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Food & Rural Affairs

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Mr Jonathan Sheppard
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Our ref: FOI2019/12944
10 July 2019

Dear Mr Sheppard,

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Peat usage in horticultural products

Thank you for your request for information of 16th June about Peat usage in horticultural products. We have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

The EIRs apply to requests for environmental information, which is a broad category of information defined in regulation 2 of the EIRs. Public authorities are required to handle requests for environmental information under the EIRs. They give similar access rights to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Your request was as follows:

What steps is the Government taking, if any, to ensure all horticultural products no longer contain peat, and what timescale, if any is being worked to in order for peat based products to be removed from sale?

The Government is committed to phasing out the use of peat in horticulture in England by 2030 (as set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP)). We have taken action to tackle domestic extraction of peat; the National Planning Policy Framework, first published in 2012, ends the granting of new licences for peat extraction. Peat extraction in England will therefore end when the remaining licenses expire. Reducing the use of peat in horticulture not only protects domestic peat bogs, but those elsewhere: around two-thirds of the peat sold in the UK is imported from the rest of Europe. We are therefore focussed on reducing demand for peat in horticulture. We announced in the 25YEP that if the current voluntary approach to phasing out the use of peat in horticulture did not lead to sufficient movement to peat alternatives by 2020 we would take measures to compel it. We will conduct a formal consultation on a range of measures as part of the forthcoming England Peat Strategy.

The Government is also working with the industry to make the transition to peat alternatives and to overcome barriers to their use. For example, we are jointly funding research with the industry on peat replacements in professional horticulture. We have also worked with the industry to develop a Responsible Sourcing Scheme for Growing Media, which allows manufacturers and retailers to make informed choices of growing media



inputs to amateur/retail products, based on environmental and social impacts.

We are working with the industry to put in place a replacement for our previous monitoring of peat use in growing media, which last reported in 2016. It showed that peat use in the amateur sector was down 21% in 2015 compared to 2011, and the professional grower sector was down 26% since 2011.

Information disclosed in response to this EIRs request is releasable to the public. In keeping with the spirit and effect of the EIRs and the government's Transparency Agenda, this letter and the information disclosed to you may be placed on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. No information identifying you will be placed on the GOV.UK website.

We attach Annex A, explaining the copyright that applies to the information being released to you, and Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact the address below.

Yours sincerely

Mark Shotton
Information Rights Team
InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk

Annex A

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Annex B

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 11 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Nick Teall, Head of Information Rights, Area 1E, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (email: InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our [website](#).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for a decision. Please note that generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The ICO can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF