

Response ID ANON-JXUZ-QRPF-A

Submitted to Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040

Submitted on 2021-08-31 15:11:32

Introduction

1 What is your name?

Name:

Aidan Campbell

2 What is your email address?

Email:

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3 What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Rural Community Network

Scope of the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040

4 Do you agree with the scope of the strategy?

Yes

5 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on the scope of the strategy.

Do you have any further comment on the scope of the strategy?:

Vision of the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040

6 Do you agree with this vision?

Yes

7 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on the vision of the strategy.

Do you have any further comment on the vision of the strategy?:

RCN agrees with the vision as set out in the draft strategy. The importance of the role protected and restored peatlands could play in storing carbon are vitally important in addressing climate change and reducing carbon in NI.

Aim of the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040

8 Do you agree with the aim of the strategy?

Yes

9 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on the aim of the strategy.

Have you any further comment on the aim of the strategy?:

The strategy needs to state more clearly its aim to increase appreciation amongst the general public of the important role peatland can play in the environment. Whilst the strategy clearly explains the ecosystem services that healthy peatland provides most members of the public would be unfamiliar with the concept of ecosystem services.

For communication purposes and to raise wider awareness the Department may need to consider using more accessible language as the importance of peatland is not well understood. Even in rural communities peatland or bogs are often viewed as land that is on the margins or residual as it has no agricultural value.

Strategic Objective 1

10 Do you agree with Strategic Objective 1?

Yes

11 Do you agree that the actions listed will ensure that Strategic Objective 1 is achieved?

No

12 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on Strategic Objective 1 or the associated actions.

Do you have any further comment on Strategic Objective 1 or the associated actions?:

It is unclear that if all priority actions are implemented that the objective to conserve peatlands and prevent degradation will have been achieved. A review and key issues paper on commercial peat extraction, turbarry rights and use of peat in horticulture will quantify the extent of these issues and their effects in terms of biodiversity and ecosystem function they will not necessarily address the issues.

Low income households in rural communities still use peat as a fuel due to the high rates of fuel poverty in many rural communities. Turbarry rights has the potential to become a contested issue in some rural communities in NI (as it has in some rural communities in the South of Ireland). If the wider issue of fuel poverty in rural communities can be addressed through better insulation and zero carbon heating systems then potential removal of turbarry rights could become a less controversial issue in rural communities.

The phasing out of commercial extraction for horticulture will need to be subsidised with an exit scheme or commercial extractors offered incentives to retrain in conservation and peatland management as an alternative. Again these approaches require careful thought and engagement to minimise conflict that could be caused.

Strategic Objective 2

13 Do you agree with Strategic Objective 2?

Yes

14 Do you agree that the actions listed will ensure that Strategic Objective 2 is achieved?

Yes

15 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on Strategic Objective 2 or the associated actions.

Do you have any further comment on Strategic Objective 2 or the associated actions?:

The priority actions appear as if they will lead to the achievement of this strategic objective.

The development of training and skills to enable peatland restoration, conservation and management will need to be part of the programme of Peatland restoration projects.

Strategic Objective 3

16 Do you agree with Strategic Objective 3?

Yes

17 Do you agree that the actions listed will ensure that Strategic Objective 3 is achieved?

No

18 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on Strategic Objective 3 or the associated actions.

Do you have any further comment on Strategic Objective 3 or the associated actions?:

Whilst we agree with the priority actions much depends on future land management schemes funded through post CAP agricultural policies. Whilst the DAERA minister has just published his future agricultural policy framework portfolio (24.08.21) it makes just one reference to the Peatland strategy.

To achieve the priority actions considerable amounts of public funding will need to be committed.

We would suggest that priority action 22 may also need to include a reference to the phasing out of the export of peat compost to other jurisdictions. Phasing out use, import and sale in NI by 2025 may lead to commercial extractors exporting peat to other jurisdictions where peat is still in use.

Strategic Objective 4

19 Do you agree with Strategic Objective 4?

Yes

20 Do you agree that the actions listed will ensure that Strategic Objective 4 is achieved?

Yes

21 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on Strategic Objective 4 or the associated actions.

Do you have any further comment on Strategic Objective 4 or the associated actions?:

RCN strongly supports the need to build capacity and develop practical skills training courses for peatland restoration contractors. This may help offset loss of employment or business in commercial peat extraction companies/contractors who can be encouraged to shift their focus away from extraction.

We agree there is also a need for bespoke training courses for landowners/organisations involved in peatland conservation and restoration to share best practice.

We are unsure of the need for additional research by AFBI/CAFRE into alternative growing media as alternative growing media already exist and are available in NI.

Strategic Objective 5

22 Do you agree with Strategic Objective 5?

Yes

23 Do you agree that the actions listed will ensure that Strategic Objective 5 is achieved?

Yes

24 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on Strategic Objective 5 or the associated actions.

Do you have any further comment on Strategic Objective 5 or the associated actions?:

There is an urgent need to build greater awareness of the important role of peatland in addressing climate change and how restored peatland can sequester carbon.

Managed access to peatlands for recreation and education should be part of this awareness raising process and should be done in partnership with rural communities.

Strategic Objective 6

25 Do you agree with Strategic Objective 6?

Yes

26 Do you agree that the actions listed will ensure that Strategic Objective 6 is achieved?

No

27 If appropriate, please provide any further comments you may have on Strategic Objective 6 or the associated actions.

Do you have any further comment on Strategic Objective 6 or the associated actions?:

Many of the actions across all 6 objectives are contingent on funding being secured by the NI Executive to implement the Strategy.

We strongly support the need to deliver peatland restoration projects in partnership with local communities.

For those households who use peat to heat their homes further investment is required to address fuel poverty in rural communities.

Final Comments

28 If appropriate, please provide any final comments you may have on the Draft Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040.

Do you have any final comments on the draft NI Peatland Strategy 2021-2040?: