



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Ending the retail sale of peat in horticulture in England and Wales

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Peat in horticulture consultation

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Foreword

This document provides a summary of responses to the government's consultation on proposals to end the sale of peat and peat containing products in England and Wales. We asked for views on:

- Measures to end the use of peat and peat containing products in retail horticulture.
- Views on each of the proposed measures and how they could operate.
- Any evidence on the impacts of ending the use of peat and peat containing products in the professional horticulture and wider sectors.

Policy background

Peatlands are an iconic feature of our landscapes and the UK's largest stores of carbon. They also provide vital ecosystem services including supplying UK drinking water, decreasing flood risk, and providing food and shelter for rare wildlife.

The extraction of peat releases the carbon stored inside as carbon dioxide, contributing to climate change. Peat is extracted in the UK for, primarily, horticultural purposes. By ending the retail sale of peat in horticulture, we will be protecting our vulnerable peatlands and helping to prevent climate change.

Peat has been commercially extracted for growing media since the 1970s. The modern commercial horticulture sector has been developed around the use of peat and its properties for plant growing. Peat for horticulture is extracted from lowland peats, predominantly from lowland raised bogs, which occur in flat, low-lying inland locations or basins. Commercial extraction in England is now only licenced on approximately 627 ha of peatland across 24 sites.

Publication date and period of consultation

The consultation was initially published on Saturday 18 December 2021, it was open for 12 weeks, and closed on Friday 18 March 2022.

Why did we ask for views on this subject?

Through one or more measures in the consultation, the intention was to seek views on ending the use of peat within the Horticultural sector in England and Wales. The policy objective being to reduce to zero the unnecessary use of peat. This policy will contribute to the government's net zero carbon emissions target.

Full list of questions and summary of responses

The consultation was submitted for public viewing and over the course of the 12-week consultation period there were 5619 responses.

Open-ended questions were analysed and split into categories; some longer answers may have been included in multiple categories. The 'n' number used in this document represents the number of respondents that answered each question or part of each question.

Responses by question

Type of User

Which of the following do you identify yourself as?

(Question 1 in the consultation)

This question was designed to separate the users of the survey into categories based on their potential use of peat and other growing media.

Most of the responses identified as an amateur gardener at an 88.6% response rate, with 144 respondents (2%) selecting the option of a professional grower in horticulture.

Respondents selecting 'Other' (n=367, 6%) identified as:

- Professional gardeners and landscape architects (n=59)
- Ecologists (n=18)
- Horticulturalist (n=14)
- Species specific plant breeder (n=4)

Which of the following do you identify yourself as? (n=5618)

Option	Total	Percent
Amateur gardener (i.e. a user of horticulture products who does not sell any products)	4982	88.7%
Environmental body/NGO	71	1.26%
Growing media manufacturer	19	0.34%
Retailer selling bagged growing media	33	0.59%

Professional grower of horticulture	144	2.56%
Peat extractor	2	0.04%
Other	367	6.53%

There was one respondent who did not answer this question.

Location

Which territory/territories do you live in or, if applicable, does your business operate in?

(Question 2 in the consultation)

Respondents to the consultation predominantly lived in England (n=5124, 91%), with the next chosen options being Wales (n=393, 7%), Scotland (n=173, 3%) and Northern Ireland (n=53, 0.94%)

Which territory/territories do you live in or, if applicable, does your business operate in? (n=5618)

Option	Total	Percent
England	5124	91.19%
Northern Ireland	53	0.94%
Scotland	173	3.08%
Wales	393	6.99%
Other	48	0.85%

There was one respondent who did not answer this question.

Approach

Our current approach consists of voluntary targets in England to end the use of peat in horticulture by 2020 for the amateur sector. Should we continue with the voluntary approach?

(Question 3 in the consultation)

This question focused on the voluntary targets set out in 2011 for phasing out the use of peat in horticulture. The majority of respondents did not support a continuation of the voluntary approach with 85% (n=4789) answering 'No' to this question. The remaining responses were split between those answering yes (11%) and those unsure of the best approach to take (3%).

Our current approach consists of voluntary targets in England to end the use of peat in horticulture by 2020 for the amateur sector. Should we continue with the voluntary approach? (n=5593)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	610	10.9%
No	4789	85.6%
Unsure	194	3.45%
Not Answered	26	-

Timescales

If we were to revise the date for ending the use of peat in horticulture for the amateur sector, when should that date be?

(Question 4 in the consultation)

Whilst 57% of respondents thought that 2024 was a suitable date to end the use of peat, taking into account the individual responses to the open ended question 41% of respondents thought that peat use should end by 2024 or sooner.

If we were to revise the date for ending the use of peat in horticulture for the amateur sector, when should that date be? (n=5416)

Option	Total	Percent
2024	3109	57.4%
2025	168	3.10%
2026	69	1.27%
Other	2070	38.2%
Not Answered	203	-

This question also had an open-ended element which had 4522 responses. Of these, the written responses were analysed and categorised as shown in the following table.

Summary of responses to the open-ended question 'If we were to revise the date for ending the use of peat in horticulture for the amateur sector, when should that date be?'

Response	Total number
Peat should be banned as soon as possible	2683
Acknowledgment of environmental reasons behind the proposed changes	1620
There are peat-free alternatives available	997
The voluntary target did not work	599
It should be mandatory	398
There is a shortage of other suitable products	122
The peat-free alternatives are poor	114
Need more time for businesses to stop the sale of peat-based products	18

Do you agree that mandatory reporting would encourage the horticulture industry to reduce their use of peat and peat containing products?

(Question 13 in the consultation)

The majority of respondents (64%) answered 'Yes', mandatory reporting would encourage the horticulture industry to reduce their use of peat. However, 21% (n=1176) of respondents were unsure whether this measure would reduce the use of peat by the horticultural industry.

Do you agree that this measure would encourage the horticulture industry to reduce their use of peat and peat containing products? (n=5580)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	3557	63.7%
No	847	15.2%
Unsure	1176	21.1%
Not Answered	39	-

Do you agree that mandatory reporting would help to raise awareness of issues around the use of horticultural peat?

(Question 14 in the consultation)

When considering whether mandatory reporting would raise awareness about the issues of using peat 79% (n=4388) of respondents thought that this measure would help.

Do you agree that this measure would help to raise awareness of issues around the use of horticultural peat? (n=5582)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	4388	78.6%
No	556	9.96%
Unsure	638	11.4%
Not Answered	37	-

Do you think there should be a retail sales ban for peat and peat containing products in England and Wales?

(Question 15 in the consultation)

There was overall support for a retail sales ban with 96% (n=5439) of respondents answering 'Yes' to this question.

Do you think there should be a retail sales ban for peat and peat containing products in England and Wales? (n=5602)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	5349	95.5%
No	206	3.68%
Unsure	47	0.84%
Not Answered	17	-

Will it be feasible to implement a sales ban for the retail sector by the end of this parliament (2024)?

(Question 16 in the consultation)

The majority of respondents (82%) believed it would be feasible to implement a ban on the retail sale of peat by the end of the parliament (2024). This question had an open-ended

section for those wishing to comment further on their answer, this provides insight into factors motivating respondents in answering this question with the most frequent response being the environmental drivers for a ban (31%).

Will it be feasible to implement a sales ban for the retail sector by the end of this parliament (2024)? (n=5597)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	4592	82.0%
No	275	4.91%
Unsure	730	13.0%
Not Answered	22	-

The open-ended answers (n=2023) were scrutinised and divided into different categories. These were grouped as shown in the table below.

Summary of responses to the open-ended question ‘Will it be feasible to implement a sales ban for the retail sector by the end of this parliament (2024)?’

Response	Total number
Acknowledgment of environmental reasons behind the ban	641
There are peat-free alternatives available	526
The date of 2024 is feasible	507
The retail sector has had long enough to remove peat	283
More time is needed for adjustment	66

Are there industries other than the horticultural industry that will be severely affected by a ban of the retail sale of peat and peat containing products? [If ‘yes’] which industries?

(Question 17 in the consultation)

There were only 308 responses that indicated that industries other than those in the horticultural sector would be severely affected by a retail sales ban on peat and peat

containing products. Using the open-ended question these respondents identified the other impacted sectors as whisky and heating fuel. However, the majority of respondents 64% were 'Unsure' if other industries would be subject to change following a ban.

Are there industries other than the horticultural industry that will be severely affected by a ban of the retail sale of peat and peat containing products? [If 'yes'] which industries? (n=5493)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	308	5.61%
No	1651	30.1%
Unsure	3534	64.3%
Not Answered	126	-

The open-ended section of this question gauged the responses(n=642) of respondents about exemptions to a ban. The two industries acknowledged in the comments were the whisky industry and the need for peat for fuel and heating.

Should there be any exemptions from such a sales ban? (Please select all that apply.)

(Question 18 in the consultation)

Approximately two-thirds (n=3698, 66%) of respondents thought that there should be no exemptions to a ban. Just under a third of respondents (n=1724, 31%) selected that there should be scientific exemptions to a ban, with 217 (4%) indicating that there should be exemptions for growing media for potted plants and shrubs.

Should there be any exemptions from such a ban? (Please select all that apply.) (n=5567)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes, where peat is used as a growing medium for potted plants and shrubs	217	4.44%
Yes, for scientific purposes	1724	30.9%
Yes, other reason	218	3.92%
No, there should not be any exemptions	3698	66.4%
Not Answered	52	-

The open-ended question to follow this one was answered by 2349 respondents and categorised as follows:

- There is no need to use peat – so no exemptions are needed 42%
- There should be exemptions for scientific use 25%
- Exemptions will be used as loopholes 16%
- Exemptions should be made for some industries 10%
- Acknowledgment of environmental reasons behind the ban (climate change, net zero) 4%
- There should be an exemption for the whisky industry 1%
- There needs to be a Defra licence to use peat 1%
- There should be no ban 0.90%
- A ban is dependent on import restrictions 0.08%

For potted plants and shrubs, what should be the maximum quantity of peat that should be exempt from a sales ban?

(Question 19 in the consultation)

Around half of respondents (57%) selected the ‘Less than 1L of peat’ option and around one third of respondents (40%) selected the ‘No maximum’ option. The analysis of the open text comments (n=2540) show that 88% of respondents believe that there should be no peat allowed in potted plants and shrubs. As the number of respondents expressing that no peat should be allowed in potted plants and shrubs is greater than the number selecting either the ‘Less than 1L of peat’ and ‘No maximum’ option [or the two combined depending on the n for the open question] this can be interpreted to mean that the majority of respondents selecting either of these two options are expressing a preference for no exemption to the sales ban for peat used in potted plants and shrubs.

For potted plants and shrubs, what should be the maximum quantity of peat that should be exempt from a sales ban? (n=5034)

Option	Total	Percent
Less than 1L per product	2882	57.3%
Less than 5L per product	68	1.34%
Less than 10L per product	40	0.79%
No maximum	2044	40.6%
Not Answered	585	-

The responses from the open-ended question to follow up were analysed, of these the dominant statements was that no peat content should be allowed. These results are summarised below:

- There should be no peat content allowed 88%

- There are peat-free alternatives available 5%
- Exemptions needed 4%
- This is open to interpretation and could create loopholes 2%
- I don't understand the question 1%
- Acknowledgment of environmental reasons behind the ban (climate change, net zero) 0.47%
- There should be no maximum 0.20%

Do you think that the measure to increase the price of growing media containing peat (i.e. the point of sale charge) will have an impact on consumer behaviour?

(Question 20 in the consultation)

Two thirds of respondents (68%, n=3770) answered 'Yes' that increasing the price of peat-based products would have an impact on consumer behaviour.

Do you think that the measure to increase the price of growing media containing peat will have an impact on consumer behaviour? (n=5585)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	3770	67.5%
No	957	17.1%
Unsure	858	15.4%
Not Answered	34	-

Analysis of the 2716 open-ended responses to this question provides reasons why respondents believed this measure would have an impact, with a small number of respondents expressing the view that price rises would affect those on lower incomes. However, almost a quarter of those providing additional comments (23%) expressed the view that peat sales should just be banned.

Summary of responses to the open-ended question 'Do you think that the measure to increase the price of growing media containing peat will have an impact on consumer behaviour?'

Response	Total number
People go for whatever is cheapest	707
The use of peat should be banned	639
Peat products need to cost more than alternatives	456
Increasing the cost needs to be significant to change behaviour	401
Peat free alternatives need to reduce in price	272
The messaging on peat free media needs to be improved	144
Increasing costs on peat products should be an interim measure	50
The increase in price should be a environmental tax	32
Price changes to products affect less well-off	28
Increasing prices like this is greenwash	8

Would a point of sales charge encourage the sale of more peat-free alternative growing media?

(Question 21 in the consultation)

Of the 5562 respondents to this question 69% (n=3870) thought that increasing the price of peat based growing media would encourage the sale of peat free alternatives.

Would this measure encourage the sale of more peat-free alternative growing media? (n=5562)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	3870	69.6%
No	577	10.4%
Unsure	1115	20.0%

Not Answered	57	-
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Analysis of the open-ended responses (n=1792) to this question suggest that consultees think that price points will affect the choices people make when buying growing media. Of the responses 13% (n=167) still believe that a price increase is unlikely to change anything, and a minority 1% think that this would price lower income gardeners out of the market. The results are summarised below:

Summary of responses to the question ‘Would this measure encourage the sale of more peat-free alternative growing media?’

Response	Total number
People are motivated by price	521
The sale of peat should be banned	332
An increase in price is unlikely to change anything	167
More education about peat use is needed	104
Good marketing and availability of peat free is needed	78
It would promote peat free over peat	45
Peat seen as a superior product	23
Will choose the most environmental choice over peat	22
This would price out lower income gardeners	17
Retailer is making more money off peat	16

What would be an appropriate amount for the point-of-sale charge for a 50L bag of growing media containing peat?

(Question 22 in the consultation)

The responses to this question were categorised by the value that consultees put on a bag of peat, with nearly equal numbers of respondents answering that peat should cost the highest amount given of £3.50(n=2117, 40%), and 40% (n=2110) of consultees selected

'Other' with the predominant explanation for this answer being that peat should cost more than £3.50 for a 50L bag.

What would be an appropriate amount for the point-of-sale charge for a 50L bag of growing media containing peat? (n=5283)

Option	Total	Percent
£1.00 (£0.02 per litre)	311	5.89%
£2.50 (£0.05 per litre)	745	14.1%
£3.50 (£0.07 per litre)	2117	40.1%
Other	2110	39.9%
Not Answered	336	-

The respondents (n=1611) also had the opportunity to elaborate on their answers and these are summarised below:

- The additional charge should be higher 51%
- The sale of peat should be banned 46%
- A point-of-sale charge will not work 3%

Do you have a view on what retailers should do with the levy money raised through the point-of-sale bag charge? (Please select all that apply.)

(Question 23 in the consultation)

This question offered a selection of responses including an open-ended response. Of the 5379 of consultees that answered the question, 86% (n=4644) of them believe that any point-of-sale-charge on any peat-containing product should be donated to peatland restoration projects. The next largest group of respondents (n=1181, 22%) thought that the charge should be donated to fund research and development in the horticulture industry.

Do you have a view on what retailers should do with the levy money raised through the point-of-sale bag charge? (Please select all that apply.) (n=5379)

Option	Total	Percent
Donate funding to peatland restoration projects	4644	86.3%
Donate funding to research & development projects around the horticulture industry	1181	21.9%
Other	666	12.4%
Not Answered	240	-

The open—ended question was answered by 1732 of the respondents and alongside the suggestions to donate the money to peatland or other environmental projects, 31% of respondents used this space to suggest that there should be a ban on the sale of peat containing products.

- There should be a ban on the sale of peat containing products, and no point-of-sale charge 30.2%
- The money should be donated to peatland restoration projects 22.9%
- The money should be donated to help with environmental issues 19.2%
- The money should be used to lower the cost and improve the quality of peat-free media with the money made 13.6%
- There are peat free alternatives available 7.48%
- It should be compulsory to donate 6.57%

Do you believe there should be any exemptions to the point-of-sale charge? [If yes] How should we decide who should be exempt from measure?

(Question 24 in the consultation)

Of those that answered 89% (n=4792) believe that there should be no exemptions to a point-of-sale charge.

Do you believe there should be any exemptions to the point-of-sale charge? [If yes] How should we decide who should be exempt from measure? (n=5410)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	166	3.1%
No	4792	88.6%
Unsure	452	8.4%
Not Answered	209	-

The open-ended section of this question was answered by 794 consultees. Of those that responded, 5% believe that there should be exemptions made for specialist plant collections and for scientific purposes. The summary of the open-ended question is given below:

- The sale of peat should be banned 62%
- Exemptions will be used as loopholes 30%
- There should be exemptions for specialist plant collections and scientific needs 5%
- There will be increased costs for small and medium businesses 2%
- There should be no point-of-sale charge 1%

In addition to the point-of-sale charge, do you think having mandatory labelling of growing media bags containing peat would have an impact on consumer behaviour?

(Question 25 in the consultation)

This question was asked to see if consultees thought that people would make purchasing decisions based on information provided to them as well as economic pressures. Respondents primarily (n= 3943, 72%) answered that 'Yes' labelling would have an impact on consumer behaviour.

In addition to the point-of-sale charge, do you think having mandatory labelling of growing media bags containing peat would have an impact on consumer behaviour? (n=5492)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	3943	71.8%
No	719	13.1%
Unsure	830	15.1%
Not Answered	127	-

Business respondents

Are you [responding on behalf of?] a business?

(Question 5 in the consultation)

This question was designed to separate the consultees into two groups for further analysis, with those answering 'Yes' having to answer more questions regarding their business activities and their potential relationship with the horticulture sector. Most respondents (94.9%, n=5333) answered 'No' to this question with only 3.5% answering on behalf of a business. This is very close to the 3.5% that answered in question 1 as either a growing media manufacturer, retailer selling bagged growing media, a professional grower of horticulture or a peat extractor.

Are you [responding on behalf of?] a business? (If 'No' you will be skipped to question 13.) (n=5530)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	197	3.51%
No	5333	94.91%

Not Answered	89	1.58%
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Are you a business in the horticulture sector?

(Question 6 in the consultation)

Of the 204 respondents that answered this question 85% (n = 174) were answering on behalf of a business in the horticulture sector.

Are you a business in the horticulture sector? (n=204)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	174	3.10%
No	30	0.53%
Not Answered	5415	96.37%

How many employees are there in your organisation?

(Question 7 in the consultation)

The answers to this question give an idea of the size of the businesses responding to the consultation. Of the 170 respondents to this question, 125 (74%) were businesses with 49 or less employees. The next largest group were businesses with 50-249 employees (n=27, 16%), and the smallest group were 18 businesses with more than 250 employees (10%).

How many employees are there in your organisation? (n=170)

Option	Total	Percent
0-49	125	73.5%
50-249	27	15.8%
250+	18	10.5%
Not Answered	5449	-

Do you agree that retailers of horticultural peat should have access to information from their manufacturers about the amount of peat in the growing media bags they sell?

(Question 8 in the consultation)

Of those that responded to this question, an overwhelming number (n=167, 93%) agreed that they should have access to the amount of peat in the growing media bags that they have for sale. Thirteen respondents (7%) selected 'No', 'Unsure' or 'Not applicable'.

Do you agree that retailers of horticultural peat should have access to information from their manufacturers about the amount of peat in the growing media bags they sell? (n=180)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	167	92.8%
No	4	2.2%
Unsure	3	1.6%
Not applicable	6	3.3%
Not Answered	5439	-

Would you be able to assess the amount of peat in the different sizes of growing media that you sell? [If yes] How will you assess this?

(Question 9 in the consultation)

There were 172 respondents to this question, and those that answered yes (n=62, 36%) were encouraged to provide a written response for how they would assess this.

Would you be able to assess the amount of peat in the different sizes of growing media that you sell? [If yes] How will you assess this? (n=172)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	62	36.0%
No	31	18.0%
Unsure	19	11.1%
Not applicable	60	34.9%
Not Answered	5447	-

A second part of the question was '**Please give your reasons and upload any supporting evidence (optional).**' There were 90 responses to this part of the question. These responses were analysed and recorded as falling into one or more of five categories which were:

- We can check content manually 36 %
- We are peat free already 35%
- We don't sell growing media 20%
- The peat content should be labelled clearly 13%
- We can't check content manually 7%

Should small and medium enterprises be given more time to adopt this measure of assessing the amount of peat? [If yes] How much more time should we give small and medium enterprises to adopt this measure?

(Question 10 in the consultation)

From the respondents to this question, the opinion was categorised on whether SMEs should have more time to adopt any changes with 79 (44%) selecting 'Yes' and 84 (47%) selecting 'No'.

When asked a further question of how much time they should be given the answer was as follows based on 100 responses:

- 3+ years 52%
- Unsure 17%
- 2 years 14%
- 1 year 12%
- 6 months 5%

Should small and medium enterprises be given more time to adopt this measure? [If yes] How much more time should we give small and medium enterprises to adopt this measure? (n=180)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	79	43.8%
No	84	46.7%
Unsure	17	9.4%
Not Answered	5439	-

How feasible will it be for retailers of products that contain peat, for example potted plants, to obtain accurate information on how much peat is used within the potted plants?

(Question 11 in the consultation)

The feasibility of retailers to obtain accurate information on the peat content of products such as potted plants had a response with 38% (n=65) of respondents indicating that it was highly feasible, and 42% (n=70) answering that it was somewhat feasible.

How feasible will it be for retailers of products that contain peat, for example potted plants, to obtain accurate information on how much peat is used within the potted plants? (n=168)

Option	Total	Percent
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Highly feasible	65	38.7%
Somewhat feasible	70	41.6%
Not at all feasible	33	19.6%
Not Answered	5451	-

The 66 responses to the open-ended part of this question on the feasibility for retailers were analysed and the grouped responses are given below,

- Manufacturers could easily provide the information 27%
- They already state the peat content 24%
- Our products come from abroad 21%
- It should just be zero peat 12%
- People would lie about the peat content, and it would be hard to enforce 9%
- They are already peat free 6%

Should some retailers be exempt from mandatory reporting if they are selling less than a particular amount of peat per year? [If answered 'yes'] What amount should the threshold be in m³?

(Question 12 in the consultation)

Respondents to this question most often thought that retailers should not be exempt from reporting the amount of peat they sell with 114 (64%) selecting 'No'.

Should some retailers be exempt from reporting if they are selling less than a particular amount of peat per year? [If answered 'yes'] What amount should the threshold be in m³? (n=177)

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	38	21.5%
No	114	64.4%
Unsure	25	14.1%
Not Answered	5442	-

Other responses from eNGOs and Commercial users of peat

There were a number of coordinated responses to the consultation from industry bodies and from Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (eNGOs). Where practicable

these have been included into the responses detailed above. A number of responses that were not suitable for analysis in the responses above are being used to inform future decision making and to guide the policy direction.

Conclusion and Next Steps

We welcome the responses received to this consultation. The consultation has demonstrated that there is strong public support for introducing a ban on the sale of peat and peat containing products when compared to the other options and as such a ban on the sale of peat and peat containing products by the end of this parliament remains the preferred measure.

As a next step we will take forward discussions with the Horticulture Sector to understand better the technical barriers to replacing peat based growing media with suitable alternatives within the professional sector and to understand how exemptions from the proposed preferred measure can be implemented in respect of the professional horticulture sector.

This response details the analysis of the consultation responses. As this is a devolved matter respective policy positions will be published by Defra in respect of the policy position for England, and by the Welsh Government in respect of Wales.