

Press Release

Hogan and Deenihan establish Peatland Council

The Government today (Thursday 7 April) announced that it is establishing an independent non-statutory Peatlands Council to respond to commitments set out in the Programme for Government and to assist Ireland in responding in a strategic way to the requirements of the EU Habitat's Directive which require Ireland to protect and conserve important peatland habitats.

Mr. Conor Skehan has been appointed as Chair of the Council. Conor Skehan is a lecturer with DIT's School of Spatial Planning. As a former Director of Bord na Móna he has experience of the peat sector. His consultancy experience in EIA and Habitats legislation gives him an overview of the legal and scientific issues which the Council will be dealing with.

The Chairman will begin dialogue with affected parties as quickly as possible.

Other members are being invited from the IFA, the Irish Peatland Conservation Council, the Turf Cutters and Contractors Association, the Irish Rural Link, a representative of the Irish Environment Network, Bord na Móna and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The European Commission has been critical of Ireland's approach to the protection of peatland habitat and initiated infringement proceedings against Ireland in January this year. Minister Hogan has already met twice with EU Environment Commissioner Potočník to discuss the matter since taking office.

The previous Government decided that turf cutting should end on 31 raised bog SACs from 2010 and on a further 24 raised bog SACs from the end of this year. In the light of that decision, and the requirements of the Habitat's Directive, the Peatland Council will be tasked with advising the Government on a number of key actions. These include:

- the drawing up of a national strategy on Peatlands conservation and management within 12 months, in consultation with bog owners and other stakeholders, to deal with long-term issues such as land management, restoration, conservation, tourism potential, carbon accounting and community participation in managing this resource.
- in the context of the national strategy, to draw up an agreed national code of environmental practice in regard to turf-extraction in designated sites, including a re-examination of the position regarding raised bog Natural Heritage Areas, which are protected under national legislation and the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, in advance of the 2014 cutting season.

Details of the compensation measures for those affected by the requirement to cease cutting will be announced early next week.

The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Mr Phil Hogan T.D. and the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Mr Jimmy Deenihan, T.D. have welcomed the Government Decision. “It is vitally important that the views of turf-cutters and land-owners are brought much more centrally into decision making on these matters” said Minister Hogan. The Peatlands Council will bring together turf-cutting and conservation representatives with the relevant State officials to ensure that all interests are fully considered. “Previous Governments have not grasped the issues involved in protecting Ireland’s peatland habitats. The lack of clear direction has not served turf-cutters or conservation interests well, and has led the European Commission to commence infringement proceedings against Ireland on this issue. I have met with Environment Commissioner Potocnik twice in recent weeks to discuss this serious situation” said Minister Hogan.

Minister Deenihan said “It is clear to us that the decision of the last Government to bring an effective end to turf-cutting on 31 raised bog SACs from 2010 and on a further 24 SACs from the end of this year must be implemented. Following the decision to establish the Peatlands Council, the Government will make further announcements in the coming days in relation to the compensation package which is being put in place. In the meantime the establishment of the Peatland Council provides an important framework for stakeholder involvement in the long-term management of Ireland’s peatlands. The Council will have a key role in mediating on any difficulties which arise, as provided for in the Programme for Government. The Government is very aware that a number of people have relied on these bogs for their fuel needs and that the genuine needs of these people must be addressed in a comprehensive manner.”

These significant review and mediation initiatives will help us build a shared understanding of our peatlands over the years ahead.” said Minister Deenihan

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