IUCN | National Committee United Kingdom

Peatland Programme

Horticulture and Peat in Scotland - Round Table Event

Monday 27th March 2017, Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation

Attendees:

Paul Alexander (PA)	Royal Horticultural Society
Kathleen Allen (KA)	University of Edinburgh
Clifton Bain (CB)	IUCN UK Peatland Programme (Chair)
Dr Jane Barker (JB)	Dalefoot
Kate Bellew (KB)	RSPB
Davie Black (DB)	Plantlife Scotland
Neil Bragg (NB)	Bullrush (by Phone)
James Carlyle (JC)	City of Edinburgh Council
Neil Cummings (NC)	Horticulture Trades Association
Gary Dunion (GD)	Friends of the Earth Scotland
George Gilchrist (GG)	SRUC
Steve Harper (SH)	Growing Media Association (by Phone)
Mark Hamill (MH)	Westland Horticulture
Tim Keyworth (TK)	National Trust for Scotland (by Phone)
Deborah Land (DL)	Natural England
Ewan MacDonald-Russell (EM)	Scottish Retail Consortium
Craig Macadam (CM)	Buglife
Andrew McBride (AM)	Scottish Natural Heritage
Alison McKinnie (Ali M)	Zero Waste Scotland
Jenny Mollison (JM)	Scottish Allotment Growers Society
Joanna Richards (JR)	IUCN UK Peatland Programme (by Phone)
Neil Ritchie (NR)	Scottish Government
Avril Stewart (AS)	Transition Linlithgow/Burgh Beautiful
Gavin Stewart (GS)	Transition Linlithgow/Burgh Beautiful
Olly Watts (OW)	RSPB (by Phone)

1.	**Planning consents for peat extraction in Scotland**
CB	Provided an overview of peatland policy in Scotland which includes a National Peatland Plan with a vision for restoring and conserving peatlands and for the public to be embracing peat-free composts. The Scottish Government has set a target to restore 250,000 hectares of peatland by 2030 (Draft Climate Change Plan). Scottish Government has committed to 'reduce and eventually phase out the use of

	peat in horticulture' and recognises that 'real improvement requires the marketing and distribution of alternatives to peat in horticulture'. Scottish Government supports the UK targets for retail supplies to be peat-free by 2020 and for commercial horticulture to end peat use by 2030. Planning policy also has a presumption against new commercial peat extraction permissions.
CB	Latest figures from Mineral Extraction in Great Britain show 0.5 million m^3 peat is extracted annually in Scotland compared to 0.8 million m^3 from the UK as a whole. In the amateur market peat and peat-free products have 53:47 market share. Peat use in the UK is increasing and is currently 2.2 million m^3 annually - ~53% is imported from the Republic of Ireland.
CB/KA	IUCN UKPP review of historic peat consents in Scotland Report shows considerable data gaps. Of 86 known peat extraction sites less than a third have accessible documented information. 14 sites are known to be actively extracting peat. Most sites have old consents and few have restoration plans.
	Discussion key points: • Further analysis of planning consents requires additional work to recover information from local authorities and main peat extraction companies • Recent planning consents have been for extensions to existing works or renewals and changes to the extraction licence. • Local authorities concerned at implication of costs for revoking or significantly amending consents. • Local Authorities are not instigating the ROMP process, tends to be developers triggering this voluntarily. No penalty if ROMP is not undertaken. • Phasing of restoration is important and ideally should start during extraction rather than the end of the consent period – however this may require a change to the planning consent. • Restoration proposals often don't meet up to date guidance on restoring peatlands and many still require other after uses such as forestry or agriculture. • Few sites have bonds to ensure costs of restoration covered. • Peatland Code provides potential for industry to contribute to the cost of restoring abandoned peat extraction workings (due to additionality rules the Code doesn't apply to sites with existing planning conditions). • Sites which are required to be restored by planning policy wouldn't be eligible for Peatland Action funds but the money may be available for restoration of old abandoned sites. **ACTION – CB to take proposal to National Peatland Group for further work to be done to review information on existing planning consents and restoration plans.** **ACTION – CB to brief main peat extraction companies and retailers on the Peatland Code opportunities.**
MH	All Westland's sites have gone through ROMP process and have detailed restoration plans with restoration bonds – all now aimed at restoring to wetland. **ACTION – MH to make data available to IUCN UK PP on sites with consents and restoration plans.**

2.	**Progress with and potential for non-peat products in horticulture**
NB	Considerable activity across the horticulture industry looking at alternatives. Major players largely using wood based alternatives and coir. Recognising there can be environmental issues associated with some of these, particularly the water demand for coir production.
PA	Introduced Project four (P4) Part of DEFRA taskforce Responsible Sourcing Scheme for Growing Media working group reflecting manufacturers, NGO's, growers, Defra and retailers overseeing agreement of the details. Each raw material gets scored allowing each "bag" to get a total product score (using the Responsibility Calculator). Each raw material is scored against seven criteria deemed to reflect responsible sourcing. P4 will not assess the carbon impacts – simply too challenging and expensive across all products. Factors assessed include water used, energy used, impact on habitat and biodiversity and seeks to use pre-existing documents (planning applications, restoration bonds) as evidence wherever possible. Auditors being appointed to ensure independent assessment. This is not yet available on bags - another 12/18 months possibly. Does not exclude peat being used but allows for a more balanced assessment of the ingredients enabling the buyer (in this case the retailer or the professional grower) to make a more informed buying decision based on the "responsibility" of the product.
	Discussion key points: • Need major retailers and garden centres to demand high performance standards from all horticulture products as well as insisting they have gone through the Responsibility Calculator. • The P7 Task Force is working on developing a quality standard • This work can help encourage good practice for extraction sites and restoration. • Range of new products that can utilise opportunities in eg agriculture policy – wool based material or waste reduction policy

3.	**Issues with the supply of sustainable materials**
	Safety & Quality:
MH	Availably of quality, safety and consistency is an issue especially when using for food production
	Discussion key points: • End users taking basic hygiene precautions as with any growing media have no greater risk with peat-free materials. • Retailers can find sourcing of products at the low prices they demand a challenge, Growing media is often sold as a lost leader and the price cuts are passed back up the supply chain. Limiting factor therefore is the low price and not necessarily the availability of materials. • Opportunity for retailers/specialist plant sales to promote alternatives. • Perception is a big issue. People nervous about growing in new products. • Need for better instructions for using alternatives and explaining which work best under what situations • Big leap of faith. Not enough confidence in the alternatives. • Some Defra trials take place but need more trials in alternatives, especially in plant nurseries. Trials should be around effectiveness of the product for its stated purpose and not simply comparing peat and peat-free. • Need retailers to be demanding more testing of products – and adoption of P7 standards
	Costs
SH	It is possible to produce good quality alternatives but they usually cost more. Need retailers to accept that prices will be higher.
	Discussion key points: • Retailers are in a very competitive market with little appetite for increased prices. • Major end users such as councils have to keep costs down and peat is still the cheapest product. • Some of the alternatives however may provide additional benefits over peat eg added nutritional benefit, greater water retention and therefore may provide cost savings for the grower. • 75% of peat use is at the cheapest less demanding compost end. • Need to encourage retailers to pay a fair price for peat-free and avoid competition from lost leaders on peat eg drop 'buy 3 bags for £10' • Food waste managed to get rid of BOGOF offers through working with retailers • Where is the price differential coming from – need to examine? • Good quality compost will cost more but also needs to be used differently. Cannot be compared like for like. E.g. water usage and application time will be different. Alternatives may present opportunities to reduce water and labour costs. • Transport costs can be an issue – bulk density of composted materials as a sustainable substitute is a limiting factor.

	• One of professional working groups which included DEFRA has already undertaken some work looking at costs so there should be some information available on this. • Must look at how to reduce costs of alternatives, sometimes competing uses raise the price eg wood based products used in biomass. • Public prepared to pay more if they believe they are getting a better product **ACTION – CB to explore with Judith Stuart (Defra) option for IUCN UK PP Commission of Inquiry to examine costings around peat and peat-free materials, including cost savings from water use and transport.**
	Education & Skills in using products.
	Discussion key points: • Need more education on the use of peat free alternatives and how to care for the plants using these products to be able to use them effectively. • NTS School of horticulture provide training and carry out testing of products. Role for their Regional advisory groups to get together and talk about experiences of peat-free. Connect with community work • Need a focal point and some coordination for training • Zero Waste Scotland could help in sharing green waste experience across Councils. • Need to make available a list of nurseries that are peat-free. • Students in SRUC are aware of peat free issues. Need more trials to provide evidence of quality etc. Skills not the priority where budgets are the key issue. Time and cost can prohibit trial of new products. • RHS Plant Finder (online) provides information on where to source specific plants from (it's a list of nurseries) and includes information, in some cases, in relation to grown peat-free. • Opportunity for Eco Schools to provide education on use of alternatives. • The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) helped fund literature on peat-free products – possible further opportunities.

4.	**Experiences of using peat free products**
	Discussion key points: • Transition Linlithgow has used peat free products, worked well, no issues with the quality • National Trust gardens have different requirements across the country depending on location. Most National Trust gardens are now peat free but still buying plants which have peat in them. • Garden for Life Forum, use peat-free compost • B&Q are price and quality conscious. They are now using peat free productions for all their bedding plant production • A number of Councils did try using peat free products but switched back. • Costs can be a big issue for Councils. Don't necessarily have the resources to be able to trial new products. Need products that are reliable and low cost. **ACTION- PA, TK, CB to explore opportunity for capturing the positive success stories in reducing peat use and communicating this.**

5.	**Research and Development**
DL	 Introduced Paludiculture as a method of producing sphagnum and other plant based alternatives derived from wet peatlands including former commercially worked out sites. Trials in Germany providing high grade growing media for specialist plant growers. Opportunities for farmers to gain more income from growing Sphagnum on peat rather than arable or grass. More R&D needed. Preliminary results for harvesting sphagnum as a reuse at the milled sites including Bolton Fell Moss. Provides an alternative end use to grassland although still has some low carbon impacts. Germany doing research. UK not doing much.
	Discussion key points: • Early days for many products and companies have undertaken some self funded R&D. • Other waste streams are becoming avaiulable, such as food based products, can be a battle to get products past the Environment Agency protocols. Takes a long time and can be very difficult to meet 'end of life standards'. • SEPA have a different approach with certification standards that have enabled food and garden waste products to be used. **ACTION – CB/AM consider options for a seminar with Defra/devolved governments, the different country agencies and producers to explore use of new waste materials.**

6.	**Legislative, policy and fiscal mechanisms**
GD	Varying VAT rates could be used to create price differentiation. It would still be up to retailers if they pass this on. Plastic bag tax a good example of where pricing changes have been effective in changing consumer behaviour. Risk of retailer not passing the savings on would need to be addressed. Also risk of reinforcing prejudice against alternatives if the public perceived them as lower quality.
NR	Varying VAT on the same product class wouldn't be legal under the World Trade Organisation. Open to legal challenge. With Brexit, any deviation from WTO rules would be challenged. Public education needed to understand the benefits and manage expectations. Education needs to be embedded in schools e.g. eco-school programs.

7.	**Communications**
	Discussion key points: • Need to communicate the benefits of alternatives better. Message will depend on the audience. For many people, may need to move away from the environmental message, focus on communicating the money savings and other benefits. How peat free products support food waste collections and contribute to circular economy. • Move from focus on stopping peat use to promoting the quality and benefits of alternatives • Retailers are the more effective route to bring about change than mass communications work to an ambivalent and conflicted public • Need to promote good stories about peat free products. • Some work already done to share good practice e.g. through Keep Scotland Beautiful – opportunity to do more. Story boards in Linlithgow 'protect our Peatlands' • SRUC have a grow careers initiative that could help inspire on peatlands • Gardening media in Scotland perceived as a bit behind in promoting alternatives • Experience to be learnt through Bolton Fell Moss (Cumbria BogLIFE Project). People have lost cultural connection to the landscape. May be more fruitful to engage communities that live close to a raised bog. • There is some literature already available about peat alternatives. • Can be difficult to find peat free products within stores. Should be easily identifiable, as gluten and dairy free products now are. But be aware strict competition rules on product placing. Getting competitors in same room to discuss strategy on this isn't advisable. **ACTION – CB to contact retailers and Retail associations to arrange meeting to discuss opportunities for retailers to support delivery of peat phasing out targets.**