Bulrush Horticulture Response to Irish Government Public Consultation on Peat in Horticulture 30th January 2020

Bulrush Horticulture are a subsidiary of Pindstrup Mosebrug Ltd.

Pindstrup is one of the world's leading producers of growing media for horticulture with five decades of experience supplying high-quality substrates to the horticultural and agricultural industries.

Based in Denmark, we also have production facilities in Latvia, Russia, Spain and the UK. With sales offices in China, North and South America, Russia, Southeast Asia and many countries across Europe, Pindstrup exports to more than 100 countries worldwide.

A. **What are your views on what more could be done to support and enable the switch to peat free horticulture at professional crop production level and consumer level?**
Suitable acceptable quality alternatives to peat are not available in the quantities needed to sustain a rising global demand for substrates. All alternative materials have their own challenges. Clearly establish where peat for horticulture sits as a percentage of Irish CO2 production to inform the process. There should be financial support for R&D for substrate development, financial support for capital investment projects for peat alternatives. Compensate for incentives offered to take material streams away from peat alternatives e.g. biomass boiler type RHI schemes which target wood based materials. Flexibility and support in incorporating or licensing some waste streams for use in substrates.

B. **What are your views on alternatives to the use of peat in the Horticultural Industry (from for example the perspective of the professional grower or consumer/ amateur gardener)**
Peat alternatives work for a lot of growing, certainly for hobby/retail products but are not available in the quantities or quality needed to support a rising global demand for substrates. Alternative materials can require higher water and fertiliser inputs and for professional growers would present very significant challenges. Issues around availability, quality, consistency and cost are considerable. Continued peat dilution should be the way forward for professional growers.

C. **What are your views on whether Ireland should cut back or cease the export of peat for use outside of Ireland even if this would result in job losses in Ireland.**
The Irish horticultural peat industry exists to supply an export market for substrates. It wouldn't exist to service the local market. Ireland should not cease the export of peat for horticulture. The rising global population will need to be fed and quality substrates will form an essential part of this process. Special areas of bog land should be protected and not extracted but any degraded or damaged areas could be considered for horticultural use. The extractor can then restore these areas post production. There are large areas of cutover bog in this country. Ireland has a huge opportunity to restore degraded and cutover areas to create significant carbon sinks. For those involved in peat extraction for horticulture there should be a requirement for a suitable afteruse plan. Any areas being brought into production can be offset with restoration on cutover areas. Stopping production on existing horticultural peat extraction areas will not restore these areas. Peat based substrates to replace Irish material would be shipped over greater distances to sustain the industry if Irish peat extraction ceases.

D. **Do you consider that a working group should be established to advise on how best to overcome the barriers to reducing peat use in professional horticultural crop production and in the amateur horticultural market?**
A working group would help. It is important to establish and agree the facts around the environmental impacts of all the potential substrate materials rather than make decisions based on perceptions or sentiment. Again confirm where peat for horticulture sits as a percentage of Irish CO2 production to inform the process Substrate companies are working hard on alternatives and have been for many years. Some growers have trialled and understand the cost and performance challenges they face. The P4 calculator developed in the UK is a good tool for letting substrate users make an informed choice about the benefits and challenges of the materials used. Care needs to be taken to ensure we don't displace peat based substrates with other materials that creates problems elsewhere. Suitable alternatives are not available in the quantities needed at present.

E. **If you are in favour of the establishment of a working group which stakeholder groups should be represented on it?**
If a group were to be established growers, substrate producers, government representatives, interested NGO's

F. **How do you think that those involved in harvesting peat for horticulture could be compensated for any loss arising from a cessation of this activity (for example, on the basis of the profit loss arising or related to the value in ecosystem services retained/provided)**
On the basis of profit loss, easier to calculate and draw a line under. Valuing a wetland area based on carbon sequestration and the ecosystem value isn't straightforward. No need for compensation if existing areas are worked until fully extracted then restored to wetland.

G. **How do you think that those involved in harvesting peat for horticulture could be guided towards alternative activities, for example developing an environmentally suitable alternative material that could replace peat in professional horticultural crop production?**
Substrate producers are in a position to develop alternatives and have been working on them for many years. These alternatives are not available in the quantities needed at present. No single solution on the horizon in terms of cost, quality or quantity.

H. Table to score – All elements of equal value

I. **In your opinion should the use of peat within (i) the amateur horticultural market and (ii) the professional horticultural industry be phased out over the next 3, 5, 10, 15 or 20 years and if so, how should this be done bearing in mind the potential job losses and the difficulties with alternative growing media?**
Getting quantities of safe alternatives for the retail market will be challenging in the next 5 years. Growers will be further challenged as their needs are more exacting, the professional growers will need to learn to work with different and more challenging materials which aren't as consistent and need more attention to get them to perform. Increased watering , more fertiliser inputs etc.

J. **Does more need to be done to educate and build consumer awareness of peat free products which are available at retail level?**
Consumers need to be provided with accurate balanced information to allow them to make an informed decision about the materials used in their substrates. This applies to peat based as well as reduced peat or peat free materials. UK Growing Media Association P4 calculator scheme or similar.