



IRISH PEATLAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

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Peatland Policy Unit
Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht
7 Ely Place
Dublin 2

15th April 2014

Re Submission from the IPCC on the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan 17th January 2014

Habitat (Victim) Impact Statement of the Effects of this Raised Bog SAC Management Plan

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Irish Peatland Conservation Council welcomes the development of a National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan by Government and the opportunity to comment on it.

Our comments on this document also relate to the Raised Bog NHA review which is so obviously an integral part of the SAC Raised Bog Management Plan. We welcome the ecohydrological approach being taken to the assessment and future management of raised bogs of conservation importance in Ireland.

IPCC have been engaged deeply in the scientific process which led to the publication of this document through our participation in the Raised Bog Conservation Steering Committee as representatives of the Peatlands Council.

Political Issues - Transparency and Public Consultation

From the very start of our involvement it has been obvious that the development of this document is heavily politically led. A previous draft of the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan of November 2013 presented to the Raised Bog Steering Committee and to the Peatlands Council excluded complete information in Chapter 4 - Potential Measures to Achieve Conservation Objectives and Chapter 6 - Addressing the needs of those affected by the Plan. IPCC consider this action to demonstrate a lack of transparency in the process of reviewing the conservation value of our raised bogs. This policy continues currently with Minister Deenihan indicating that he will not be revealing the location of sites in the 2014 NHA network for some time and the absence of technical overview assessments for the NHA and undesignated raised bogs.

Since the publication of the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan, Minister Deenihan has seen fit to disregard the time frame for public consultation which is open to the 18th April 2014. Over a period of two weeks from 24th February 2014 he sanctioned an advertising campaign and the release of letters to raised bog owners throughout the country informing them of the new status of their lands within the existing 75 Natural Heritage Area Networks. Thus he has gone ahead enacting some of the proposals within the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan without taking public opinion into account.

In the light of this behaviour IPCC would question the value of making a submission to this process at all. However as the leading NGO in peatland conservation in the country and being a voice for a significant number of Irish citizens who support conservation of peatlands we wish to present one case study and to make a series of points in support of our Habitat (Victim) Impact Statement of the Effects of this Raised Bog SAC Management Plan.

OVER 30 YEARS TAKING ACTION FOR BOGS AND WILDLIFE

Case Study: Clonroosk Little Bog (Ballysooghan Bog)

Prepared by Irish Peatland Conservation Council April 2014



Figure 1: Google Earth Map showing the location of Clonroosk Little Bog, Cos Kildare and Offaly outlined in red - a site proposed for inclusion within the Natural Heritage Area Network in 2013/14.

Clonroosk Little Bog (Ballysooghan Bog) was first identified by the IPCC as being of conservation value in 2005 when we undertook a habitat survey of the Bog of Allen. The site which straddles the Kildare-Offaly border (Grid Ref: N645 225) is a raised bog remnant of 69ha in extent, the majority of which is owned by Bord na Móna and located within the Ballydermott works in Co. Kildare, approximately 4km north west of Rathangan village and 2km upstream of the River Barrow and Nore cSAC (Figure 1). Directly adjacent to the intact site on its eastern boundary sod moss is actively being produced. Further east is a large-scale

milled peat production area. Part of the bog to the west and south is privately owned. Farmland occurs along the northern margin of the site. The site has never been part of the active peat production areas in these works despite Bord na Móna having a presence in the area for more than 50 years.

IPCC surveyed this peatland in 2005 and identified it as one of five raised bog remnants within the Bog of Allen that had a habitat and biodiversity value (Figure 3). Ref: Hurley, C. (2005) *Bog of Allen Habitat and Heritage Survey*, IPCC, Co. Kildare ISBN 1874189269.

Following the completion of the survey we met with Bord na Móna to highlight the importance of this and other sites in their ownership in the Bog of Allen.

As part of the Draft Rehabilitation Plan for the Ballydermott Bog Group, Bord na Móna identified this site as an area to be retained as remnant raised bog habitat (Ref: Draft Ballydermott Rehabilitation Plan prepared by Bord na Móna as part of condition 10 of the IPPC license, ref 502, revised January 2013).

In 2011 the Peatlands Council was set up with a view to developing a National Peatland Strategy. As part of this the Irish Government gave an undertaking to review the status of raised bog in Ireland. A contract was subsequently awarded to RPS Consultants. As part of this project in April 2013 RPS contacted IPCC for a list of raised bog sites to be considered for inclusion within the NHA review. Clonroosk Little was included in our submission.

A field survey of the site was undertaken in October 2013 as part of the Kildare Wetland Survey. This survey recorded *Sphagnum pulchrum* on the site (its only station in Co. Kildare). The site was found to contain 4ha of active raised bog and to be one of the most eastern examples of raised bog habitat remaining in Ireland. The site was still intact at that stage. Bord na Móna gave permission for the survey workers to enter the bog and they are aware of these findings.

In January 2014, RPS and NPWS published the draft Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and the Raised Bog NHA Review for public consultation. Clonroosk Little is one of the undesignated sites under review in these documents.

IPCC visited Clonroosk Little Bog on the 3rd April 2014 and we found that it had been completely drained for peat production (see Figures 2 and 4). 1m deep drains were inserted across the site at 9m intervals. The drains were actively removing water and peat sediment from the raised bog and appeared to flow towards the River Barrow and Nore cSAC. Extensive damage was done to the acrotelm surface of the bog. On every second 9m section, the living moss layer had been completely obliterated (Figure 3). The outfall drains extended directly into an area of bog woodland at the perimeter and again sub-



Figure 2: Air photograph looking south showing the extent of the drainage works undertaken on Clonroosk Little Bog, Cos Kildare and Offaly some time between October 2013 and March 2014.



Figure 3: Clonroosk Little Bog, Cos Kildare and Offaly. The surface of the bog in 2005 when the site was surveyed by the IPCC. Priority active raised bog habitat was present on the site. In 2013 the Kildare Wetland Survey verified that *Sphagnum pulchrum* was a component of the vegetation. This was its only known location in Kildare.



Figure 4: Clonroosk Little Bog, Cos Kildare and Offaly. An on the ground shot showing the destruction of the site arranged by Bord na Móna in the period between October 2013 and the IPCC site visit on the 3rd April 2014. The hydrology of the bog has been destroyed, the acrotelm obliterated over extensive areas and the soft peat surface has been compressed by the machinery used.

stantial damage to mature trees and the woodland structure had been done to insert the drains. We could find no indication that standard water protection measures (such as silt pond installation) were adhered to / followed as would normally be required of Bord na Móna or other licensed peat development operators when undertaking such works. The peat stratigraphy of the site shows a richness of moss peat so the operation may be with a view to producing horticultural products. This was subsequently confirmed by Bord na Móna at a meeting with IPCC on the 9th April 2014.

This case study of Clonroosk Little Bog raises serious issues of public concern which need to be addressed in the NHA Review and in the Raised Bog SAC Management Plan:

- 1 It is very disappointing that a site earmarked for conservation by IPCC, Bord na Móna, Independent Consultants and NPWS has been developed. There has been no regard for the conservation value of the site despite it being in play as part of the Raised Bog NHA Review. As it stands a site which may be scheduled for designation as an NHA has been ditched and drained for the production of sod moss peat.
- 2 The development of the site contravenes the Draft Rehabilitation Plan for the Bord na Móna site which has been lodged with the EPA as part of the IPPC licensing process (Licence Ref. 502 of 2013). This fact has been acknowledged by Bord na Móna at a meeting with the IPCC on the 9th April 2014 and in correspondence of the 10th April 2014 in which they state that the damage was an error and was wholly due to internal system failure which is being corrected within the company.
3. A further related issue to Point 2 above is how the EPA oversee their IPPC licences. This case highlights a need for a system of regular site inspection by the EPA. IPCC are concerned that the development on Clonroosk Little may have gone unnoticed by the regulators but for the vigilance of a member of the public. In this case there may be potential for restoration (which Bord na Móna have committed to on the 9th April 2014), but how can we be sure that in the past there have not been other examples which did go unnoticed and that there will not be further cases in the future. A change of operational management is needed in Bord na Móna. IPCC acknowledge and welcome Bord na Móna's

commitment (given to IPCC on the 9th and 10th April 2014) to reviewing operations internally but they need to be guided at a national level through the Peatland Policy Unit of the NPWS, the Peatland Strategy Implementation Group in addition to the EPA.

4 IPCC need assurances that Bord na Móna's Biodiversity Action Plan 2010 to 2015 is a real Corporate Social Responsibility that is adhered to by every worker in the company.

5 Although Clonroosk Little Bog is within the licenced IPPC land, it is a condition of licenses based on draft rehabilitation plans (i.e where peat production is still underway) that all drainage activities on previously undrained land be subject to planning permission and EIA. IPCC would see this development as being totally illegal on the grounds that an assessment for drainage projects of 10ha or more in extent on a peatland is required. This development which far exceeds 10ha and therefore required planning permission from Offaly County Council and Kildare County Council. Other peat development projects of this scale by companies or individuals who are not IPPC licensed are subject to planning permission and assessment.

6 This development contravenes six stated principles for Bord na Móna within the recently published draft National Peatland Strategy (NSP) (including : NPS P5, NSP P12, NSP P14, NSP P15, NSP P30 and NPS A21). NSP Principle 14 which states: "*the policy of Bord na Móna is not to open up any undrained bogs for peat production*" and NSP Principle 30 states "*Coillte and Bord na Móna as the managers of significant tracts of peatlands on behalf of the Irish people will continue to show leadership in responsible management, rehabilitation and restoration of peatlands*".

7 This development by Bord na Móna lends weight to the claims of turf cutters in Kildare that the responsibility for protecting raised bog habitat in the county rests entirely with private landowners while Bord na Móna have already developed large areas of raised bog in the county for financial gain with little responsibility for nature conservation. This action by Bord na Móna is extremely damaging in the eyes of the public and must be fully undone and compensated for in order to restore public confidence in them.

8 This site development by Bord na Móna is in direct contradiction to the code of practice set down by the International Peat Society in their publication: *Strategy for Responsible Peatland Management* (2010) and which has been adopted by the peat industry.

9 This site development for horticultural products highlights the need for better regulation of this business in Ireland. There are many different peat producers who harvest horticultural products operating within the country at present that should be controlled within the EPA licensing system. Most of the moss peat industries focus on raised bogs which is another pressure on this almost extinct habitat.

10 IPCC are very disappointed to see this development as a first result of our engagement in the Raised Bog NHA Review in Ireland as it realises our worst fears in relation to the indirect impacts of the Raised Bog NHA Review. Over 200 sites were submitted to the RPS and NPWS teams in good faith as possible candidates for NHA status. The outcome of the NHA review is that over 150 sites are deemed not to be of sufficient quality to be included in the NHA network. IPCC are deeply concerned this decision will give the green light for the development of these sites once their location is published. Is one of the impacts we can expect from the NHA review to be another "brown gold rush" of peat development across the country?

This case study demonstrates the need for strict guidelines and strong regulation on the wise management of peatlands outside of the designated site networks but which still retain a nature conservation value at local level. Such sites contribute to achieving targets in terms of biodiversity protection and greenhouse gas emissions. It is not good enough for the NPWS to concern themselves only with designated sites and to ignore the reality of the findings of the EPA funded BOGLAND report, that the sustainable management of all peatland resources in Ireland is fundamental to achieving a healthier environment in which people can live, conduct their business and protect their natural resources. Joined up thinking and action is required across all stakeholders going forward.

Results of the Analysis of the Draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and the Draft Raised Bog NHA Review by the Irish Peatland Conservation Council

1. Continued Turf Cutting on Raised Bog SACs and NHAs until 2017

IPCC are totally opposed to any further turf cutting on the raised bogs of conservation importance in Ireland (including on SAC raised Bogs and NHA bogs). This is because we cannot see how one can begin to restore the hydrology of sites which requires drain blocking and possibly other engineered actions if people are continuing to cut turf, as their actions require drainage and burning. We need to halt the loss of active raised bog habitat in 2014 because the Raised Bog SAC Management Plan itself states that *“it will take 10 years after drains are blocked before a reverse in the loss of active raised bog can be measured”*. Therefore even if turf cutting stopped immediately, the habitat is still deteriorating because of the effects of drainage and turf cutting over previous decades. The ecological and hydrological scientists who evaluated sites in the Raised Bog SAC Management Plan indicate that turf cutting and associated drainage are the major factors causing the loss of high bog and active raised bog habitat in Ireland.

Specifically

1.1. We are not happy with turf cutting being permitted on one SAC (Tullagher Bog) as it is misleading for the public and will lead to further loss of high raised bog plus the indirect effects of drainage within the SAC boundary and the possible delays that may occur in the restoration progress. In addition we cannot see how this is justified given that there are alternative options for the turf cutters involved such as financial compensation and turf fuel deliveries.

1.2. Minister Deenihan must ensure that for the five other SACs for which he is considering the possibility of turf cutting, he will not allow this, again because of the further loss of active raised bog and the indirect effects described in 1.1.

1.3 It is scientifically absurd that the government are planning to allow turf cutting to continue on the NHA bogs in the new network until 2017. We cannot see any justification for this decision scientifically. How can the political process and Minister Deenihan stand over allowing turf cutting to continue beyond the next general election when the last general election led to a serious U-turn on the issue of turf cutting. Turf cutting was due to cease in 2013. By postponing the decision to stop turf cutting, the Minister runs the risk of all of his work being undone. How can the scientific process documented in this Raised Bog SAC Management Plan which found that turf cutting and active raised bog conservation are not compatible and that active raised bog can be expected to further decline over the coming years stand over allowing turf cutting to continue for another three years? This decision jeopardises the integrity of the Raised Bog SAC Plan decreasing the likelihood that it will stand up to challenge or scrutiny. The 2017 deadline must be brought back to the original deadline of 2013.

1.4 As a matter of general policy in relation to turf cutting, nature conservation agencies in other countries think about ways to phase out the dependence on turf, rather than resorting to de-designating sites of conservation value. Several attempts have been made by the NGO's represented on the Peatlands Council to encourage Government to develop incentive schemes for households currently using turf to switch to other sustainable fuel types. We are disappointed to see that within the SAC Management Plan this option is not even mentioned. We would recommend that government makes a commitment to delivering on this scheme and includes it within the SAC Raised Bog Management Plan.

2. Active Raised Bog Conservation Target

IPCC welcome the setting of a national conservation target for active raised bog conservation of 3,600ha which will consist of a network of SAC raised Bogs and NHA raised bogs. We cautiously welcome the setting up of a new network of NHA raised bogs which will relieve the Government of the responsibility of dealing with multitudes of turf cutters directly. We would point out that this target really represents the bare minimum of what has to be done to satisfy the legal requirements of the European Union and the social needs of our citizens but it is being jeopardised by the decision to allow turf cutting to continue until 2017 when it should have been stopped in 2013.

Specifically

2.1 IPCC are concerned at the tiny area of just 3,600ha being proposed (just 1% of the original area of raised bog in the country) as the national conservation target and we feel it should be increased for a number of reasons. The figure was formulated from an assessment of active raised bog in SACs and NHAs in 1994 and did not take into account the overall quantity of active raised bog in the country at the time which is standard practice within the EU. In addition we do not see a contingency or efficacy factor built into the data given the scientific view in the Plan that the area of active raised bog is likely to continue to decrease for at least 10 more years even with management intervention, such is the amount of damage that has been done to the habitat. Furthermore, by allowing turf cutting to continue until 2017 there will be more direct loss and indirect damage to active raised bog in the supporting NHA network. And the restoration of sites will automatically be delayed to facilitate turf cutters. Therefore more active raised bog needs to be included in the target to mitigate for these losses. We need a more credible national conservation objective that has some hope of being achieved. In order to ensure that the plan is robust and can withstand public scrutiny, the national conservation target needs to take these factors into account and there must be absolute certainty over the figures being quoted.

2.2 IPCC would like to point out that the figures for attaining the national conservation target of 3,600ha cannot be met without resorting to the restoration of 230ha of cutover bog - a new area of expertise needing to be developed for the NPWS. However in the proposal to de-designate part of or all of 46 NHAs the Government is discarding 79.7ha of active raised bog and a further 175.6ha of potentially active raised bog. Together these figures of 255.3ha would more than compensate for the deficit in area of active raised bog without having to resort to possibly prolonged and expensive cutover bog restoration research which may in the end at best deliver secondary habitat of active raised bog. Given the current impoverished condition of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in terms of staff and resources such projects are not realistic at all.

2.3 Through IPCC's analysis of the sites and the scoring systems allocated in total for each site which informed the ranking of the NHA's we can gain no understanding of the logic behind the final selection of sites either for retention in the NHA network or for exclusion from the network. Based on the technical, environmental and socio-economic scoring systems used, the expectation is for the highest ranking sites to be the most favourable for conservation and to be retained in the new NHA network. This has not occurred and it points to a lack of transparency in the designation process which could be undermined by those in favour of turf cutting.

For example: Annaghbeg Bog, Co. Galway is ranked as the 41st best site in terms of overall scoring in the review. Despite this and the fact that it scores higher than 16 Category 1 NHAs the site is to be de-designated (see Table 1: MCA Current NHA network results on page 6 in the Review of Raised Bog NHA Network and Table 2 Categorisation of the current NHA Network on page 9 in the Review of Raised Bog NHA Network).

Another example: the new NHA network is proposed to consist of 61 sites. Based on overall score four sites to be de-designated are included in the top 61. These are Little River Brosna Callows, Corracramp, Clonreher and Annaghbeg.

However, based solely on environmental and technical scoring: eight of the category 2 NHA's falling within the top 61 are to be de-designated. Furthermore Cangort Bog NHA, ranked 140 in environmental and technical scoring (ie. conservation value and potential for restoration) is to be retained.

2.4 IPCC are concerned that some of the top ranking sites in the undesignated category are being used as relocation sites for turf cutters from SAC bogs. E.g. Castlesampson Bog, Co. Roscommon is to be a relocation site for Ballynamona/Corkip Bog. Again this work is being fast tracked before the public consultation period is completed.

2.5 We are also concerned that some of the sites designated by Bord na Móna for biodiversity are now to be used as relocation sites. For example Tirrur, Co. Galway. We were not aware that policy in relation to biodiversity could be chopped and changed without a scientific assessment. This issue needs to be resolved in the SAC Plan. Sites that are to be used in this manner must be subject to full Environmental Impact Assessment. We would also refer to the Clonroosk Little Case Study attached to this submission and to the sites that will eventually not be included within the SAC or NHA networks.

2.6 Regarding the ecological assessment of the NHAs and non designated sites, there is a danger of an over prediction in relation to their potential restoration value because a detailed field survey assessment

was not carried out on each site. This means that we cannot be certain of the figures being presented. This situation must be resolved without delay.

2.7 Restoration areas to active raised bog habitat proposed are based on the assumption that drains in these bogs are peat based and do not puncture the sub-peat mineral soil. They assume that there is no draw down factor. Field work in relation to this issue is to be carried out after the public consultation, so the potential restoration area may need adjustment in the light of the field data obtained.

2.8 Table 4.3 on page 75 (inset below) in the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan describes the new NHA network. IPCC would point out that there are considerably fewer sites (14 less) and bog units (19 less), and substantially less high bog area (2000ha less) in the new network. In light of our comments in point 2.2 above there is still scope for an adjustment in the size and shape of the new NHA network which we would urge so that the country can deliver on the goal of conserving active raised bog in Ireland.

Table 4.3 Comparison of current and new raised bog NHA network

	Active Raised Bog (ha)	Degraded Raised Bog (ha)	Total Active and Degraded (ha)	High Bog (ha)	N° of Sites*	N° of Bog Units	Approx N° of Turf Cutters
Current NHA Network	284	410	694	7,477	75	82	3,091
New NHA Network	290	475	765	5,405	61	63	518

*Some sites contain more than one bog

3. Site Specific Management Plans

The plan predicts that site specific management plan works will focus only on rewetting. IPCC feel this is a very narrow view of raised bog restoration. Re-vegetating bare peat areas will also be required to speed up the process of restoration particularly in cutover areas and particularly where the end goal is to achieve active raised bog formation on the cutover sites. We would like to see this management technique recognised and costed in the plan.

IPCC do not see any works proposed in the plan for the NHAs which support the network of SACs. In Table 5.1 on page 79, this aspect of the Conservation of Raised Bogs is not listed, nor is it costed. Clarification is needed on this issue immediately as we work to attain the national conservation objective for raised bogs.

4. Sustainable Management of Raised Bog Resources

Beyond the SAC and NHA network of sites designated for conservation there is no mention of how raised bogs in the wider countryside are to be managed. Has consideration been given to the role that sites which are not designated have in mitigating against climate change and in supporting peatland species and habitats to help meet national conservation objectives either now or in the future? IPCC estimate that the number of sites involved may be as many as 97. IPCC regard this as a serious omission from the plan that needs to be resolved to ensure that Ireland meets its targets on climate change emissions and on biodiversity conservation. The EPA published BOGLAND, a protocol for the sustainable management of peatlands in 2011. They focused on the issue of carbon dioxide emissions from degrading peatlands and the need to manage utilised peatlands with a view to reducing their emissions. This international issue has been ignored in the raised bog plan. Furthermore there are many small remnant areas of raised bog within the general countryside that have an importance as Local Biodiversity Areas (under the Convention on Biological Diversity). Again the plan ignores these. This is contrary to policy in other jurisdictions. Of particular relevance is the situation in Northern Ireland where at a local planning level a network of Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs) has been established that includes a significant number of lowland raised bog sites of nature conservation interest, which are not designated as ASSI or NNR or SAC (Ref: Northern Ireland Lowland Raised Bog Habitat Action Plan 2003).

5. Budget, NPWS Staff and Resources

Unless more staff and significant financial resources are committed to the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan its goals will not be achieved.

Specifically

5.1 There is an urgent need to double the present staff levels in the NPWS and to release €20 million annually in the present 6 year cycle for management and monitoring sites and the effectiveness of the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan. This is in addition to the €11.9 million needed to compensate 514 turf cutters in the new NHA network plus existing turf cutters in the SAC network. The budget presented in Table 5.1 of the plan at €10.8 million is unrealistic and incomplete for many of the actions. For example how can a demonstration project on Clara Bog be costed at €1.2 million and yet to block drains and restore hydrology on 52 other SAC bogs is only costed at €1.7 million - an average of €32,000 per site. Why is there no budget presented for 6 of the 14 actions? Why is there no budget or action in relation to the restoration of the NHA network sites which are to play such an important part in delivering the national conservation objectives for raised bogs? Why is there no contingency budget? IPCC recommend that someone who knows how to formulate a project budget be brought in immediately to rectify this situation. Incomplete work such as this points to a lack of serious intent on the part of the government in its determination to deliver on raised bog conservation.

5.2. The management budgets for the restoration of sites is not well thought out in terms of finances or staff resources which makes us fear that the objectives set may be difficult to achieve.

6 Education and Awareness

IPCC notice that there is an education programme included in Table 5.1 Summary of Proposed Programme of Conservation Measures but there are no details whatsoever about this education and awareness programme in the text. With our experience in the delivery of peatland education and awareness programmes, IPCC would suggest that formal (schools) and informal strands be included and that the programme be life long in its scope. There is a particular priority to provide communities within turf cutting areas with skills in restoration management, the monitoring of species diversity and the development of local amenities around protected sites. The education programme needs to be expanded on in the text of the SAC Management Plan.

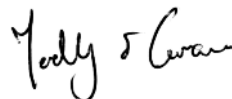
In the interests of clarity of information we would recommend the inclusion of an information box within the text of the SAC Management Plan entitled: Does turf cutting damage raised bogs- similar to the information box on Climate Change presented.

Over all IPCC have a substantial number of issues with these documents in their draft form and we would expect all of our recommendations to be given due consideration. In this regard we would welcome a consultation with the Peatland Policy Unit to discuss the issues and how the Department intends to deal with them.

Yours sincerely



Dr Catherine O'Connell
Chief Executive



Tadhg Ó Corcora M. Sc.
Conservation Officer