



# Raised Bog Conservation Study

## Communications Phase 2 Summary Report

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the consultation activities that took place in relation to Phase 2 of the Scientific Basis for Raised Bog Conservation in Ireland Study (the Raised Bog Conservation Study).

Phase 2 of the study covers the period from November 2013 to May 2015. This phase coincides with technical tasks that included the development of the Draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report, and incorporates formal and informal consultation in the months after the publication of these documents.

This report focuses on consultation activities related to the Draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and associated SEA Environmental Report. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) published a National Peatlands Strategy and a Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network documents at the same time as the Draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan. However, these were not prepared by the Raised Bog Conservation Study and are therefore not the subject of this report.

In terms of consultation activities, this phase is characterised by the following:

- Statutory consultation with statutory consultees in relation to the SEA Environmental Report;
- Statutory consultation with statutory consultees and the public in relation to the draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and the SEA Environmental Report (produced by the Raised Bog Conservation Study) as well as the National Peatlands Strategy and Natural Heritage Area (NHA) Review (produced by the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG));
- Ongoing informal consultation with all stakeholders from the end of the statutory consultation period (April 2014) to May 2015.

## 2 COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

Communications activities associated with Phase 2 included the development of communications materials and the planning and execution of communications methods.

### 2.1 COMMUNICATIONS MATERIALS

The communications materials which were developed in relation to Phase 2 of the study are listed in Table 2.1. These materials facilitated the achievement of Phase 2 objectives and the planning and execution of communications events and activities.

**Table 2.1** Phase 2 communications materials

<b>Materials</b>
Ongoing maintenance and population of <b>Stakeholder Register</b>
Ongoing maintenance of <b>Communications Register</b>
Ongoing maintenance of <b>Communications Risk Register</b>
Development of <b>study newsletter</b> no. 2
Preparation of <b>presentations</b> for briefings/meetings/workshops etc.
Development of <b>supporting materials</b> (letters, invitations, advertisements) for promotional purposes
Preparation of <b>summary report</b> (this report)

### 2.2 COMMUNICATIONS METHODS

Communications methods undertaken in relation to Phase 2 of the study included:

- Statutory consultation activities;
  - Notification of statutory authorities;
  - Preparation and dissemination of stakeholder pack;
  - Notification emails;
  - Web-based consultation;
  - Coordination with existing information dissemination mechanisms;
- Briefings for relevant personnel, groups etc:

- Direct communications with stakeholders;
- Bog-specific workshops;
- Preparation of summary report (this document).

## **2.2.1 Statutory consultation activities**

### **Notification of statutory authorities**

The statutory authorities listed in SI 435 of 2004 were notified of the publication of the draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and SEA Environmental Report. The statutory authorities were given approximately three months to comment (24<sup>th</sup> January 2014 to 18<sup>th</sup> April 2014).

The statutory consultees for SEA are established within the legislation as being:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG);
- Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG);
- Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR); and
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

The statutory consultees were also advised that DAHG were undertaking a concurrent consultation on the Draft National Peatlands Strategy and a review of Natural Heritage Area (NHA) raised bogs.

### **Statutory public consultation activities**

Members of the public and all interested parties were also notified of the publication of the draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and SEA Environmental Report, as well as the draft National Peatlands Strategy and a review of Natural Heritage Area (NHA) raised bogs.

### **Preparation and dissemination of stakeholders pack**

A stakeholder pack was prepared and issued to stakeholders to notify them of the publication of the suite of peatlands documents and to invite them to comment. The pack included:

- A letter inviting submissions on the suite of peatlands documents with reference to the location of the documents on the study and NPWS websites, and at NPWS offices;
- Study newsletter no. 2.

Examples are included in Appendix A.

The pack was issued to the following stakeholders:

- The Peatlands Strategy consultees (343 no.);
- Local bog committees associated with the SAC Bogs (88 no.);
- Local authority directors of services (environment and planning) and heritage officers (41 no.);
- Peat producers;
- Any other relevant stakeholders listed in the study's Stakeholder Register (17 no.).

The consultation period was the same as for the statutory authorities i.e. from 24<sup>th</sup> January 2014 to 18<sup>th</sup> April 2014. The issue of the packs, and all related correspondence, was recorded in the Communications Register.

### **Notification emails**

Notification emails were sent to a number of individuals/groups to inform them that the statutory public consultation period was taking place and, in some instances, to identify possible additional promotional opportunities. Recipients included:

- Study team members;
- Study Steering Group members;
- Peatlands Council members;
- NPWS divisional and regional managers;
- Scientific Advisory Group members.

### **Web-based consultation**

An invitation to comment on the suite of peatlands documents was added to the study and NPWS websites. The documents were uploaded to the website. A facility was set up on the study website to allow users to comment directly through the website.

### **Coordination with existing information dissemination mechanisms**

The key stakeholders identified in

Table 2.2 were asked to include information in relation to the statutory public consultation on their websites, facebook accounts, twitter accounts, publications, etc. The stakeholders were issued with pre-prepared content, including a short article for websites and publications, and announcement text for Facebook and Twitter accounts (Appendix A).



**Table 2.2** Existing information dissemination mechanisms

Organisation	Details	Level
National Parks and Wildlife Service	<a href="http://www.npws.ie">www.npws.ie</a>	National
Peatlands Council	<a href="http://www.peatlandscouncil.ie">www.peatlandscouncil.ie</a> Peatlands Council newsletter	National
Irish Peatland Conservation Council	<a href="http://www.ipcc.ie">www.ipcc.ie</a> Facebook page YouTube channel Peatland News newsletter Action for Bogs online newsletter	National to local
Irish Environmental Network 30,000 members within member organisations	<a href="http://www.ien.ie">www.ien.ie</a> IEN weekly newsletter Facebook Twitter Distributed information to all member organisations	National to local
Irish Rural Link	<a href="http://www.irishrurallink.ie">www.irishrurallink.ie</a>	National to local
Bord na Móna	<a href="http://www.bordnamona.ie">www.bordnamona.ie</a>	National
An Taisce	<a href="http://www.antaisce.org">www.antaisce.org</a> <a href="http://www.facebook.com/antaisce">www.facebook.com/antaisce</a> <a href="http://www.twitter.com/antaisce">www.twitter.com/antaisce</a> An Taisce e-zine	National to local
Birdwatch Ireland	<a href="http://www.birdwatchireland.ie">www.birdwatchireland.ie</a>	National
Teagasc	<a href="http://www.teagasc.ie">www.teagasc.ie</a>	National
Coillte	<a href="http://www.coillte.ie">www.coillte.ie</a> Facebook Twitter News feed	National
Friends of the Irish Environment	<a href="http://www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.net">www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.net</a>	National to local
Irish Wildlife Trust	<a href="http://www.iwt.ie">www.iwt.ie</a>	National to local

Organisation	Details	Level
CELT (Centre for Environmental Living and Training)	<a href="http://www.celtnet.org">www.celtnet.org</a>	National
International Peat Society	<a href="http://www.peatsociety.org">www.peatsociety.org</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/peatsociety">www.facebook.com/peatsociety</a>	International

## 2.2.2 Briefings and workshops

The briefings, meetings and workshops which took place during Phase 2 of the study are outlined below. RPS provided updates of study activities at these events.

### Period between 16<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014

- A series of workshops were held with the Project Steering Group to discuss detailed scientific input and consultation with respect to the Draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan:
  - 4<sup>th</sup> February 2014 (Workshop 8, Ely Place, Dublin);
  - 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 (Workshop 9, Ely Place, Dublin).
- Technical meetings were held with NPWS:
  - 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014, RPS and NPWS;
  - 17<sup>th</sup> January 2014, RPS, NPWS & Steering Group Experts;
  - 10<sup>th</sup> March 2014, RPS and NPWS;
  - 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014, RPS and NPWS.
- Briefings were made to the Peatlands Council, Minister and the EU Commission:
  - 23<sup>th</sup> January 2014, NPWS Staff and Minister;
  - 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014, Peatlands Council.
- Briefings were given to key stakeholders:
  - 25<sup>th</sup> January 2014, Turf Cutters and Contractors Association (TCCA);
  - 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014, EPA.

### Period between 16<sup>th</sup> May 2014 and 15<sup>th</sup> November 2014

- Meetings were held with the project Steering Group:
  - 09<sup>th</sup> June 2014 (Workshop 10, Ely Place, Dublin).
- A project progress meeting was held with NPWS:
  - 12<sup>th</sup> June 2014, RPS and NPWS.
- A series of technical meetings were held with NPWS:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014, RPS and NPWS;
  - 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014, RPS and NPWS;
  - 16<sup>th</sup> October 2014, RPS and NPWS;
  - 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014, RPS and NPWS.
- Briefings were made to the Peatlands Council:
  - 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014, Peatlands Council.
- Briefings were made to key stakeholders:
  - 28<sup>th</sup> July 2014, Cloonmoylan and Barroughter Bog Committee;
  - 30<sup>th</sup> July 2014, RPS and NPWS Regional Staff;
  - 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014, Clara Bog Group.

Period between 16<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015

- A meeting was held with the project Steering Group:
  - 27<sup>th</sup> November 2014.
- A project progress meeting was held with NPWS:
  - 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015, RPS briefing to NPWS Senior Management Team.
- A technical meeting was held with NPWS:
  - 10<sup>th</sup> February 2015, RPS and NPWS.
- A briefing was made to the Peatlands Council;
  - 9<sup>th</sup> December 2014, Peatlands Council.

- Briefings were made to key stakeholders:
  - 28<sup>th</sup> November 2014, Lough Sheelin TCCA, Castlepollard;
  - 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014, Carrownagappul representative, Mountbellew;
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015, Presentation at the Bord na Mona Biodiversity Action Plan – Review Day, Athlone;
  - 19<sup>th</sup> February 2015, OPW and Carrownagappul representative, Mountbellew.

#### Period between 16<sup>th</sup> March 2014 and 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015

- A meeting was held with the project Steering Group:
  - 20<sup>th</sup> April 2015.
- A briefing was made to the Peatlands Council:
  - 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015, Peatlands Council.
- Briefings were made to key stakeholders:
  - 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Mouds Bog Interim Committee, Newbridge;
  - 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Lough Sheelin TCCA, Castlepollard;
  - 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Deputy Fitzmaurice, Leinster House;
  - 14<sup>th</sup> April 2015, Lough Ree TCCA, Roscommon;
  - 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015, Kildare TCA, Newbridge;
  - 4<sup>th</sup> May 2015, Lough Sheelin TCCA, Castlepollard.

### **2.2.3 Direct communications**

Incoming and outgoing communications by email, letter, or via the website were recorded in the Communications Register and the correspondence, and any attachments, were kept on file.

### 3 SUBMISSIONS AND RESPONSES

Table 3.1 summarises the numbers of submissions received in response to the invitation to comment.

Section 3.1 summarises the main issues raised by consultees, the submissions themselves are included in Appendix B. In relation to the group submissions detailed below, one copy of each of the generic letters is included as an example within the appendix.

**Table 3.1** Summary of number of responses and submissions

Type	Number		
	Exploitation	Conservation	Both
Campaign / petition letters	1,151	96	26
Members of public	126	11	8
Government departments and state bodies	0	4	1
Regional authorities	0	0	1
Local authorities	0	4	2
NGOs	0	7	3
Local groups	0	1	0
Representative groups	8	4	3
Politicians	4	0	0
Academics	0	7	2
Business interests	0	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,289</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>1,474</b>		

#### 3.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES RAISED

Many consultees expressed their satisfaction that work is being done, and that progress is taking place, in relation to peatlands issues. They welcomed the publication of the suite of peatlands documents as they advance the efforts being made in relation to peatland management.

The below sections summarise the main issues raised in the submissions. The submissions themselves are included in Appendix B.

### **3.1.1 Petitions / campaign letters and members of the public who support continued turf cutting**

Most of these stakeholders formally objected to the draft plan and strategy documents. They stated that there is nothing in the documents for turf cutters and land owners on designated SAC bogs. They feel they have been excluded from the decision-making process in relation to their heritage, tradition and property and that the real decisions have already been made without their input. They stated that they have no trust or confidence in the integrity or claimed expertise of the Government or their paid contractors with regard to raised bog conservation. They believe that nobody has ever been held accountable for what they label the mistakes, injustices and intimidation of the past. They believe that tax payers' money has been wasted on conservation activities.

They believe that the approach to raised bog conservation is counter-productive as it pits local individuals and community's interests against nature conservation. They believe that the government has focused too much on the environmental pillar of sustainability to the detriment of the social and economic pillars.

The majority of turf cutters expressed their wish to continue cutting turf and emphasized that their families have cut turf for generations. Some raised concerns in relation to how they would heat their homes without continuing the activity, particularly as the price of other sources of fuel continues to rise. Many stated their intention to continue to cut turf.

The majority of the consultees stated categorically that they are not in favour of the re-wetting of bogs as they fear flooding of their homes and/or lands. Some mentioned the risk of bog bursts.

The following conditions were called for:

- Turf-cutters must be compensated before the re-wetting of bogs;
- There should be no restriction on farming activities within the SAC areas i.e. grazing of livestock; spreading of slurry, lime or fertiliser; drainage work; construction of fencing etc;
- There should be no penalties of single farm payments on farmland because of bog re-wetting;
- There should be no restriction on planning permission for new houses and farm yards;
- Compensation for turf-cutting does not give the NPWS the right to enter property;
- There should be no blocking of drains or restriction on cleaning of drains;
- There should be no trespassing on land without permission;
- Any loss of market value of land, by wetting, should be compensated for;

- Any movement of bog and damages to other farm lands and associated property are the responsibility of the department;
- All department or study staff working on the bogs must be fully insured as no bog owner can be liable for an insurance claim;
- No roads should be flooded by the re-wetting activities;
- Bog owners should retain carbon credit on the bog.

The following opinions were expressed:

- Requiring turf cutters on retained and newly designated NHA bogs to seek a permit to cut their own turf for their own use is a cynical ploy to try to end turf cutting on these bogs by refusing requests for permits on a phased basis after the local, European and general elections;
- The requirement for all turf cutting contractors on all bogs (designated and non-designated) to be registered and licensed is a means to facilitate the eventual ending of all turf cutting on all bogs by revoking the licenses on a phased basis, thereby avoiding the widespread resistance that would be provoked if a ban on turf cutting were introduced with immediate effect;
- There is no need to further regulate the exercise of turbary right. Turbary rights are already self-regulating in that one can only cut turf within the confines of one's own small plot and only to satisfy the requirements of one's own family;
- The designation process for the proposed new SACs and NHAs is arbitrary, secretive, undemocratic, unjust, oppressive, disproportionate and illegal;
- We all live in a managed landscape. The wilderness approach to nature conservation was rejected.

The assertion in the peatlands documents that active raised bog habitat has been lost due to domestic turf cutting was rejected for the following reasons:

- Small scale domestic turf cutting is a localised activity, is sustainable, is a centuries old established land use, is within the carrying capacity of the bogs and does not threaten the integrity of the bogs;
- Government reports demonstrate the active raised bog habitat is increasing in several bogs in co-existence with small scale domestic turf cutting, that several bogs devoid of any turf cutting have suffered a decline in active raised bog habitat, and that the bogs which have suffered the greatest reduction in active raised bog habitat have no turf cutting on them at all.

### **3.1.2 Petitions / campaign letters and members of the public who support conservation**

The publication of the suite of peatlands documents was welcomed by stakeholders who feel that they begin to address the long overdue need to achieve realistic peatland conservation goals. However, the view was expressed that the documents do not adequately address all of the issues relevant to peatland conservation.

The following were set out as requirements:

- The peatlands documents need to be strengthened to deliver on conservation goals.
- The documents need to recognise that turf cutting is not the only issue facing peatlands in Ireland. Issues such as climate change, wind farm development, forestry and others need to be given a more robust policy direction.
- The publication of advertisements notifying the de-designation of NHAs prior to the end of the consultation period was disappointing and may undermine the peatlands documents. The de-designations could result in an overall loss of peatland habitat. Also, there is a risk that the election of a new government before the process of designating sites is completed in 2017 could result in a review of NHA status.
- More information should be given on the proposed Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group such as the membership of the group and the group's level of influence in relation to the various government departments regulating peatlands for various uses.
- It is essential that timelines be specified for the actions proposed in the Peatlands Strategy.
- There must be more support and greater guidance for actions relating to the promotion of peatland education in the Peatlands Strategy.
- The education potential of sites was not taken into account in the analysis of sites in fulfilling the national conservation objectives.
- It is important that communities are included in any proposed work to be carried out in their area. Training should be provided on how to carry out restoration work which could provide the opportunity for job creation.
- The NPWS should be given more staff and a larger budget to tackle the issues of peatlands conservation



### 3.1.3 Government departments and state agencies/bodies

In general the publication of the peatlands documents was welcomed and the inclusion of suggestions and comments provided at the SEA scoping phase was acknowledged.

It was stated that the commitments included in the Peatlands Strategy will need to be reflected by the provision of adequate resourcing and commitment across a range of relevant statutory bodies and key stakeholders to ensure its effective implementation.

The important role of peatlands in providing a range of ecosystem services was welcomed.

It was acknowledged that the Peatlands Strategy delivers on one of the key strategic conclusions of the BOGLAND Project<sup>1</sup> i.e. a National Peatlands Strategy is clearly required if the protocol for sustainable management of peatlands is to be implemented.

#### Clarifications

Several requests for clarifications and changes of wording were made in relation to the strategy. For example, it is suggested that the terms 'ecosystem services' and 'ecosystem functions' are not well defined and there are inconsistencies in their usage. They should be clearly differentiated from other services, functions and benefits which derive from the exploitation of peatlands to the detriment of natural functions of the ecosystems,

#### Extent of peatlands and mapping

It was highlighted that there has been a large increase in cutting (both domestic and commercial) on undesignated bogs over the last few years due to the price of other fuels. This loss may be significant. The issue of mapping the extent of peatlands in Ireland should be given greater prominence within the strategy, including data gaps. The full realisation of many of the principles and actions will be difficult to achieve without accurate spatial baseline data on peatlands. It is recommended that the development of a national peatlands map be a priority action in the strategy. This would facilitate reporting requirements under the Kyoto Protocol.

#### Economic value

There is a need to fully recognise the ongoing economics value of the peat industry in Ireland.

#### Governance

It was suggested that the proposed Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group could be strengthened by assigning a clear leadership and accountability role to the NPWS and DAHG. The role of local

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<sup>1</sup> <http://erc.epa.ie/safer/iso19115/displayISO19115.jsp?isoID=236>

authorities as key players and regulators of land management could also be clarified and strengthened. Many other departments and agencies also need to be involved in providing support. There may therefore be merit in considering a tiered approach to implementation and governance with a relatively small and focused national coordination group at tier 1, a broader consultative group at tier 2, and local consultative groups at tier 3.

### Timeframes

The setting of timeframes over which the strategy will be implemented is desirable. The development of an implementation plan with clear accountability and actions and timeframes would facilitate this. A commitment to review the strategy every five years would be worth considering.

### Regulation

The process used to regulate peat extraction in Ireland (for plots greater than 50 ha) is not appropriate for managing and regulating ecologically sensitive areas such as peatlands. Therefore, the review of the existing legal framework is welcomed and should be prioritised for urgent consideration. The administrative burden that will be placed on applicants to fulfil the requirements of EIA and AA will need to be determined very carefully before regulations are finalised.

### EU Water Framework Directive (WFD)

There is the potential for stronger linkages to the WFD to be reflected in the strategy. The principles and actions should be reviewed with a view to promoting integration, linkages and synergies.

### EU Floods Directive

The current Catchment Flood Risk Assessment & Management (CFRAM) Studies should be taken into consideration. A commitment should be included in the peatlands documents on how it is going to have regard to the potential impact on flood risk, as required by the Floods Directive. This flood risk should be systematically assessed.

### Climate change

The strategy should strongly signal the longer term objective of sustainable management of all national peatlands which includes the maintenance of the considerable store of carbon within peatlands.

The commitment in the strategy to developing a sound technical basis for analysing and reporting greenhouse gas emissions and removals is supported, but in order for this to have any practical benefit, the Irish government needs to press to have land use change included within the scope of emissions counted for EU reporting.

### Rural Development Programme

It would be useful to elaborate more fully on how the proposed agri-environment climate measures, including the proposed new Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS), could contribute to achieving the objectives of the strategy. It is recommended that the Peatlands Strategy recommends that areas of peatlands that are eligible under the Habitat's Directive, but are currently outside the Natura 2000 network, be considered for inclusion in Tier 1 Priority Environmental Actions under the GLAS scheme.

### The Plan and SEA and AA

There would be merit in establishing an Implementation Sub-Group to promote ongoing stakeholder engagement and monitor the progress of plan implementation. There would be merit in linking the plan and SEA related monitoring and, where relevant, reporting, to allow the overall effectiveness of plan implementation to be determined.

### Peatlands and Ecological Focus Areas

It is recommended that wildlife areas that are not defined as permanent grassland and pasture (including peatland), and are currently ineligible for support under the Single Farm Payment Scheme, be considered for inclusion as potential Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) under the Greening Measures of CAP.

### Statutory drainage maintenance and compensation for loss of drainage outfall

The strategy is not making stakeholders aware that restoration plans will have potential for loss of statutory drainage outlets which could result in stakeholders incurring losses. Compensation mechanisms could however be devised as appropriate.

### Further work

It was suggested that a landscape level assessment of potential peatland corridors between sites be carried out in line with the Habitats Directive aim of improving the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network.

The effects, including cumulative impacts, of septic tanks within cutover areas should be investigated and this should be addressed in the final plan.

The site-specific restoration and management plans should assess the impact of forestry and extensive grazing in the cutover areas of the SAC bogs and should zone areas as suitable and unsuitable based on hydrological modelling of the connection of the cutover to the high bog.

The controlled use of off-road all-terrain vehicles, such as quad and trail bikes, should also be investigated and suitable areas zoned if appropriate.

### Clara Bog Visitor Centre

More information on the Clara Bog Visitor Centre and its positive impact on the local community should be included in the final plan.

### Stakeholders

It was stated that collaborative engagement with all stakeholders will be essential to the success of the Peatlands Strategy. The following suggestions were made:

- A link could be made with the National Biodiversity Data Centre in order to establish a raised bog survey and encourage public participation.
- Investment could be made into an online raised bog educational and interpretation resource.
- Twinning raised bog sites with sites in other countries could be explored in order to benefit local communities e.g. Clara Bog is twinned with Bargerveen SCI, a cross-border site shared between Germany and the Netherlands.
- A formal network of people and organisations working in the field of raised bog interpretation should be set up (e.g. the IPCC, NPWS, An Taisce and suitable 'Heritage in Schools' programme providers) to target limited resources to increasing awareness of conservation issues.
- The approach adopted to achieve buy-in should be more innovative, experimental and experiential than the current compliance-centric approach.

### NHA Review

There is some confusion as to which bogs are proposed for designation, they should be clearly named.

In relation to the section on applying for consent to continued turf cutting, reference should be made to Section 19 of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000, which puts the requirement on a statutory footing and details the steps involved. Standard consent conditions should be included in the documentation. Consent and should be subject to review and monitoring.

### Gaps

It was suggested that there are no specific actions in relation to blanket bogs and issues relating to them.

### **3.1.4 Regional authorities**

The importance of peatlands as a unique asset in all aspects of life, particularly across the midland region, from a current and historic perspective was emphasised and the need for a focused vision encompassing and maximising this was acknowledged.

It was pointed out that the existing provisions of Regional Planning Guidelines support the preparation of plans for the use and management of industrial peatlands.

It was stated that regional authorities can provide appropriate fora within which stakeholders can engage and interact at strategic level to address peatlands issues.

It was suggested that regionally focused plans, below the national level plan, would be beneficial. The regional element is fundamental to the development and implementation of peatland policy.

It was suggested that alternative employment options need to be urgently considered in light of cessation of peat harvesting as well as the need to sustain communities into the future.

### **3.1.5 Local authorities**

The local authorities generally welcome the publication of the peatlands documents and the vision statement within the strategy. It was recommended that the cultural value of peatlands be reflected in the vision statement.

Local authorities provided additional information, studies and mapping that they wish to be considered in the finalisation of the peatlands documents.

It was suggested that the potential of peat soils to yield significant information on our past through preserved archaeological and palaeo-environmental material should be reflected to a greater degree within the strategy.

It was suggested that comprehensive mapping of peatlands and their uses be created to enable proper planning.

The de-designation of bogs is likely to lead to widespread destruction of what are still sites worthy of conservation.

NHA bogs that will be retained need careful consideration and investigation and planning.

It was suggested that the figure of 7% quoted in the strategy for the potential of the bogs for tourism and amenity purposes is a substantial under-estimation.

It was requested that the role of local authorities in the control and management of turf cutting, if any, as outlined in the draft plan be clarified. Any required training should be provided.

It was requested that local authorities be fully consulted as part of the SEA/AA/EIA processes in relation to peatlands.

It was suggested that the enforcement provisions in the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) are not the optimum mechanism for regulation breaches in relation to turf cutting. Therefore, the action to review the existing legal framework relating to the regulation of peat extraction is welcomed. It was suggested that a national lead authority be considered for the enforcement role, not local authorities.

There needs to be a balance between the economic value of peatlands and their conservation. The importance of peatlands from an employment point of view needs to be fully recognised in the strategy.

The issues of the control of invasive alien species and overgrazing were raised as main threats to the protection of biodiversity within peatlands and it was requested that particular attention be given to these threats.

It was suggested that the compensation scheme be extended to turf cutters on NHAs.

It was suggested that the strategy include a dedicated section on the after use of peatlands and that the issue of community gain from the after use of peatlands should be incorporated.

It is suggested that the strategy currently describes all of the constraints and opportunities in relation to peatlands on an individual / sectoral basis. It seems to miss an opportunity to stitch all of the constraints and opportunities together in a spatial dimension.

The strategy should acknowledge that the existing network of linkages through scenic, open, wilderness and re-developed peatlands areas could easily be lost if the after use of peatlands is allowed to proceed in an ad-hoc way.

It was pointed out that the ability of local authorities to take enforcement action has in the past been compromised because of the lack of evidence that landowners were fully notified. Therefore, it is suggested that landowners be properly notified as regard the status of sites and their obligations when carrying out certain activities.

It has been noted by Local Authorities that the boundaries of SACs follow ordinance survey field boundaries which seem arbitrary. Therefore it is considered that the present activities afford a good opportunity to review these boundaries.

Greater public awareness of the value and importance of peatlands is essential to ensure their protection, conservation and restoration. The department should take a more active role in that regard.

Suggestions were made in relation to the choice of area for the National Peatlands Park suggested in the strategy.

It was suggested that the permitting of all extraction, no matter how small, may not be possible.

### **3.1.6 Non-governmental organisations**

The publication of the peatlands documents was generally welcomed as it begins to address the need to achieve realistic peatland conservation goals.

#### Scope and timescales

It is considered that the strategy does not address all of the issues affecting peatlands e.g. climate change, wind farm development, forestry, education. These issues need to be given a more robust policy direction and management guidelines. More of the actions arising from the BOGLAND Project should be incorporated into the strategy. Setting timeframes for the achievement of actions is necessary.

#### New site designation

The publication of advertisements notifying the de-designation of NHAs prior to the consultation period could undermine the documents. As well as resulting in an overall loss of peatlands which are worthy of conservation, the process of designating new sites by 2017, which is just after a general election, could lead to the next government once again reviewing the NHA status, bringing things back to square one.

#### Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group

There is not enough information on the Peatlands Strategy Information Group, its membership, and its degree of influence over the various government departments with a role in regulating peatlands issues. A Peatland Research Group should also be set up to support the implementation of the strategy.

#### National conservation targets

Targets need to be set for peatland types other than raised bog. The targets for raised bog should be more aspirational – based on what we should be aiming to achieve rather than on what we think we can achieve.

#### Fen and transmission mire habitats

There is not enough within the strategy in relation to these habitat types, transmission mire habitat is not mentioned at all. Direction and management guidelines should be provided.

#### Enforcement

There needs to be more control of corporate entities that utilise peatlands. Those that are not licensed should be licensed and there should be monitoring and enforcement of licence conditions.

### Resourcing

The NPWS must have adequate resources to ensure that the actions in the strategy can actually be achieved and its principles adhered to. The final strategy should give an indication of the resources required.

### Air quality

The issue of the release of particulate matter during peat burning is not addressed in the strategy.

### Management of privately cut peatlands

There are no actions in the strategy concerning the after-use and management of privately cut bogs. Similarly there is no action on how turf cutting in these areas is to be managed and controlled into the future.

### **3.1.7 Members of the public**

Many of the members of the public who made individual submissions stated that they formally object to the plan.

Many stated that there is nothing in the plan for turf cutters on SAC designated bogs, and that the rights and needs of affected turf cutters have not been considered.

Some members of the public expressed the opinion that Ireland's people are more important than its bogs and that the needs of bogs, and other landscape features and wildlife, are being put before the needs and wants of Ireland's people.

Many pointed out the historical, cultural and social importance of turf cutting to themselves and to their families. Turf cutting was described by some as a vocation.

Some stated that turf cutters have not been consulted in the decision making process with regard to their property rights, tradition, culture and heritage. They feel that the process is unjust, secretive and undemocratic. They believe that the government have no right to interfere with, or cause impact upon, private property or rights.

The natural heritage, recreational, tourism and agricultural value of cutaway peat areas were highlighted by some members of the public. Some consultants suggested that tours be offered on bogs by local people and that the money raised should be passed to the bog owners. It is believed that these uses are compatible with turf cutting.

Many reported that their bogs have been drained and maintained by the OPW and/or Local Authorities in the past, including access roads, for the purposes of cutting turf. Turf cutters have received financial grants in the past to cut and deepen drains. In some instances, turf cutters have made financial



contributions to the cost of drainage and maintenance schemes. They now question why such bogs are the subject of conservation efforts.

Many are seriously concerned about possible flooding and bog bursts and believe that these could result from the restoration and re-wetting of bogs.

Many are concerned about the distance they would have to travel to relocation bogs and that they might not get 'like for like' at the new location.

Many stated that they do not want their lands included in the plan. Many reject the need for a permit to cut turf and maintain that they have a right to maintain drains.

Some suggested that the requirement for contractors to be registered and licensed is merely to facilitate the eventual ending of all turf cutting and such an eventuality would be considered utterly unacceptable. Some expressed the belief that restrictions on turf cutting will eventually be extended to all peatlands in the country.

Some suggested that the requirements of the plan were incompatible with farming practices outlined in established good farming practice guidelines.

Some members of the public stated that they have been criminalised by the requirements put in place with regards to turf cutting.

It was stated that there is a complete lack of awareness within NPWS of the social issues and the impact on rural communities of the plan.

It was pointed out that the understanding and viewpoints of turf cutters and conservationists is different but neither can be described as wrong. There is a clear conflict of views about how to manage bogs.

There is a perception that NPWS went about confiscating bogs by stealth. This misunderstanding has led to mistrust.

Many stated that Bord na Mona and other large producers have decimated raised bog in Ireland, not the domestic peat cutters; and stated that there is no recognition that peatlands are in good condition thanks, in large part, to the custodianship of turf cutters.

Some described the plan as unconstitutional, with a bias against the rights of landowners and turbary rights owners.

Some stated that no one has considered what will become of the wildlife on cutaway bogs if they are restored.

It was suggested that bog owners should be issued with guidance documents to ensure that minimum damage is inflicted. These could be tied into Area Aid grants.

Some bogs were highlighted as being unsuitable for restoration and it was suggested that they be removed from the plan and de-designated.

It was stated by some that there can only be a national plan when there is national agreement charting the way forward.

A small number believe that 53 designated raised bog SACs is too many and this number should be cut drastically.

### **3.1.8 Bog-specific groups**

#### Cloghan Castles Bog Committee

The Cloghan Castles Bog Committee stated that there is no commercial activity on the bog, it is used exclusively by private households to supply their heating needs.

There is no apparent alternative bog that turf cutters could be relocated to within a reasonable distance.

The closure of drains would result in land becoming wet and waterlogged and this would cause difficulties and financial losses for farming operations.

The ring road around the bog is maintained by the bog owners. It is used as an amenity by both locals and tourists for recreational purposes and tourist access to the callows. As such it adds greatly to the attractiveness of the general area to tourists, visitors and locals. If turf cutting was to cease on the bog, then this laneway would quickly deteriorate both underfoot and by encroachment and the amenity value of the area would be greatly diminished.

#### Clonmoylan / Barrougter Local Liaison Committee

It is believed that, through negotiation and collaboration, a lasting solution can be found to the challenge of protecting unique habitats while at the same time protecting the rights of turf bank owners and their families.

The intention to continue to actively engage with the Minister and his officials was stated in the submission.

Those availing of the SAC compensation scheme reserve the right to exit the scheme if they are not satisfied with the final terms of the strategy.

Those being offered relocation should be offered like-for-like, including the amount of turf available for extraction.

Those who cannot relocate are being unfairly treated when offered compensation limited to 15 years. It should be extended to 30 years as a minimum. It is stated that the majority of the turf cutters in the area would avail of the compensation scheme if it were extended.

The submission welcomes the acceptance by NPWS of sworn affidavits as proof the multiple members of the same family use of a turf bank and asks that this be put on a formal footing and provided for in the plan.

It is stated that there are no suitable relocation bogs in relation to the Clonmoylan and Barroughter bogs. Continued turf cutting in some areas is the only option according to the submission.

Assurance is sought that those who avail of compensation retain ownership of their turf bank holdings and that they would retain ownership of the carbon credits arising from the holdings.

#### Kildare Turf Cutters Association (Mouds Bog)

The group call for the de-designation of Mouds Bog due to infringement of property rights, an improper designation process, and the belief that the bog is unfit for designation due to flood risk.

The group states that their policy is to continue to cut turf on their own banks until NPWS provide an acceptable solution to the current impasse i.e. until such time as a plan is agreed and fully operational by all, and for all, turf cutters.

The core members of the group are not interested in the compensation option.

The groups states that Lattins Bog as a proposed relocation site is not a viable solution in terms of the number of plots available. Therefore, there are no solutions within 15 km of Mouds Bog.

It is queried why private bog owners are being criminalised and not those who have plundered bogs for commercial gain.

It is stated that some form of co-existence might be acceptable. One potential solution discussed in the submission is to allow cutting at the Bull Rush area which has already been commercially harvested. It will take time to prepare a co-existence solution. In the interim, there are some finger-like protrusions on uncut bog that could be cut back. This would even out the face of the bog and provide turf for turf cutters.

The turf cutting community have a deep respect for their environment. They clear litter and fire breaks, and report suspicious activities.

There are genuine concerns regarding the proposal for we-wetting and drain blocking and the possible consequences.

### Mouds Interim Group

It is stated that there is trauma associated, not only with monetary losses, but with the loss of the social activities centred around the practice of turf cutting within the community. In preserving natural heritage, cultural heritage is lost. A facility should be made available to accommodate the tradition of hand-cutting turf for cultural and historic reasons.

It is stated that there are no feasible relocation opportunities.

The group do not believe that the turf cutting is adversely affecting the integrity of the bogs.

The group believe that Mouds Bog should never have been designated as an SAC and should now be de-designated.

The group state that the cessation of turf cutting will increase the area of active bog by a miniscule amount and will do little to achieve government targets.

It is stated that current compensation payments can only be viewed as interim compensation until a final settlement is agreed, and that the compensation limit of 15 years is inadequate. It is further stated that compensation should be based on the area of bog owned. Further, qualifying family households who have received turf from Mouds Bog as a source of domestic fuel should be offered the same compensation terms as turf bank owners. Also, the beneficiaries of the compensation scheme should have to right to bequeath the remainder of their entitlement to whom they choose without penalty.

It is suggested that houses built on the periphery of the bog may be vulnerable to flooding if turf cutting ceases. This could be exacerbated by re-wetting. Turf cutters will require indemnity from the government if any claims arise as a result of damage caused by this process.

When turf cutting ceases, facilities should be provided, in consultation with the local community, to access the bogs. Roadways and pathways should be maintained and barriers should be provided to prevent illegal dumping.

There is concern that exclusion zones could be introduced, making it difficult for family members to obtain planning permission in the future.

If, with the passing of time, it is found to be in the best national or societal interest to resume turf cutting, turf bank owners should be allowed to resume turf cutting without any financial implications.

### Coolrain Bog Committee

It is stated that the ideological-driven interpretation and implementation of the Habitats Directive by successive groups of department officials, NGOs and governments, and lack of consultation, has created conflict with turf cutting communities.

The best opportunity of finding a solution was the Athlone Forum but the opportunity was wasted through lack of engagement.

There will be no solution without involving turf cutters at the Peatlands Council.

It is stated that as there are no suitable relocation bogs for Coolrain. Coolrain Bog should be de-designated and turf cutting should be allowed to continue. Knockacoller Bog can remain an SAC and Knockacoller cutters can be relocated to Coolrain Bog, or vice versa.

The submission questions the scientific basis of the plan and suggests that some of the data presented is dubious.

It is argued that Coolrain Bog was in fact below the size limit for designation but was designated anyway.

It is stated that the amount of turf cut at Coolrain bog over the past ten years is significantly less than indicated in the plan. Figures were provided.

It is stated that the idea of needing permission to cut turf implies that permission can be granted or refused, meaning that turf cutting can be stopped. The same argument applies to the requirement for contractors to obtain licences.

Relocation bogs should be local - even a 10 km journey by road cannot be considered local.

It is queried why turf cutting is being banned when cutover can regenerate within 30 to 40 years.

It is suggested that the real issue is carbon and it is suggested that imported oil is more of a carbon problem than turf cutting.

It is queried whether the designation of Coolrain Bog can be considered legal when government departments did not inform owners and give them the right to object. It is stated that the owners of Coolrain Bog were not informed of the designation prior to the adoption of the EU in December 2004. It is stated that the public notice only mentioned commercial cutting, not domestic cutting.

### Shinglis Bog

The group request that Shinglis Bog be considered for inclusion in the NHA network whereby the conservation of wildlife and the maintenance and restoration of habitats is a primary requirement. Monitoring, tracking, audio surveys, photographic surveys and recordings at the bog have identified

significant protected species. It is stated that the community in the area recognises the potential benefits in conserving the bog for the benefit of heritage, amenity and educational use.

#### Ardgraique Bog

It was stated that stakeholders remain unconvinced of the technical and scientific basis for the designation of Ardgraique Bog.

No credible alternative bogs have been suggested to date.

Stakeholders remain unconvinced that compensation for the cessation of turf cutting will continue to be paid in future, as has been promised, in light of national economic concerns.

It is stated that restoration works would have a devastating effect on farmland and drainage apparatus in the area.

#### Mount Heavey (Croboy) Turf Cutters

The group formally object to the draft plan and strategy for a number of reasons including that there is nothing in the plan for turf cutters on SAC bogs, that turf cutters on NHA bogs are obliged to obtain a permit, that contractors on all bogs must be registered and licensed.

The group states that there is no valid reason to attempt to further regulate the exercise of turbary right and that turf cutters have been excluded from the decision-making process and are being invited to comment only after the real decisions are made.

The group reject the assertion in the plan that raised bog habitat has been lost due to domestic turf cutting.

The group states that re-wetting must not occur under any circumstances.

The group states that no one has been held accountable for past mistakes and injustices and for hurt and worry caused to turf cutters. They believe that the social and economic pillars of sustainability have been excluded from the process.

#### Lisnageeragh Bog TCCA Committee

The group emphasises the importance of 'rights' in society and culture and state that turbary rights must be recognised and maintained.

The group objects to licensing and permitting of cutting activities for landowners or contractors.

If relocation occurs, full transfer of turbary rights should occur and 'like for like' must be provided.

It is suggested that designations do not follow any line of thought or logic whatsoever and that it is conspicuous that designations do not interfere with State and infrastructural interests.

The group objects to re-wetting on the grounds that it interferes with nature and would affect the water table of surrounding lands.

The group states that there is no intention in the peatlands document to address the potential impacts on land value.

The group urges balanced, open, rational and continued dialogue with the TCCA, its members and rural communities to bring about cooperation and a satisfactory conclusion.

#### North Kerry TCCA – Moanvenlagh Bog

The group welcomes the proposed approach to dealing with the issues on a site-specific restoration and management basis.

The turf cutters have a profound interest in preserving the bog, not least as it is their fuel source.

It is stated that the development of the bog for recreation and amenity, and the issues surrounding paths and walkways, fire breaks and drainage, all have significant impact on turf cutters, land owners and surrounding lands.

It is stated that the identification of alternative bogs has not proved successful. The proposed alternatives were time limited, as well as being highly dispersed which has practical and cost implications. The group believes that the unavailability of alternative bogs brings this bog within the exceptional circumstances envisaged under Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive.

It is stated that those who wish to avail of the compensation option have already done so.

The group believes that the turf cutters can be accommodated on the 10% of the bog that is not state owned.

Note: the opinions expressed by bog committees and groups do not necessarily reflect the views of all local stakeholders in relation to these bogs.

### 3.1.9 Other submissions supporting conservation of peatlands

The publication of the suite of peatlands documents was generally welcomed. It is suggested by a small number of consultees that the documents do not take enough cognisance of the considerable research has already been carried out in relation to peatlands nationally and internationally.

It is recognised that Irish peatlands are unique within Europe, are a vital part of our natural heritage, and are essential to future generations in terms of biodiversity and long term environmental sustainability.

It is recognised that the peatlands documents are very important in relation to setting national frameworks and targets for peatland conservation. It is suggested that action is required immediately to achieve the vision set out in the documents.

Resources should be devoted to awareness and education on the value and importance of Irish peatlands.

Meaningful engagement and consultation should be undertaken with local communities as their understanding and support is vital for the sustainability of new initiatives.

Many submissions stated that clarity is required regarding the proposed Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group.

It is discussed in several submissions that there is clear evidence that drainage/degradation of peatlands leads to a large increase in carbon dioxide emissions. Re-wetting has been shown to result in a decrease in emissions. Carbon management should be a strong component in the selection of suitable sites for conservation. Conservation can be justified in economic terms on the basis of greenhouse gas emission savings. These issues should be included more clearly in the plan.

It was suggested that turf cutters be made aware that future international climate change agreements may reward them for carbon storage. Continued peat cutting could be undermining their capacity to realise this potential income.

It is suggested by some that the derogation for continued turf cutting for two years and the de-designation of NHA bogs will result in the destruction of habitat. It is also opposite to the policy agenda on climate change. The derogation pleases a small minority while removing all other socio-economic and ecological benefits of a natural resource for all the people.

It is stated that bogs have significant archaeological potential, and this should be placed on an equal footing with ecological and conservation agendas. Consideration of archaeological potential should be placed at the centre of the peatlands documents. Restrictions on extraction should be considered for archaeological reasons.



It is stated by several submissions that peatlands are unsuitable for the construction of wind farms as are likely to show no net carbon saving.

It is suggested that the use of so called 'sausage machines' should be banned as they remove all vegetation of ecological value and expose the surface of peatland to erosion and oxidation.

It is argued that the supply of peat for heating or electricity is not an ecosystem service as described in the peatlands document as this activity is not sustainable at the majority of sites where peat is being 'mined' rather than harvested as a renewable resource.

It is suggested that contractors should be subject to the same tax enforcement, particularly in relation to carbon tax, as are other businesses.

It is acknowledged by some that many peatlands, including some currently designated sites, have already been so severely damaged as to make any restoration extremely difficult, if not impossible. It is suggested that conservation efforts should be focused on peatland that have a good prospect of being restored.

Some feel that the plan seems to be chiefly concerned with reconciling short and long term needs for the use of raised bogs by turf cutters. The approach should be a prevention of biodiversity loss approach, thereby addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss, of which there are many.

The utilisation of peatlands for forestry and agriculture, as well as the threat from invasive species, climate change and pollution need to be given greater prominence with the plan. In addition, hunting and shooting, dumping and visitor control need to be considered. Sphagnum moss transfer, fire prevention and a policy on adjacent land reclamation need to be assessed. The plan also needs to consider whether turf cutting will exist in the future and, if it will, on what terms.

Some expressed a strong belief that the needs of turf cutters are not compatible with the required works of conservation and that this is highlighted in a large number of reports and is the original reasoning behind the entire cessation of turf cutting on peatlands of conservation importance. Not enough reference is being given to the fact that the reduction in bog vegetation is predominantly as a result of habitat removal.

The exact meaning of a 'difficult bog' should be stated.

Exception was taken to the statement in the peatlands documents that cutaway bogs have a number of advantages over other categories of land in terms of potential wind farm development. It is suggested that this vested interest may not best serve the social and economic wellbeing of people as a whole and that peatlands are especially unsuitable for the construction of wind farms, due to the potential for the loss of greenhouse gasses. It is suggested that analysis into this topic is required.

The framework of ecosystem services provides a more accurate and holistic method of establishing the true conservation value of peatlands.

It is of concern to some stakeholders that actions in the peatlands documents lack completion dates. Without such information, the success or otherwise of implementation cannot be measured.

It is suggested that the following should be guided by ecological science – controlled burning, peatland afforestation, after-use plans for cutaways, wind farms on peatlands. Additional research is a critical action.

A commitment to conserve and restore peatlands is required, State-owned peatlands that deliver, or have the potential to deliver, significant ecosystem services are needed.

It was suggested that all wetland habitat types nationally would benefit greatly from the more systematic approach to their conservation demonstrated in the peatlands documents.

### **3.1.10 Other submissions supporting continued turf cutting of peatlands**

Some submissions support the objective of preserving a representative sample of Ireland's raised bogs. Some believe that the number should however be reduced.

It was stated that former peat extraction sites can reassume their function as carbon sinks following re-wetting and targeted regeneration measures and can again fulfil the original function of active bogs.

It was stated that peat moss remains the key component in the manufacture of horticultural substrates, accounting for over 90% of all the growing media used in Europe. Where alternative methods are available, they are not yet available in sufficient quantity and lack the consistent quality and reliability of peat moss.

There is a need to fully recognise the ongoing economic value of the peat industry in Ireland, including the social and economic benefits brought to disadvantaged areas.

Some welcomed the recognition of the value of cutaway bog for the development of wind energy projects.

Some suggested that the documents should include more up-to-date data on the amount of turf being cut.

Some are not satisfied that the Peatlands Council brings together all key stakeholders. For example, a lot of the largest commercial peat harvesters in Ireland, from a horticultural perspective, have not been consulted or invited to contribute to the preparation of the peatlands documents. Some would like to be more involved in the planning process, and believe the process could benefit from their expertise.

It is suggested that peat extraction should be assessed in the context of wider national greenhouse gas emissions, as the extraction of peat represents a small part of overall emissions in Ireland. Methane emission information should also be included in the documents. More research is needed into these issues.

The peatlands documents should reference research conducted by the European Peat and Growing Media Association (EPAGMA) on the comparative carbon footprint and lifecycles of horticultural growing media based on peat and other growing media constituents. The findings of the Growing Media Task Force should also be considered.

It is stated that turf cutters are strong advocates of good environmental stewardship and regard themselves as custodians of the worked bogs. Domestic turf cutting is a long established land use and constitutes sustainable use of a local natural resource by local people. The activity of small scale domestic turf cutters is within the carrying capacity of bogs, after more than five hundred years of this activity, these bogs are still rated as being the best preserved in Europe.

It is stated that a credible national plan cannot be drafted until all of the national issues surrounding turbarry right owners, bog owners, lands owners and the local communities are resolved by mutual agreement, free from coercion and in line with democratic principles.

Objections to the draft plan and strategy were raised on the basis that there is nothing in the plan for turf cutters on SAC bogs, that turf cutters on NHA bogs are obliged to obtain a permit and that contractors on all bogs must be registered and licenced.

It was stated that there is no valid reason to attempt to further regulate the exercise of turbarry right and that turf cutters have been excluded from the decision-making process and are being invited to comment only after the real decisions are made.

The assertion in the plan that raised bog habitat has been lost due to domestic turf cutting is rejected by some.

Many state that re-wetting must not occur under any circumstances.

Some stated that no one has been held accountable for past mistakes and injustices and for hurt and worry caused to turf cutters. There is a belief that the social and economic pillars of sustainability have been excluded from the process.

It is suggested that controls on activities on protected bogs must be proportionate, the minimum required, and at the least possible cost to stakeholders.

It is suggested that NPWS should clarify the law in relation to the type of proof that would be required by the Property Registration Authority of Ireland (PRAI) to register turbarry rights and whether or not that right is, or will be, confined solely to the right to take turf for domestic use and whether or not

commercial exploitation of bog land for the production of turf for sale will ever crystallise into a turbary right after the expiration of a relevant prescription period.

A judicial inquiry was called for to investigate the conduct and activities of the NPWS, and its predecessor Duchas, pertaining to their implementation of the Habitats Directive.

The independence of RPS in undertaking the work which culminated in the publication of the draft plan is questioned. The quality of the work is also questioned and whether it can be considered scientific in nature.

High dependency on imported fossil fuels is unsustainable and Ireland has commitments and targets in relation to renewable energy, the failure to achieve which could result in EU sanctions. The commitment to the benefits of wind energy, and the value of cutaway bog for wind energy developments, in the peatlands documents was welcomed. It is felt that this should be further developed into a principle or action in the peatlands documents. Objections were made to the specific mention of wind farm developments in terms of providing access for illegal dumping as many other activities could be said to provide the same opportunities. Prohibition of wind farms on sites purely because they are peatlands sites should not occur if any necessary prevention measures could be put in place at a reasonable cost.

It is essential that no further restrictions are placed on agricultural land adjacent to protected bogs, particularly with regard to drainage.

Many commercial farming operations are dependent on abstractions. This activity should only be curtailed if essential and then full compensation should be paid for any resulting costs and losses.

A full and comprehensive costing of the measures required to compensate for raised bog lost since 1994 should be carried out.

## 3.2 THE NEXT STEPS

The submissions received following publication of the Draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan generally fall into two main categories:

- Those who wished the complete cessation of turf cutting and the restoration of all Raised Bog SACs; and
- Those who wished to continue to cut turf through co-existence or, in a few cases, through de-designation.

In order to respond to the concerns raised within the submissions, the following approach has been adopted towards developing a Final National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan.

1. Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) are being developed.
2. The SSCO's will guide the development of draft Site Specific Restoration Plans. The Restoration Plans aim to maximise the beneficial ecosystem services offered by raised bogs.
3. The draft Restoration Plans will be subject to Appropriate Assessment.
4. Possible options for continued turf cutting within specific areas of selected bogs are being investigated.

The approach is dictated by Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive which sets out a series of steps which must be followed in order to reach a conclusion. In particular, paragraphs 6(3) and 6(4) lay down the procedure to be followed with respect to activities that have potential to affect a Natura 2000 site). Under Article 6(3) continued turf cutting, through co-existence in selected areas of the bog, must undergo an Appropriate Assessment to determine its implications for the site. DAHG can only agree to the prospect of co-existence after having ascertained that continued cutting in selected areas of the bog will not adversely affect the integrity of the site, that is, areas of existing Active Raised Bog or areas where Active Raised Bog has the potential to be re-established through restoration works either on the high bog or cutover.

Under Article 6(4) continued turf cutting may be allowed in exceptional circumstances in spite of a negative assessment, provided that there are no alternative solutions and continued turf cutting is considered to be of overriding public interest (termed IROPI). In such cases, Ireland must take appropriate compensatory measures to ensure that the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network is protected and, in the case of Active Raised Bog, this compensation must be agreed with the Commission.

Article 6(4) can only be considered after Article 6(3) has been fully explored. Article 6(3) assessments then form part of the IROPI case under Article 6(4).

5. The programme of stakeholder engagement is continuing throughout the timeframe for developing the Final National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan which is scheduled to be published by February 2016.

All submissions will be taken into consideration during the preparation of the Final National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan. The process of engagement, and how this has influenced the making of the Final National Plan, will be presented in the SEA Statement which will accompany the Final National Plan.

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# **APPENDIX A**

## **Communications Materials**

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# **APPENDIX B**

## **Submissions**

Many of the submissions are copies of petitions / campaign letters. Only one example of each is included. Submissions not included are greyed out in the list of submissions.

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