

# EU Parliamentary Questions on Peat – Summer 2008


## Parliamentary questions

18 June 2008

E-3449/08

WRITTEN QUESTION by Jim Higgins (PPE-DE) to the Commission

▶ **Subject: Habitats Directive**

 Answer(s)

Could the Commission indicate if it is prepared to re-examine the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC<sup>(1)</sup>), particularly with regard to the prohibition of the cutting of turf on certain stretches of bog land in Ireland, in view of the fact that there currently exists a major and growing crisis in relation to energy supply and cost. Furthermore, can the Commission confirm that there are less CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from harvesting turf/peat as opposed to other uses for bog land such as afforestation?

Could the Commission further confirm that bog lands in Finland are classified as biomass and that the peat continues to be harvested and processed?

E-3449/08EN

Answer given by Mr Dimas  
on behalf of the Commission  
(4.8.2008)

By way of Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora<sup>1</sup>, Member States are legally committed to protect habitat types of Community interest, including raised and blanket bogs for which the active forms are of priority interest under the Directive. This is principally to be achieved by the establishment, protection and management of Special Areas of Conservation. Ireland has particular responsibility within the EU for the protection of these habitat types.

The latest conservation status assessment published by the Irish authorities is particularly alarming, especially for active raised bogs. Intact raised bog in Ireland is now extremely rare and has decreased in area by over 35% in the last 10 years<sup>2</sup>. The ongoing deterioration of the hydrological conditions of the habitat at current rates caused by peat cutting, forestry and burning is deemed to threaten severely the viability of the habitat at most locations. There is an urgent need to put in place effective management and protection measures for Ireland's Natura 2000 peatlands, including the prohibition of turf cutting where this is not compatible with the conservation of the sites. Such prohibitions should also apply to other land use changes such as afforestation where they represent a threat to the integrity of Natura 2000 peatlands. It is the responsibility of the relevant authorities in Ireland to put in place the necessary protection safeguards. Natura 2000 covers only a proportion of Ireland's peatlands. Ireland also protects some peatlands as

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 206, 22.7.1992.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.npws.ie/en/PublicationsLiterature/HabitatsDirectivereport07/>.

Natural Heritage Areas under national legislation. There are still large areas of peatland outside of these areas where peat extraction is unaffected by the protection safeguards applying to these sites.

The Commission appreciates the difficulties being experienced by people throughout the Community in relation to the current energy crisis and addressing these with the Member States is a priority of energy and climate policy. However, as peatlands take thousands of years to form they do not represent a renewable resource or biomass, as confirmed by the guidelines of the International Panel on Climate Change. Using peat as an energy source will therefore result in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, while the preservation of this vital ecosystem will keep CO<sub>2</sub> sequestered in the soil. The Commission cannot confirm that harvesting peat releases less CO<sub>2</sub> than afforestation and other activities, nor is this a reasonable basis to allow for the destruction of Natura 2000 peatlands.

The Commission is also unaware that Finland has classified boglands as biomass. Finland has protected bog and mire habitat types in Natura 2000 according to the requirements of the Habitats Directive. The same protection safeguards apply to these Finnish peatlands under the Habitats Directive including in relation to harvesting of peat. Whereas peat extraction is still a significant activity in Finland, the Commission is not aware that it is taking place within Natura 2000 sites. Again, it is for the national authorities to ensure that the conditions of the Habitats Directive are met in cases where peat harvesting may have significant effects on bog habitat types within Natura 2000 sites.

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## Parliamentary questions

15 July 2008

E-4047/08

WRITTEN QUESTION by Proinsias De Rossa (PSE) to the Commission

### ► Subject: Peat-burning in Ireland

Could the Commission indicate whether it has been notified by the Irish authorities of the decision by Mayo County Council to grant permission for a power plant in Ballina, Co. Mayo which will burn peat, among other fuels?

Is the expansion of peat-burning indicated in the National Allocations Plan for Ireland?

Will the plant be able to avail itself of new-entrant emissions allocations under the Irish NAP?

What assessment has been carried out of the biodiversity implications of the proposed expansion of peat extraction in Mayo, as required by EU legislation, including the EIA Directive (Directive 85/337/EEC<sup>(1)</sup> as amended by Directive 97/11/EC<sup>(2)</sup>)?

What assessment has been carried out of the carbon sink implications of this proposal?

What assessment is available to the Commission of the carbon sink potential of Ireland's peatlands?

What assessment is available to the Commission of the carbon sink potential of Ireland's cutaway peatlands should they be subject to ecosystem restoration?

What are the Commission's long-term plans for protecting Europe's peatlands?

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(1) OJ L 175, 5.7.1985, p. 40.

(2) OJ L 73, 14.3.1997, p. 5.