

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

2nd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Wednesday 7
February 2024

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

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. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [3 May 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new response from the Scottish Government which is set out at **Annexe C**.
4. Since the last consideration of this petition, the Scottish Government has published its analysis of responses to its consultation on ending the sale of peat in Scotland. An extract of the analysis is included at **Annexe D**.
5. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
6. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 856 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

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

Extract from the Official Report of last consideration of PE1945 on 3 May 2023

The Convener: PE1945, lodged by Elizabeth Otway, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to place a legal ban on the extraction of peat and on peat imports, exports and sales in order to protect peatlands in Scotland and worldwide.

The Scottish Government's submission from last November highlights the fact that the revised draft national planning framework 4 prohibits new commercial peat extraction except in limited circumstances. Since that submission was received, NPF4 has been approved.

In its submission, the Scottish Government said that it had been working with the industry to understand "transitional issues" and that a consultation to remove peat from Scottish horticulture was expected to begin in December 2022 but that it would not be possible to implement a sales ban by 2023. The submission said that a "delivery plan and timetable for phasing out horticultural peat" would be developed after the consultation responses had been analysed and discussions with industry and environmental non-governmental organisations had taken place. The Scottish Government consultation was launched in February, in fact, and it closes shortly, on 12 May.

The Scottish Crofting Federation's submission urges the Scottish Government to restrict any ban on peat to horticultural sales and imports and the commercial extraction of peat for burning, while protecting the traditional rights of crofters to extract peat on a small scale for personal use.

Do members have any questions or comments?

Alexander Stewart: It is important that we write to the Scottish Government seeking a summary of responses that it has had to date to its consultation and an update on when the delivery plan and timescale for phasing out horticultural peat will be developed and produced, in light of the consultation responses. We should also seek information on whether the Government supports a legal ban on the import, sale and use of horticultural peat and the commercial extraction of peat for burning, with the exception of crofters' traditional and cultural use.

The Convener: Do other colleagues want to comment?

Fergus Ewing: I am pleased that the Scottish Crofting Federation emphasised the importance of exempting crofters from any ban of the traditional practice of burning peat for domestic use on a small scale, which is part of the history and culture of the Western Isles. I am sure that there would be threats of direct action were the ban to be extended to that practice, and I would certainly be there, manning the barricades, having recently developed a taste for direct action.

The Convener: You would be ripping the sod, to extend your current penchant for ripping into things. Out of interest, Mr Ewing, in your experience, is peat traditionally extracted from the crofters' own land? Where do crofters take the peat from for domestic use?

Fergus Ewing: It is a community effort. It is usually done by more than one person in a particular way. I think that, by and large, community land is used rather than individual land. However, I am not sure—I am no expert on it.

The Convener: Are members content with the suggestions that have been made?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 16 June 2023

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

Scottish Government response to the request for information made by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee in their letter dated 4 May 2023.

A summary of the responses to the current consultation after it has concluded.

The consultation closed on 12th May 2023 with 558 responses, 484 of which have been published ([Ending the sale of peat in Scotland - Scottish Government - Citizen Space \(consult.gov.scot\)](#)). The consultation responses are now being analysed, after which a summary of responses will be available.

An update on when the delivery plan and timetable for phasing out horticultural peat will be developed and produced, in light of the responses to the consultation.

Following closure of the consultation on 12th May 2023, results are currently being analysed by independent consultants. Timescales for banning the sale of peat will be informed by the final consultation results, along with stakeholder engagement activities and impact assessments. It is likely that a delivery plan and timetable will be produced towards the end of 2023.

Information on whether the Government supports a legal ban on the import, sale and use of peat for horticulture and the commercial extraction of peat for burning, with an exemption for crofters' traditional and cultural use.

The purpose of the consultation was to develop policy and timescales around ending the sale of peat. As such, unless it is offered for sale, the cutting and use of peat is not within the scope of this consultation.

We are mindful of the needs of crofters and islanders and the responses of those who rely on peat, in addition to our impact assessments (including an Island Communities Impact Assessment, an Equality Impact Assessment and a Scotland-focussed Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment) will help us determine whether and how they might be affected by ending the sale of peat.

Outcomes of the consultation, stakeholder engagement and impact assessments will form robust evidence that will guide Scottish Ministers as to the scope of any sales ban.

Annexe D

Extract from the Scottish Government's analysis of response to its consultation on ending the sale of peat in Scotland

Conclusions

A range of individuals and stakeholders with detailed knowledge took part in the consultation, sharing their views on the use and labelling of peat-based products and the impact of ending the sale of peat in Scotland. Reflecting their experience and perspectives, this report provides a high-level summary of the consultation responses. For more detail, readers are encouraged to look to individual responses where permission was given for publication^[8].

At an overall level there was support for a ban on the sale of peat and peat-containing products in Scotland, with the majority of supporters agreeing it should be introduced within the next few years or as soon as possible. The environmental consequences of not preserving peatlands were commonly highlighted as a reason for this stance.

However, views were more nuanced depending on respondents' use of peat. Among the large number of individual hobby gardeners who responded, there was broad support for ending the use of peat in amateur and retail horticulture. Many highlighted that they no longer use peat and actively seek peat-free alternatives, which they felt were readily available, and there was a widespread view that peat is not necessary for propagation.

This view was not unanimous, with some hobby gardeners and many commercial growers arguing that peat remains essential when growing certain species, in particular ericaceous plants, and in producing food crops such as potatoes and mushrooms. Several argued the quality of the alternatives is too poor to switch from peat to another growing medium.

Potential negative impacts on businesses were noted by many. These included the absence or limited supply of alternatives to peat, cost implications of researching, sourcing and trialling alternatives, and increased wastage and crop failure. For some, these challenges could pose a threat to the future of their business.

The potential negative consequences of a ban affecting the whisky industry were highlighted, as Scotch whisky has an important economic value and The Scotch Whisky Association estimates peat is commonly used in around 80% of Scotch whisky production. Impacts noted by respondents included the loss of sales, exports, the closure of distilleries, and the associated impact on local areas.

Many considered the proposals from the perspective of those using peat as a domestic fuel. While the consultation does not propose a ban on personal peat cutting, concerns were expressed that a ban on the sale of peat could lead to increased fuel poverty as alternatives to peat were considered to be too costly and less environmentally friendly.

While many, particularly hobby gardeners and environmental organisations, called for a ban on the sale of peat completely with no exemptions, many others advocated for exemptions for certain businesses or sectors given the reasons above.

In summary, among individual hobby gardeners there is broad support for introducing a ban on the sale of peat in Scotland. Among organisations, however, support was more limited and several negative impacts were anticipated. Professional growers expressed concerns about increased production costs and supply chain issues. Those involved in the whisky industry noted the importance of peat in production and the challenge of finding an alternative, highlighting the negative economic impact of a ban. Many argued that a ban on peat sales for domestic fuel use could exacerbate fuel poverty.

Summary of main findings

- Over two thirds (69%) stated they could stop using peat, with individuals more likely than organisations to say they could stop (74% compared to 43% respectively). The two main reasons why respondents felt they could not stop using peat were the limited availability of alternatives (60%) and the cost implications (56%).
- Overall, three fifths (62%) indicated that there should be a ban on all or most peat sales, with a further 12% supporting a ban on all horticultural peat sales.
- The highest support for a ban on all/most sales was among environmental organisations (80%) and hobby gardeners (76%), many of whom argued that the sale of peat should be banned completely, including in horticulture. Over half (58%) of

professional gardeners / commercial growers favoured a ban on all or most sales, as did 50% of retail plant sales organisations.

- The most common year suggested for introducing a ban on the sale of peat for retail horticulture was 2023; around four fifths suggested a date by the end of 2025 at the latest. Organisations involved in professional horticulture preferred a later date of 2028-2030, assuming conditions were in place such as the availability of sufficient quantities of consistent, high-quality, environmentally friendly alternatives, ongoing research and development and further investment and support in machinery and technology innovations.
- Over four fifths (83%) of organisations indicated they would be impacted by a ban on the sale of peat; one quarter (26%) would be positively impacted, and 57% negatively impacted. All whisky organisations and 88% of growing media organisations anticipated negative impacts. Frequently mentioned adverse effects included supply chain issues and increased costs, challenges maintaining growing capacity and quality, and potential closure of businesses.
- The whisky industry was most likely to suggest an industry exemption, with the lack of an alternative to peat highlighted as a particular challenge for the industry. Other businesses for which exemptions were proposed included commercial growers currently more reliant on peat-based growing media, including agriculture and tree planting businesses, historic properties, botanical gardens and science agencies. Some respondents felt exempted businesses should be subject to additional regulations.
- Many argued that a ban on peat sales for fuel, limiting the availability of peat for domestic use, could exacerbate fuel poverty, particularly in rural and island communities.