

Large Scale Illegal Peat Extraction

This report does not refer to the extraction of peat as fuel for domestic use.



The illegal large scale extraction of peat is widespread in Ireland. The sector does not operate within planning or environmental laws.

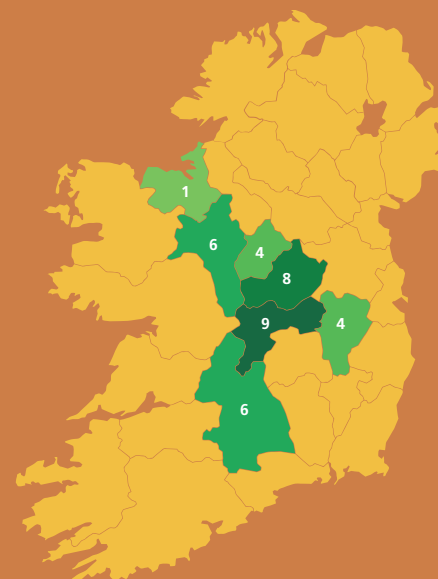


The EPA is investigating 38 large scale operations over seven counties where illegal peat extraction is taking place.



Seven Local Authorities must take appropriate enforcement action against operators of illegal large scale peat extraction.

Location of illegal large scale peat extraction sites subject to EPA investigations



Sligo	1
Roscommon	6
Longford	4
Westmeath	8
Kildare	4
Offaly	9
Tipperary	6

Regulation of large scale extraction of peat

Large scale peat extraction can only take place if it is granted planning permission. In some cases, an EPA licence is also required. A planning permission and/or EPA licence will set out conditions which control how the operation takes place. It also controls how the peatlands are rehabilitated and remediated afterwards. This ensures the extraction can take place in an environmentally safe manner.

More than
50
hectares

EPA licence
Planning permission
Environmental Impact Assessment
Appropriate Assessment

30
to
50
hectares

Planning permission
Environmental Impact Assessment
Appropriate Assessment

Less than
30
hectares*

Planning permission
Environmental Impact Assessment
Appropriate Assessment

* Planning permission is required for the extraction of peat from an area exceeding 30 hectares or from an area less than this where it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

An EPA licence is an Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) Licence. Anyone extracting peat in the course of business in an area exceeding 50 hectares requires an IPC licence from the EPA.

Planning permission is a consent from the local authority or An Bord Pleanála to proceed with development. It is required for anyone extracting peat in an area exceeding 30 hectares or in an area less than this where it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the process of examining the anticipated environmental effects of a proposed project. It is required for anyone extracting peat in an area exceeding 30 hectares or in an area less than this where it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. EIA is carried out as part of the licensing and planning process.

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) is the process of determining whether peat extraction could have a significant effect on protected sites such as Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. AA screening, to determine whether a project requires AA, must be carried out on plans and projects. AA is required if peat extraction could have a significant effect on protected areas. AA is carried out as part of the licensing and planning process.

Illegal Large Scale Peat Extraction

Types of Illegal Large Scale Peat Extraction



Milled Peat

Milling involves the removal of the top few centimetres of the peatland. Several layers can be removed throughout the same season. This milled peat is used predominantly as a peat compost in horticulture.

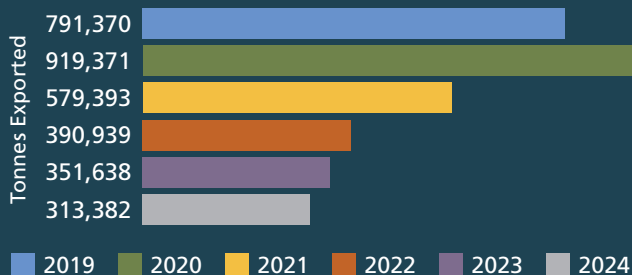
Large Sod Peat

This process involves excavating large sods/blocks of peat from the peatland and allowing them to dry. These large sods are used in horticulture.

Wet Peat Extraction

The peatland is partially drained, the peat is “quarried” and excavated in its “wet” state. This material is used in the mushroom growing industry.

Peat Export Figures



Main Uses for Extracted Peat



Horticulture



Mushroom Growing



Animal Bedding
(Agriculture)

The Regulated Extraction of Peat

Up until 2020, Bord na Móna lawfully operated 9 different peatland complexes across 11 counties. All of these bogs were operated in accordance with Integrated Pollution Control Licences issued by the EPA. The extraction of peat at these peatlands has now ceased and large scale remediation programmes are underway in accordance with EPA licence requirements. Appropriate regulation of this sector provides for the responsible aftercare and maintenance of previously worked peatlands.

The Peatlands Climate Action Scheme (PCAS) will cover rehabilitation plans for **82** peatlands.

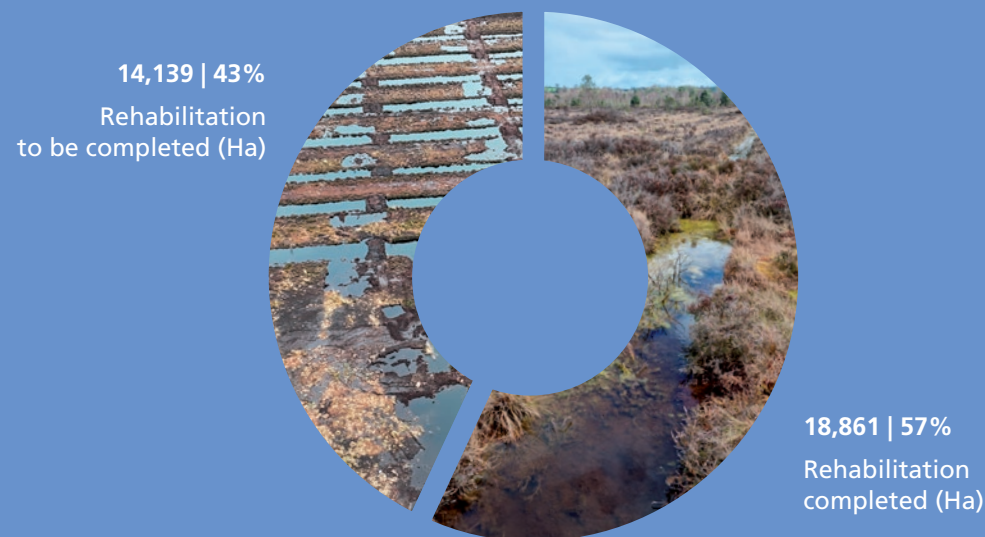
Bord na Móna owns and manages over **80,000** ha of peatlands.

These peatlands cover an area of **33,000** hectares.

Restoration is usually undertaken at peatlands that have been minimally damaged by peat extraction activity. If the peatland still contains deep beds of peat, careful and respectful management may allow it a return to a fully functioning peatland.

Rehabilitation is for cutaway and severely damaged peatlands. The immediate objective is to stop any pollution running off the peatlands. Rewetting and other works such as blocking drains and removing any water pumps, can with time, help to retain carbon in the ground and allow nature to take its course. Some rehabilitated peatlands may be used for commercial activities, predominantly renewable energy projects.

Status of Peatlands Climate Action Rehabilitation Plans



Enforcement

Enforcement Action by the EPA

The EPA has two primary functions with regard to illegal large scale extraction of peat:

The regulation of large scale peat extraction in an area exceeding
50
hectares.



The supervision of local authorities' regarding their roles to protect the environment under Section 63 of the EPA Act.

The EPA has deployed significant resources to control the unregulated large scale peat sector and will continue to target its enforcement interventions at these operations.

Legal actions in the District and High Courts have successfully halted illegal peat extraction on several sites.



EPA carried out

170 enforcement inspections

at illegal large scale peat extraction sites between 2021-2024.



Local authorities must take enforcement action with regard to illegal large scale peat extraction

Under Section 63 of the EPA Act, the EPA is directing local authorities take appropriate regulatory actions against illegal commercial peat extraction. This section allows for a cascading system of escalating enforcement actions if local authorities fail to meet their statutory environmental duties.

To date, the EPA has issued:

- 38 Section 63(1) notices to 7 local authorities, requiring county-wide and site-specific enforcement plans for large-scale peat extraction.
- 7 proposed directions under Section 63(5) requiring the 7 Local Authorities to escalate enforcement actions.

The EPA will continue using its powers to ensure all 7 local authorities fully implement and enforce environmental requirements pertaining to large scale peat extraction.