, domestic fuel, mushroom compost and animal bedding](#)). [The IUCN Peatland Programme has suggested that minerals permissions periods for peat extraction have been poorly regulated](#), and that there have not been up-to-date records of peat extraction planning permissions. Following the passage of the Planning Bill in 2019, [the Scottish Government stated an intention to write to local authorities](#) seeking a better understanding of the location and scale of existing planning permissions for peat extraction.

- There has been a presumption against permissions for new peat extractions in Scottish planning policy since 2014. [The most recent draft Fourth National Planning Framework](#) states that proposals for new commercial peat extraction, including extensions to existing sites, should not be supported, unless
 - the extraction is supporting an industry of national importance,
 - there is no reasonable substitute,
 - the extraction is the minimum necessary and residual peat depth remains at least one metre,
 - the time-period for extraction is the minimum necessary, and
 - the proposal is accompanied by a comprehensive restoration plan to return the site to its original environmental status.
- However, [two-thirds of the peat sold in the UK is imported from elsewhere in Europe](#), in particular, from the Republic of Ireland. It has therefore been noted that where sale or consumption of peat-based products is not reduced alongside extraction, [this risks displacing emissions abroad](#).
- [Estimates for the emissions from Scotland’s degraded peatlands were first included in Scotland’s emissions statistics in 2021](#). The addition of these emissions meant that the ‘land use, land use change and forestry’ emissions sector are a ‘source’ rather than a ‘sink’ of emissions for the first time.
- The UK Climate Change Committee, the statutory body tasked with advising governments on climate change, has recommended banning practices such as rotational burning on peatland by 2020

and banning peat extraction and the sale of peat and peat imports by 2023.

Anna Brand
Senior Researcher

10 August 2022

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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

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Annexe C

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.