

An Bord Pleanála
Marlborough Street,
Dublin 1,

29 May 2020

REFERENCE – Substitute Consent Leave application decision ABP-306490-20 Blackwater

[Blackwater – Location - Ballaghurt Bog in the Blackwater Bog Group located in the townlands of CLONLYON CASTLEQUARTER, LACKAGH MORE, CLONGAWNY, CARROWKEEL, DOON DEMESNE, GLEBE, CLONFINLOUGH, CLONADERG, LACKAGH BEG and DERRYHARNEY in County Offaly.

Development - Peat extraction carried out by the Applicant since 2012, the provision and maintenance of drainage and silt ponds, the provision of temporary peat stock piles and temporary rail lines at various locations within the production area, the provision of hard standing and car parking area, buildings, gates, bunded diesel tank, fenced storage areas and other associated works.]

Dear Sir/ Madame,

Following grant of Leave to Apply for Substitute Consent from An Bord Pleanála [Board Order dated 1st May 2020 (Board Order dated 30th April 2020 (ref ABP-306490-20 (Blackwater))), Bord na Móna plc. (the “Applicant”) enclose herewith an application for Substitute Consent pursuant to section 177E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, to regularise the planning status of historic peat extraction and ancillary works carried out by the Applicant since September 2012 on the bogs in the Blackwater Bog Group. The bog units have been grouped together logically by the Applicant by their Integrated Pollution Licence grouping, however some bog units occupy a discrete land bank and may merit individual assessment by An Bord Pleanála.

Background

Bord na Móna was founded in 1934 was formally set up in 1946 when the Turf Development Board was established as a statutory corporation under the title of Bord na Móna. At this time, the motivation for its establishment was equally social as it was economic. The aim was for a guaranteed strategic energy supply and, in the process, industrial employment could be provided, thus avoiding emigration, or rural depopulation. Since its establishment, Bord na Móna has acquired and developed approximately 80,000 hectares of bogland which, in turn, has supported whole communities primarily in the Irish midlands.

The First Development programme, which commenced in 1946, was a comprehensive plan for the development of the country’s peat resources by mechanical methods which would “considerably reduce the country’s dependence on imported fuel, and at the same time, provide

a substantial measure of employment.” The development of the bogs continued with the Second Development programme in 1950 and the Third Development Programme in 1975.

Bord na Móna’s Brown to Green Strategy - Overview

While Bord na Móna peat extraction has provided fuel for electricity generation, domestic heating, and peat for horticulture use while sustaining communities in the midlands for the last 80 years, in recent years the company have accepted the need to move away from peat extraction, in a planned, orderly and just manner. It has been recognised by Bord na Móna that decarbonisation is the biggest challenge facing this planet and Bord na Móna is accelerating the move away from peat into renewable energy, resource recovery and other new businesses.

Of the 79,500 hectares of bog remaining in the ownership of Bord na Móna, it is proposed to continue the extraction of peat on 8,000 hectares or just over 10% of this footprint for a limited number of years. This is a reduction from the 2019 peat extraction footprint of 19,700 hectares.

Continued extraction of peat, albeit at a greatly reduced rate, is required to facilitate the phased transition and orderly exit of Bord na Móna, its employees and local communities from peat extraction to renewable energy, resource recovery and other new businesses such as fish farming and growing of herbs.

Bord na Mona is moving forward with the ‘Enhanced Peatland Rehabilitation Programme’ which is an extensive programme of rehabilitation and restoration of peatlands that have been used in peat harvesting.

Overview of plan to cease all Peat Harvesting

It is the strategy of Bord na Móna to enable a “Just Transition” through a phased step down of its peat extraction activities. It is the intent that harvesting and extraction of peat will stop by the middle of the decade.

Specifically, extraction of peat for all purposes would reduce from the peak of 6.5 million tonnes in 2013 to zero by 2026. The step-down is shown in the Figure below.

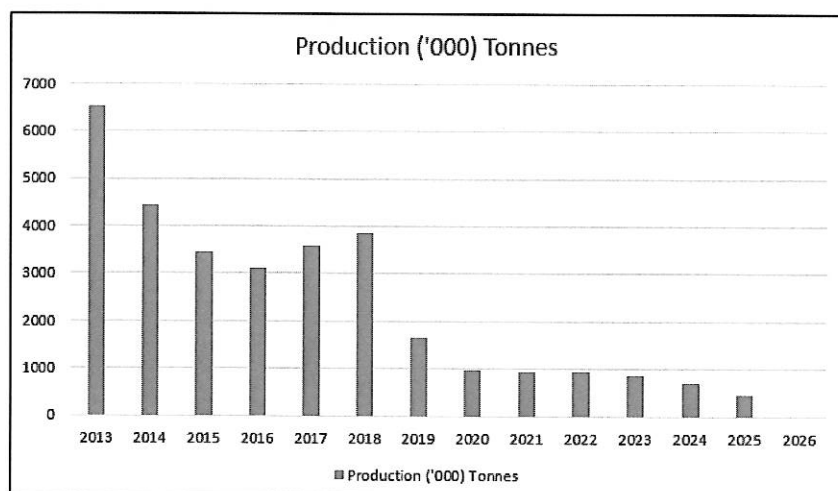


Figure 1: Past and Proposed Future Peat Production

Integrated Pollution Control Licences

All Bord na Mona's peat extraction, if continued, will be carried out under the regime of its Integrated Pollution Control License controls. This compliance, monitored and enforced by the EPA, differentiates Bord na Mona's activities and impacts from other entities involved in Peat Extraction and Harvesting.

Just Transition

Bord na M6na are addressing the need for decarbonisation through its Brown to Green strategy which accelerates the move away from peat into other businesses. This project will ensure that Bord na M6na peat extraction is reduced from a high of 6.5 million tonnes in 2013 to less than 0.5 million tonnes per annum in 2025. This project will facilitate the transition phase which will see Bord na M6na become a leading provider of renewable energy on the Island of Ireland by 2026, a leader in high-value recycling and a provider of a range of new low carbon goods and services while ensuring we remain a very significant employer in the Midlands for the decades to come. There are currently over 800 persons directly employed by Bord na M6na in the peat industry and a significant additional number employed indirectly. This project will allow for the transition of these jobs from peat to either retirement, voluntary redundancy or other businesses within Bord na M6na. If this project does not proceed, there will be immediate job losses due to the cessation of peat extraction as well as the closure of Derrinlough Briquette factory, Edenderry Power Station, and workers supplying peat based growing media to the Horticultural sector. This project will ensure that Bord na M6na can continue to fulfil its mandate of creating and maintaining sustainable employment in the Midlands. It will protect local economies while ensuring the phased transition to alternative renewable and sustainable employment

Decommissioning and Rehabilitation of Bord na Mona's Peatlands

In parallel with, and enabled by, the phased withdrawal from Peat Extraction, Bord na Mona will (as announced by the Minister for Communication, Climate Action and Environment), embark on an intensive program to decommission its peat extraction infrastructure and rehabilitate peatlands previously used for peat extraction.

Peat Harvesting plan

This project, which is the regularisation of past peat extraction and the continued, reduced rate of peat extraction for a limited period, is required to facilitate a phased transition to these new industries and to rehabilitation and the need for this phased reduction in peat extraction is set out below:

To provide milled peat for the production of briquettes in Derrinlough briquette factory.

This is the only remaining peat briquette factory in Ireland, manufacturing a fuel that is used by a large number of householders that are not typically connected to networked heating infrastructure, and in particular, used by a disproportionately high number of households vulnerable to ‘fuel poverty’. It is envisaged that solid fuel use will decrease in line with an increase in the level of retrofitting of the existing and future housing stock. The increase in retrofitting of houses will occur over the coming years and in the interim peat briquettes will continue to provide a viable and economic heating solution. The application of the carbon tax and the delivery of the government strategy to fund housing upgrades in the Midlands will result in a natural move away from the use of peat briquettes. . However, Bord na Móna contend that this move away from peat should be done in an orderly and regulated manner and not with a sudden cessation in production and the subsequent impact on domestic supply, which the ‘market’ would ironically meet with an equivalent volume of fossil fuels imported from other countries. This phased and orderly strategy is consistent with government policy under the Just Transition, as referred to in the Government’s Climate Action Plan.

If Bord na Móna are granted Substituted Consent for the Blackwater Bog Group, the intention would be to apply for planning permission for the harvesting of peat for supply to the Derrinlough Briquette Factory to service the phased decrease in solid fuel use.

To harvest milled and sod horticultural peat for the domestic and commercial horticultural industry:

Bord na Móna Horticulture focuses on the manufacture, marketing and sale of quality growing media products to both hobby gardeners and professional growers in 30 countries around the world. There is currently no viable alternative in terms of quality and scale, to horticultural peat for the professional growing market.

The recent Key Issues Consultation Paper published by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht states that the “Irish commercial horticultural industry makes a very significant contribution to the Irish gross agricultural output with a farm gate value of €437 million in 2018.” This industry employs 6,600 directly and 11,000 indirectly. It is estimated that approximately 50% of the total industry output of €437m is dependent on peat as a growing medium. There are ongoing efforts in the industry to use peat free substrates, however due to the variability and lack of uniformity a suitable alternative is not yet available. The Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht’s recent consultation on the use of peat in the Horticulture Industry, opines that “there is not at present a technically, environmentally suitable alternative material that could replace peat in professional horticultural crop production’. This project will facilitate the continued production of horticultural peat on a much-reduced footprint until such time as that suitable alternative has been developed. This project is required as the continued supply of horticultural peat from licensed and regulated bogs is required to support this industry.

It should be noted that Bord na Móna has been at the forefront of reducing peat in its retail compost products, currently operating substantial green waste composting operations in both its UK and Irish production facilities. Bord na Móna have also introduced the use of coir and green compost into most of its retail ranges in both the Irish and UK markets. Bord na Móna have also launched peat free ranges in both Ireland and the UK and will continue to look at other responsibly sourced substrates to continue to reduce the amount of peat in these ranges, whilst delivering a quality compost product which is required to deliver strong and healthy crops.

If Bord na Móna are granted Substituted Consent for the Blackwater Bog Group, the intention would be to apply for planning permission for the harvesting of peat for the supply of horticulture sod moss and milled peat products until a viable alternative in terms of quality and scale, to horticultural peat for the professional growing market is identified.

Attached herewith in accordance with section 177E of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) (“PDA 2000”) and Part 19 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 (as amended) (“PDR 2001”):

- (a) Substitute Consent **Application form** (Form No. 7) for the Blackwater Bog group;
- (b) the **fee** payable in accordance with section 177M PDA 2000;
- (c) a copy of the relevant **page of the newspaper**, including the date and title of the newspaper, in which notice of the application has been published pursuant to article 223(1)(a) PDR 2001; and
- (d) a copy of the **site notice** erected or fixed on the land or structure pursuant to article 223(1)(b) PDR 2001,
- (e) a copy of the **EIA Portal confirmation** notice;
- (f) 6 copies of **plans and drawings** as per attached drawing issue sheet;
- (g) 6 copies of a **remedial Environmental Impact Assessment** in electronic form searchable by electronic means as far as practicable; and
- (h) **6 copies of a remedial Natura Impact Statement**, in accordance with a direction of the Board under section 177D(7) PDA 2000.

Finally, we wish to bring to your attention the provisions of Section 177J of the Planning Act 2000 as amended and the express right of An Bord Pleanála to issue a draft direction to the applicant to cease all or part of its activity or operations on or at the site of the development the subject of this application. This right should only be exercised in circumstances where An Bord Pleanála forms the opinion that the continuation of all or part of the activity or operations by the applicant is likely to cause significant adverse effects on the environment or adverse effects on the integrity of a European site. We trust that on the basis of the information supplied herewith including detailed evidence provided which is also a matter of public record of our ongoing regulation by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and compliance with the relevant IPC Licence(s) issued by them, and the information contained in the remedial Environmental Impact Assessment Report and in the remedial Natura Impact Statement lodged herewith, that there are no reasonable or valid grounds upon which to form an opinion that the

continuation of the activity or operations is likely to cause any such significant adverse effects to occur.

We look forward to hearing from you with regard to same.

Kind regards

Doreen King

Bord na Móna