



Kilcatherine, Eyeries, County Cork

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*Damien Allen,
Principal Officer,
WaterQuality,
Department of the Environment,
18 December, 2009*

URGENT

Re: Diffuse Pollution on peaty soils omission from River Basin District Management Plans

Dear Damien;

I know you are aware from your work with the Forest Service of the impact of degraded peat soils on water quality. The impact of discolored peaty water (which contains dissolved organic carbons and other substances) is well established as a major factor in the production of carcinogenic trihalomethanes when potable water is chlorinated. These trihalomethanes have been identified by the EPA as a major problem in 55 public water supplies.

Unfortunately, this issue has not been referred to in any of the River Basin District Management plans.

We have submitted through the multi-stakeholder body SWAN rather than making these submissions to each RBD Plan, but have now found at this late date that this issue was omitted in the submissions provided to you.

We have been in significant correspondence with the Minister, the Parks and Wildlife Service and specific local authorities over the last year about this issue. Your Department has assisted by funding, in conjunction with COMHOR, a study using remote sensing to identify the exposed peatlands of Ireland.

This study, undertaken by UCC's Department of Geography and Marine Resources Centre, will be available to your Department and Local Authorities early in 2010 and in these circumstances it is vital that a reference be included in each RBD to this issue.

We attach a summary of the issue and would be grateful if you ensured that the matter was referred to in all River Basin District Management Plans.

Kind regards,

Tony

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Peat Extraction

Rivers subject to pollution from peat extraction are degraded. Examples include the River Shannon, including Lough Derg, and the River Inny system. Fisheries Board and NPWS reports are available. [Fitzsimons, M and Igoe, F, 2004]

No county councils have records of peat extraction other than for a limited number of Bord na Mona sites, yet extraction is widespread. Silt laden water which also may contain historic heavy metals and nutrients is flowing freely into rivers and lakes including protected areas. Many extraction sites exceed the 50ha limit for IPPC licensing. No EIAs have been undertaken.

Water discoloration is a major issue since peatlands, particularly when degraded, produce discoloured water with high concentrations of dissolved organic carbon [Driscoll et al., 2003]. Chlorination of highly-coloured water releases trihalomethanes, which are potentially toxic and carcinogenic (Kneale and McDonald, 1999).

This will have an economic impact. [J. Holden., J. et al 2007]. The EPA have records of 55 public water supplies which exceed the trihalomethane limits [EPA, 2007].

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