



Position Statement on a Peat Ban in Northern Ireland

Current statement of fact

- Ulster Wildlife is one of the leading organisations restoring peatland across Northern Ireland and through our EFS Group Scheme work with over 550 farmers to encourage applications to agri-environment schemes to manage peatland habitat, whilst providing ongoing advice and support to maximise positive management outcomes.
- Ulster Wildlife does not support activities on peatland that offset the positive impacts of our restoration and farmer advocacy work. This includes damage to peatlands through drainage, grazing, burning and/or extraction or sale of peat products.
- Ulster Wildlife is a member of the Peat-Free Partnership NI advocacy group, and we share the overarching goal with other partnership members to seek the end of commercial trade in peat across the UK.
- Ulster Wildlife is aware of the importance of peat as a growing media in commercial horticulture and the need for reliable and effective alternatives before it is phased out.
- Ulster Wildlife is aware of the progress being made in England, Scotland and Wales on phasing out of peat and the ambitious timelines proposed. We seek the same outcomes for Northern Ireland but are aware we cannot adhere to the same timeline due to the absence of the Stormont Executive/NI Assembly in recent years but would aspire to catch up acknowledging that pressure from retailers and consumers will help drive more rapid change.

Policy asks

Ulster Wildlife:

- 1. seeks immediate ratification of the Peatland Strategy to avoid further delay of peatland restoration and positive management in support of biodiversity and climate change targets.**
- 2. calls for the Minister to include a ban on retail sales of bagged peat by the end of 2025 into the Peatland Strategy and bring forward legislation to this effect.**

Rationale: this request is in line with other UK jurisdictions who are still campaigning for this to be instigated by the end of 2024, but acknowledge this timeline now looks to be slipping into 2025. In England great progress has been made on peat usage due to the likelihood of legislation being made, with only 16% of bagged compost sales now composed of peat - we do not have an NI equivalent measure of progress but it is likely to be less advanced.

The aspirations of the draft Peatland Strategy included the “phase out the use, import and sale of peat compost in Northern Ireland by 2025”. This was removed from the Strategy post-consultation due to concerns around lack of alternatives for commercial users. Our revised ask for Strategy wording does not impinge on commercial use and focuses mainly on personal purchases for gardens - in what can be considered non-essential use.

- 3. supports the development of alternative growing media, particularly those of relevance to the horticulture industry and will work in partnership with others to promote and identify alternatives and barriers to their uptake (and to ensure no unintended consequences of environmental damage from the use of peat alternatives).**

Last updated August 2024

Rationale: This directly supports the Peatland Strategy, which states, "Commission research at AFBI/CAFRE into the development of alternative growing media and identify evidence gaps that require further research, particularly those of relevance to the Horticulture Industry. This should include examining the barriers to uptake of alternatives."

Ulster Wildlife has developed a unique partnership role through the UFU Peatland Officer, who is tasked with engaging industry on delivery of this aim. The Peat-free Partnership are also taking forward research in England led by the Royal Horticultural Society.

4. To ban the use of peat in horticulture entirely by 2030, allowing for a period of transition for commercial growers or bedding plants and mushrooms.

Rationale: The request for a 2030 ban mirrors that of the current GB lobbying position and if enacted, will be achievable in NI as industry and retail will have to align across the UK.