

Reference Number: DAERA/26-495

Information on a Joint Ministerial Statement to legislate to ban the sale of peat and minutes of meetings of the Four Nations Horticultural Peat Group.



Department of

**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Depairtment o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

EMFG
Natural Environment Policy Division

██████████
██████████ [@btinternet.com](mailto:██████████@btinternet.com)

Natural Environment Policy Division
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Belfast
BT3 9ED

Telephone: 028 9442 6941

E-mail: DAERA-Peatlands@daera-ni.gov.uk

07 August 2026

Dear ██████████

Environmental Information Regulation 2004

I refer to your request for information dated 23 July 2026 that sought the following information:

Information on a Joint Ministerial Statement to legislate to ban the sale of peat and minutes of meetings of the Four Nations Horticultural Peat Group.

I can advise that relevant Ministers in DEFRA, Scottish Government and Welsh Government and Minister Muir agreed via correspondence, that they would collaborate to bring forward legislation to end the sale of peat and that no Joint Ministerial Statement was issued.

On 21st April 2026, Baroness Hayman of Ullock (in response to a question from Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick) confirmed in a written statement in the House of

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Lords that DEFRA Ministers had agreed to representations from Devolved Governments to work collaboratively and adopt a UK-wide approach to take forward legislation to ban the use of peat in horticulture, (<https://gna.files.parliament.uk/qnadailyreports/Written-Questions-Answers-Statements-Daily-Report-Lords-2026-04-21.pdf>).

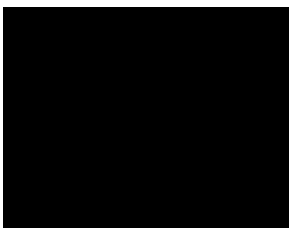
The Department holds the information you requested regarding minutes of meetings of the Four Nations Horticultural Peat Group. However DAERA has decided not to disclose this information as it considers Regulation 12 (4) (d) of the Environmental Information Regulation 2004 to be engaged as your request relates to material which is still in the course of completion, to unfinished documents or to incomplete data. In these instances, the Department is legislatively required to consider the public interest in disclosure. An associated Public Interest Test has been conducted and is attached for your information at **Annex A**.

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,



**Natural Environment Policy Division
DAERA**

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Annex A

Public Interest Test – EIR

Reference Number – DAERA/26-495

Requested Information

Information on a Joint Ministerial Statement to legislate to ban the sale of peat and minutes of meetings of the Four Nations Horticultural Peat Group

Exception under consideration

Regulation 12(4)(d) provides an exception where the request relates to material which is still in the course of completion, unfinished documents or incomplete data. In this case, the relevant material relates to continuing policy development and Four Nations engagement on peat policy.

Public interest factors favouring disclosure:

There is a significant public interest in transparency regarding environmental matters, particularly where proposed measures may affect horticulture, peatland protection, biodiversity, climate change objectives and commercial interests.

- Promotes openness and accountability in environmental decision-making.
- Enhances public understanding of the development of peat reduction and peat-free policies.
- Supports informed public debate on the environmental and economic implications of any proposed ban on the sale of peat.
- Demonstrates how governments within the UK are collaborating on matters of shared environmental concern.

Public interest factors favouring maintenance of the exception:

- Reveals information that remains unfinished and subject to further consideration, amendment and agreement.
- Risks misleading the public by disclosing positions that do not represent settled government policy.
- Undermines the space required for officials and Ministers across the four administrations to engage in full, frank and candid discussions during policy development.
- Potentially prejudices effective policy formulation by inhibiting future exchanges between administrations on sensitive environmental matters.
- Disrupts the orderly development of proposals before final decisions have been reached and formally communicated.

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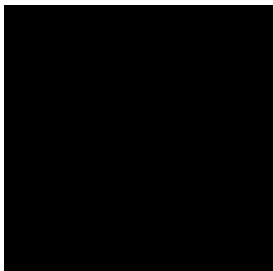
Conclusion

Having carefully considered the competing public interest factors, DAERA has concluded that, on balance, the public interest in maintaining the exception under Regulation 12(4)(d) outweighs the public interest in disclosure at this time.

DAERA recognises the public interest in transparency and accountability in relation to environmental policy. However, greater weight is attached to protecting the integrity of the ongoing policy-making process and ensuring that Ministers and officials are able to consider options and develop policy in a safe space before matters are finalised.

The information requested forms part of continuing discussions and policy development. Disclosure at this stage could undermine that process, create a risk of public misunderstanding, and affect the ability of the four administrations to reach a collective and considered position.

Accordingly, the information is withheld under Regulation 12(4)(d) of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.



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