



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

National Peatlands Strategy Mid-Term Review

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Background

The National Peatlands Strategy 2015-2025 has as its vision statement ‘to provide a long-term framework within which all of the peatlands within the State can be managed responsibly in order to optimise their social, environmental and economic contribution to the well-being of this and future generations’. It sets out a cross-governmental approach to managing issues that relate to peatlands, including: compliance with relevant national and international environmental legislation, agreements, plans and policies; climate change; forestry; water quality; flood control; energy; nature conservation and restoration; land use planning; and agriculture. The Strategy has been developed in partnership between relevant Government Departments/State bodies and key stakeholders through the Peatlands Council.

It is underlined by 25 key principles and commits to the undertaking of 32 actions across various sectors and themes, including, among others, Research, Tourism, Agriculture, Forestry, Conservation, Restoration, Peat Extraction, Energy, Water Quality and Climate Change.

Progress reports on the Strategy have been published for 2017 and for 2018/2019, and this review is being carried out in the context of those reports.

Introductory Context

The original principles and actions of the Strategy were a positive attempt to stake out a plan in a rapidly changing context, with the understanding that circumstances were evolving and that goals and actions would need to be updated to match them: it was always intended as a living document. Hence the mechanism of the mid-term review.

The purpose of this mid-term review is, therefore, not to reiterate the progress reports but to provide a broader assessment on where the Strategy currently is, what it can achieve over the next five years, and, if necessary, to propose changes to the actions set out in the Strategy to refocus it in line with its overall goals and the current context.

A significant achievement of the Strategy is the coordinated focus and attention it has brought to bear on peatlands issues and the concomitant cooperation between Government Departments, State agencies and State bodies it has enabled.

For each action under the Strategy, a lead body is designated for its implementation, with other bodies also being indicated in most cases. A number of major projects and initiatives have begun or been continued as part of the implementation of the actions of the Strategy, which suggests the explicit setting of concrete goals and working to fulfil them has been an effective approach. However, progress in the implementation of some actions has been slow.

What Has Changed Since Publication of the Strategy?

A number of other significant policies and plans have come into existence since the National Peatlands Strategy was published, including:

- The National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022;
- The Climate Action Plan 2019;
- The European Green Deal;
- The National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021;
- Bord na Móna Biodiversity Action Plan;
- The Biodiversity Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan 2019;
- The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030;
- The Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016;
- Heritage Ireland 2030 (in progress);
- Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan (2019);
- River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021;
- Land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) regulation for 2021-2030;
- Public Consultation held on draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines (in progress);
- Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan;
- 2020 Programme for Government;
- The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland (2019).

While these have not taken over the functions of the National Peatlands Strategy, it is necessary that the future direction of the Strategy should take the goals of these other plans into consideration, especially where there may be overlap with desired outcomes or actions of the Strategy.

More broadly, the conversations around peatlands use, environmental and biodiversity goals, climate action, and the commercial use of peat have all changed significantly over the past five years and the prevailing principles and actions in the Strategy should be reviewed in that context.

Additionally, on a very positive note, a number of the specific actions set out in the Strategy have been completed. It will, therefore, be useful for this mid-term review to also assess which actions could be closed, which actions need only be monitored, and which actions require a combination of both.

What Can Be Achieved in the Next 5 Years (2021 To 2025) of the National Peatlands Strategy?

In the second half of the Strategy's ten-year duration, the focus must shift to accomplishing as much as possible in service of the Strategy's Principles. As much measurable progress as possible needs to be made in the implementation of the Strategy, while also highlighting new areas in the mid-term review that are coming to prominence that could be considered in a successor Strategy.

With that in mind, it is proposed that the actions set out in the National Peatlands Strategy be updated into a new Implementation Plan, which focuses on refining outstanding actions and prioritising measurable, achievable objectives.

This revision of the Strategy will increase the effectiveness of the Strategy in achieving its ultimate goals, improve coordination and communication between relevant Government Departments, State agencies and State bodies, and set out the actions that are being prioritised and will be undertaken over the next five years. The Implementation Plan is intended as a pragmatic and practical approach to focus on what is achievable, what should be prioritised, and what can be measured and reported on effectively.

Certain actions set out in the National Peatlands Strategy have been achieved at this point or have progressed to a stage where they require monitoring of implementation. These actions will continue to be monitored by the Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group (comprised of representatives of the relevant Government Departments and State bodies) as appropriate

National Peatlands Strategy – Implementation of Prioritised Actions 2021-2025

Description	Action Ref Nos ¹	Lead Body	Timeline for Completion
<p>A The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Bord na Móna, will upgrade land-use and habitat mapping systems to establish the baseline condition of wetlands and inform the development of best-practice guidelines for wetland management, including the management of degraded wetland and peatlands currently exploited for energy peat extraction (see page 108 of the Climate Action Plan 2019).</p>	2	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications	Q3 2021
<p>B The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will provide appropriate information and advice to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the course of updating the Prescribed Burning Code of Practice to ensure best practice regarding appropriate land management for peatlands is upheld.</p>	4	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Q4 2021
<p>C Following the publication of the review report on the use of peat moss in the horticultural industry, a working group is to be established to include representatives from relevant Government Departments and State Agencies, Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations and industry stakeholders under an independent chairperson to examine the issues which were identified during the review and to report to the Minister for Heritage and Electoral Reform on its deliberations.</p>	5	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Q2 2021

¹ These numbers refer to the original action/s in the National Peatlands Strategy that the actions in this Implementation Plan are derived from.

National Peatlands Strategy – Implementation of Prioritised Actions 2021-2025 (continued)

	Description	Action Ref Nos	Lead Body	Timeline for Completion
D	The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Coillte will work with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to ensure the successor document to the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 commits to creating guidance and criteria for the identification and appropriate future management of peat areas currently afforested, as well as to develop guidance on future afforestation of peat soils.	7	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Commencing Q1 2021
E	The Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group will continue to monitor progress and provide support on initiatives designed to increase the delivery of ecosystem services of naturally functioning peatlands, in particular the EU INTERREG CABB (Ireland/UK Co-operation Across Borders for Biodiversity 2017 to 2022) and CANN (Collaboration Across Natura Network) projects; relevant Bord na Móna research projects; relevant Environmental Protection Agency and other research projects; restoration measures under the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022 and the new Bord na Móna peatlands enhanced decommissioning, rehabilitation and restoration scheme; actions undertaken within the EU LIFE Integrated Project 'Wild Atlantic Nature'; and other actions taken under relevant projects that may be established in the timeframe 2020-2025.	8	Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group	Ongoing through 2021 -2025

National Peatlands Strategy – Implementation of Prioritised Actions 2021-2025 (continued)

Description	Action Ref Nos	Lead Body	Timeline for Completion
F The Department of the Environment, Climate Action and Communications and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with assistance from Bord na Móna, will conduct an assessment of the overall ownership status of cutaway peatlands (including blanket bog) throughout the country, with a focus on determining the proportion in public and private hands. This information will be essential for identifying appropriate future uses for this land and harnessing its potential. Consideration will be given to publication of a report in line with data protection legislation.	9, 12	Department of the Environment, Climate Action and Communications	Q4 2022
G Bord na Móna, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, will continue its trials of Sphagnum moss cultivation and initiate trials of other paludiculture techniques and report on the outcomes. Consideration will be given to publication of the results, subject to commercial sensitivity.	10	Bord na Móna	Ongoing through 2021-2025
H The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Environmental Protection Agency will fund and oversee the project 'The vulnerability of peatland ecosystems to a changing climate and increases in the frequency and severity of droughts'	14	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Commencing Q1 2021
I The Office of Public Works, in cooperation with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, will implement the follow on actions and recommendations from the fen Special Area of Conservation pilot conservation management project.	15	Office of Public Works	Ongoing through 2021 -2025

National Peatlands Strategy – Implementation of Prioritised Actions 2021-2025 (continued)

	Description	Action Ref Nos	Lead Body	Timeline for Completion
J	The strategies contained in the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022, to endeavour to ensure that turf-cutting on protected raised bogs only takes place in such a way that the integrity of the Special Areas of Conservation is not threatened, will continue to be implemented.	16	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Ongoing through 2021-2022 and to 2025
K	Strategies in relation to turf-cutting on blanket bog Special Areas of Conservation will be considered within the EU LIFE Programme funded Integrated Project 'Wild Atlantic Nature'.	16	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Ongoing through 2021-2025
L	The results of the review of Ireland's raised bog Natural Heritage Areas will be implemented, contingent on the enactment of the Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016 and its commencement.	17	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Q2 2021
M	The existing legal framework relating to the regulation of peat extraction in terms of planning, environmental protection and habitats protection will be reviewed and recommendations developed to bring about a clearer, proportionate and enforceable system of regulation that also ensures compliance with appropriate EU environmental legislation, including Appropriate Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment to ensure best practice in peat extraction operations.	19, 23	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Q4 2021

National Peatlands Strategy – Implementation of Prioritised Actions 2021-2025 (continued)

	Description	Action Ref Nos	Lead Body	Timeline for Completion
N	The extent and impact of use of the Difco cutter or 'sausage' machine in peatlands will be assessed within the EU LIFE Programme funded Integrated Project 'Wild Atlantic Nature'.	20	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	To commence Q2 2021
O	The Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group will support the work of the National Land Cover and Habitat Working Group (chaired by the National Parks and Wildlife Service/Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) and joint initiatives by Ordnance Survey Ireland and the Environmental Protection Agency to develop mapping and geospatial data for land use planning and development management in relation to all peatland types and will assess the potential application of its report (expected in 2021) as a resource for peatlands policy, research and actions.	21	Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group	Q4 2021
P	The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, in consultation with the members of the National Appropriate Assessment Forum, will complete the ongoing plans for updated Appropriate Assessment guidance and publish them in 2021.	22	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Q4 2021
Q	The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will publish revised planning guidelines in relation to wind energy development, which will include an Annex in relation to peatlands.	24	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Q1 2021

National Peatlands Strategy – Implementation of Prioritised Actions 2021-2025 (continued)

	Description	Action Ref Nos ¹	Lead Body	Timeline for Completion
R	The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will convene a meeting of all relevant authorities and working groups to outline each organisation's activity in education and public awareness regarding peatlands in line with the EPA Bogland Report. An updated report on bogs and education will be prepared as a result of this meeting and published by the end of 2021.	27, 29	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Q4 2021
S	The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will conduct a feasibility study on the creation of a national peatlands/wetlands park to be published in 2021.	28	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Q3 2021
T	Current and future peatlands research project results from the Environmental Protection Agency and other organisations will, where appropriate, be taken on board by the Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group, disseminated to group members, and used to assist in future policy development as appropriate.	32	Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group	Ongoing through 2021 -2025
U	With the assistance of the Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will co-ordinate the actions in the 2020 Programme for Government regarding peatlands to maximise the benefits for biodiversity.	*	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Ongoing through 2021 -2025

*This action was not derived directly from an action in the National Peatlands Strategy but is in line with recent developments and is in service of the Principles set out in the Strategy.

Appendix – National Peatlands Strategy Actions Closed and/or moved to Monitoring

Action Ref No	Description
1	Good agricultural and environmental practices (GAEC) and statutory management requirements (SMRs) continue to be upheld, and the provisions under Cross Compliance continue to provide safeguards for farmland protection. The Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group will continue to monitor the success of this action. [Close & Monitor]
3	The success of the ongoing European Innovation Partnerships that relate to peatlands, uplands and Natura areas, and the Locally Led Agri-Environment Scheme for the eight designated Freshwater Pearl Mussel areas, will be monitored by the Peatlands Strategy Implementation Group. [Monitor]
6	The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, Bord na Móna, and the ESB will continue to oversee the transition of power generation away from peat in line with the Government's Just Transition programme. [Monitor]
11	An assessment of the use of cutaway peatlands for flood attenuation, considered in terms of the River Shannon, was conducted in 2017 and found to be unviable at that time. [Close]
13	Eddy Covariance (EC) towers have been installed at two peatland sites, Clara Bog Special Area of Conservation (near-natural) and Lullymore Bog (former industrial cutaway site with post rehabilitation works), to monitor temporal fluxes in carbon dioxide and are currently subject to research via the Environmental Protection Agency project SmartBog. The National Parks and Wildlife Service/Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage plans to install two EC towers as part of the national raised bog designated sites restoration programme and the EU LIFE Programme funded Integrated Project "Wild Atlantic Nature", and together these four EC towers will form a peatland-climate monitoring network across Ireland. Monitoring of the temporal fluxes will continue. [Close & Monitor]

Appendix – National Peatlands Strategy Actions Closed and/or moved to Monitoring (continued)

Action Ref No	Description
18	A comprehensive programme of restoration of raised bog Special Areas of Conservation and Natural Heritage Areas has been developed through the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022, including the drafting of restoration plans for Natural Heritage Areas. Restoration works will continue to be implemented in partnership with affected land-owners and other stakeholders. [Close & Monitor]
25	This principle will be kept in mind going forward and upheld through Environmental Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment where appropriate. [Close]
26	This principle has been taken into consideration in the development of the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 and the Bord na Móna Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2021, and will be kept in mind going forward. [Close]
30	The consideration of peatlands as an amenity will be considered as part of current and future restoration plans but does not require a specific action at this time. [Close]
31	This has been incorporated into the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022. [Close]

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