



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Exploring the need for a European-wide collaboration to accelerate action for peatlands restoration, conservation, and sustainable management

European Peatlands Initiative

Exploratory Study Report September 2022

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	2
Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction	5
<i>What are peatlands?</i>	5
<i>Peatlands in policy</i>	6
<i>Transnational collaboration for peatlands</i>	6
<i>Dialogues towards a European Peatlands Initiative</i>	6
<i>The challenge: How can a government-supported network bring added value to peatlands in Europe?</i>	8
2. Exploratory Study Methodology	10
<i>Participants</i>	10
<i>Interviews & Survey</i>	10
<i>Workshops</i>	11
<i>Online Information Session</i>	11
<i>Timeline</i>	12
3. Results - An outlook for a European Peatlands Initiative	13
(i) Challenges for peatland restoration	13
<i>Knowledge, research & science</i>	14
<i>Funding & financing</i>	14
<i>Technical/practical</i>	14
<i>Policy</i>	14
(ii) Emerging needs for a European Peatlands Initiative	15
a. Government-backed support	15
b. Increased harmonisation	16
c. A unified & coherent voice for peatlands	16
d. More viable solutions for farmers & landowners at scale	17
e. A pan-European, integrative approach with multi stakeholder collaborations	18
(iii) High priority needs for a European Peatlands Initiative	19
(iv) Benefits of a European Peatlands Initiative	19
(v) Support, roles, and contributions for a European Peatlands Initiative	20
(vi) Risks of developing a European Peatlands Initiative	22
(vii) Existing Networks	24
4. Conclusion and next steps	25
Recommendations	25

Appendix 27

Exploratory Study Methodology: Further Details 27

List of existing networks working with peatlands 28

Survey Questions 31

Abbreviations

COP	Conference of the Parties
EPI	European Peatlands Initiative
GPI	Global Peatlands Initiative
LULUCF	Land-Use Change and Forestry
NPWS	National Park and Wildlife Service
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly

Executive Summary

Peatlands, a type of wetland, are some of the most valuable ecosystems in Europe for biodiversity, water quality, flood protection and carbon storage. Rewetting peatlands is a key step to reducing CO₂ emissions and mitigating climate change. However, despite being climate change champions, these benefits are not being fully realised.

It is crucial that we ensure peatlands are conserved, restored, and sustainably managed now, and for our future. To reverse the loss of peatlands across Europe, all stakeholders must come together and accelerate positive actions for peatlands.

At the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) there was a call-to-action to open a dialogue on how pan-European collaboration on peatlands between all stakeholders could be maximised through a possible European Peatlands Initiative (EPI). To advance discussions, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Irish Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine drove an exploratory study to understand how a pan-European network could make a positive difference for peatlands. The study was undertaken by Bax & Company and supported by the United Nations Environment Programme's Global Peatlands Initiative.

The exploratory study included interviews and surveys with over 150 peatlands experts, practitioners, and enthusiasts from over 15 countries across Europe. Furthermore, online and in-person workshops were held to deep dive into the key needs which could be addressed by an EPI and identify opportunities to build on previous and existing initiatives. This report sets out the outcomes of this exploratory study.

Key areas that could benefit from European collaboration on peatlands were identified in the study, and are split into the following five categories:

- **A government-supported network** to grow political awareness, identify and help unlock large-scale funding, and drive knowledge exchange on all levels.
- **Increased harmonisation** to outline a common vision for the sustainable management of peatlands, create comparable scientific approaches, and support coordinated actions across organisations.
- **A unified and coherent voice** for peatlands that is backed by science and governments, raises the profile of peatlands, and forms a louder joint voice championing peatlands issues.



- **More viable solutions** for farmers and landowners at a scale that focus on long-term economic incentives, accelerate the peatlands economy, and support large-scale pilot sites.
- **A pan-European, integrative approach** to peatlands with multi-stakeholder collaborations that fosters open and transparent dialogue, is cross-sectoral and on all stakeholder levels, and builds upon existing initiatives.

The purpose of this report is to document the findings of the Exploratory Study of the EPI for peatlands experts, researchers, policy advisors, practitioners, farmers, and community representatives, among others.

The next step towards creating an EPI will be the Preparatory Phase which will build the initial vision for an EPI. This should be co-developed with all stakeholders and partners.



Clara Boardwalk, Co. Offaly, Ireland



1. Introduction

What are peatlands?

Peatlands – also known as mires, fens and bogs - are a type of wetland found in almost every country on earth. Their year-round waterlogged condition means that dead plant material cannot fully decompose. Instead, it builds up to form peat. The peat accumulates over millennia, becoming, in places, several metres thick. Peatland refers to both this layer of undecomposed plant material and the wetland habitat that grows on its surface which, with the correct wet conditions, will eventually die and turn into the peat soil itself.

Peatlands span all continents, and although all waterlogged, can be incredibly varied. In Europe alone, peatland ecosystems range from Ireland and Scotland's open, treeless blanket mires to Northern Europe's raised bogs, Northern Scandinavia's string-flark mires, and the Southern European fens. With such variation, a sensitive approach to peatland management and restoration is crucial, making pan-European collaboration a necessity.



Latvian site by Mara Pakalne & Vallei Zwarte Beek by Wim Dirck

Despite only covering 3% of land surface globally, it is estimated that peatlands contain at least 550 gigatons of carbon - more than twice the amount stored in all forests, and equivalent to 75% of all carbon in the atmosphere. This makes peatlands the world's largest land-based carbon store, despite their relatively small surface coverage. Beyond their vital role in carbon storage, peatlands also provide crucial ecosystem services. In their natural wet state, they prevent flooding and drought, help ensure clean drinking water, and reduce the risk of fire. Peatlands are also incredibly important for biodiversity, home to rare birds, throngs of insects, and unusual plants. These factors all contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Peatlands are also culturally important for their human inhabitants. As well as providing a buffer against flooding, peatlands are recreation areas and a place to engage with nature. Thanks to their long history and preservative nature, peatlands also have an important archive function, with the capacity to preserve scientific and community history spanning thousands of years. Once the peat is removed, this archive is lost forever.

Peatlands in policy

Peatlands and their management have a huge variety of interconnections in many different sectors. Applicable EU policy areas include the Habitat Directive and Natura 2000, Biodiversity Strategy 2030, LULUCF Regulations, 2030 Climate and Energy Framework, Common Agricultural Policy, Farm to Fork Strategy, Water Framework Directive, Soil Thematic Strategy, Just Transition, Renewable Energy Directive, and the EU Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive.

At the 2019 United Nations Environment Assembly, all countries committed to working together toward the Conservation and Sustainable Management of peatlands articulated in the UNEA Resolution 4/16. As we enter the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, it is crucial that we ensure peatlands are conserved, restored, and sustainably managed.

Transnational collaboration for peatlands

Bringing stakeholders together can have a significantly positive impact for peatlands. The Global Peatlands Initiative, the ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative, the German “MoorDialog” and the Nordic Council of Ministers have already demonstrated how collaboration can raise awareness and catalyse action. While some European countries have begun addressing peatlands directly within their national strategies (e.g., the Irish National Peatlands Strategy, the England Peat Action Plan and the German National Peatland Protection Strategy), a dedicated network between countries has the potential to create strong synergies, accelerate action and boost impact at scale through a joined up international collaborative effort. With Green New Deal policies (including the revised LULUCF regulation in Fit for 55-package and Carbon farming Initiative) presenting a huge opportunity to advance commitments and action on peatlands across Europe, the time is right for Europe’s stakeholders to come together and form a long-called collaboration on peatlands.

Dialogues towards a European Peatlands Initiative

The Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI) is an international partnership launched in 2016 by leading experts and institutions at the UNFCCC COP22 in Morocco. The mission of the

Initiative is to protect peatlands as the world's largest terrestrial organic carbon stock and to prevent it from being emitted into the atmosphere.

Following the success of the GPI, interest to establish a regional-level European Peatlands Initiative originated from discussions with partners at the Eurosite annual meeting in 2018. Further discussions were convened by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) and BMUV (formerly BMU) when they hosted a European peatlands policy exchange workshop in 2019. The GPI, experts and stakeholders from more than 12 EU Member States and other European countries discussed how to integrate peatlands conservation at a European level, summarised in a BfN Policy Brief.



Dianna Kopansky, head of the GPI with Minister Malcolm Noonan (left), Philip Blackwell from the Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Julie Van Offelen from the GPI and Jelke Brandenhof from Eurosite (right) at the EPI workshop in Dublin in April 2022. (Photo by Marc Scharping/NABU).

In November 2021, the Irish Government took the discussions forward by organising an event on “Dialogues towards a European Peatlands Initiative” at the Global Peatlands Pavilion at the UNFCCC COP26.



The event speakers (left), and Minister Malcolm Noonan giving an opening address (right) at the Peatlands Pavilion at COP26 in Glasgow

The event brought together four European ministers, supported by nine leading peatlands experts and interested farmers, to discuss the importance of protecting and restoring peatlands and the value of European collaboration.

The sharing of ideas, perspectives, and experiences in establishing a set of common challenges, shared visions, and practical solutions showed the significant interest from various stakeholders in an EPI. The expressed support for the EPI by the UNEP-led Global Peatlands Initiative, strengthened ambitions for its further development.

The challenge: How can a government-supported network bring added value to peatlands in Europe?

Following the event at COP26 and the great interest shown in an EPI, Ireland, the hosts of the event, with the support of Bax & Company, drove this exploratory study in order to understand how a government-supported network could have a positive impact on European peatlands. This study identified the potential benefits that could accrue because of cross-country collaboration on peatlands management at all levels.



The goals of the European Peatlands Initiative's exploratory study were:

- To identify if there is a need for a pan-European collaboration that can bring added value to peatlands in Europe
- To engage with multiple Irish and international stakeholder groups, including governments, NGOs, research, and the private sector, to gather their input into what an EPI could deliver
- To gather vital baseline data to progress the towards the next step, the Preparatory Phase, of the development of an EPI



2. Exploratory Study Methodology

The exploratory study consisted of 45 semi-structured interviews, a qualitative survey, and 2 workshops.



Desk research
Needs identification
Existing initiatives,
strategies & networks



Interviews & survey
45 interviews & 43 survey
responses from peatlands
experts in >15 countries



Workshops
Consensus on findings
during in-person and online
sessions

Participants



The exploratory study was led by the NPWS of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and conducted by Bax & Company. The study targeted countries with over 2% peatland coverage of their total land surface area. The key participants came from non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, research institutions, universities, and semi-state agencies. Many of the participants form partnerships through EU-funded projects such as INTERREG, Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, and the LIFE programme.

The map shows the countries involved in the exploratory study interviews. This includes Finland, Estonia, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Netherlands, UK, and Denmark. France, Belgium, and Austria.

Interviews & Survey

To gain a better insight into the potential challenges and opportunities for an EPI, semi-structured interviews with 45 peatlands experts were conducted, including 27 international and 18 Irish interviewees from March to April 2022. The interviews and survey also aimed to draw lessons from previous and existing initiatives, as well as exploring potential partnerships.



Workshops

Workshops were carried out to deep dive into the key needs which could be addressed by an EPI, to present the findings of the exploratory interviews and survey and to draw on the expertise of a diverse group of European peatlands scientists and experts from NGOs, network organisations and research institutions. There were two workshops carried out during the exploratory study; one in-person in Dublin and one online.



EPI workshop in the Custom House Dublin, Ireland (Photo by Marc Scharping/NABU)

Online Information Session

On the 26th of May 2022, a one-hour online session was hosted to bring together the diverse stakeholders who had participated to date in this exploratory stage of the process.

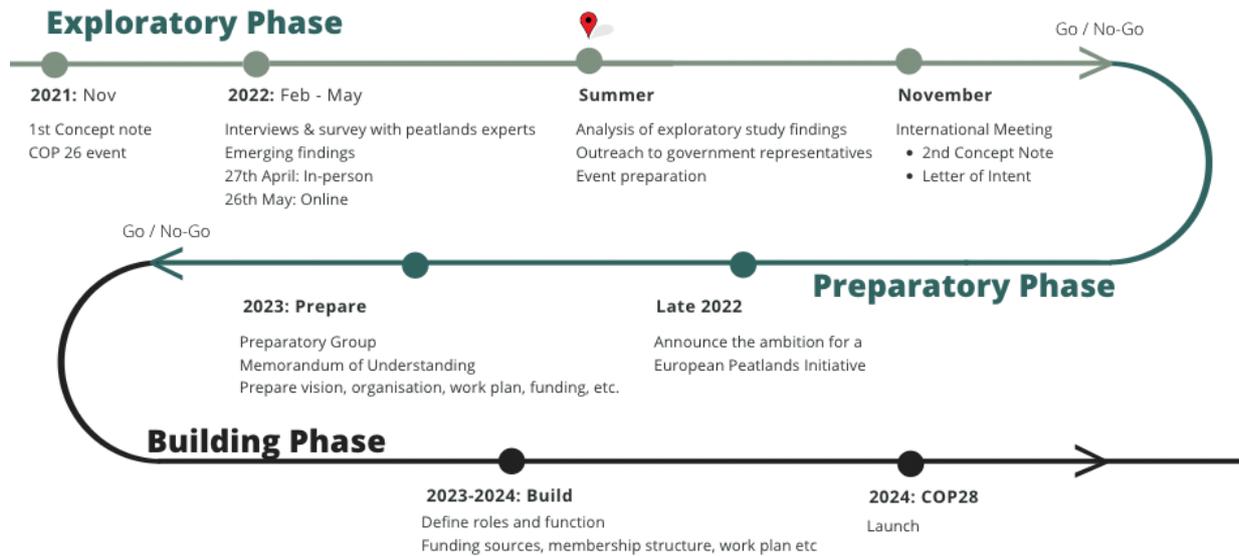
The session brought together over 30 peatlands experts, scientists, and practitioners from European-wide research institutions, NGOs, and government agencies in order to update them on the emerging findings from the EPI exploratory study interviews, survey, and workshop. Dianna Kopansky from the Global Peatlands Initiative gave a motivating speech, stating their role, support, and vision of the EPI.

Attendees were asked to provide questions throughout a Q&A session, which were answered during the session and in a follow-up document. The session was recorded, and the video is available upon request.



Timeline

It is recommended to develop the initiative within distinct phases to effectively create an impactful collaboration with all stakeholders. This can be envisaged as 3 parts (i) exploratory, (ii) preparatory, and (iii) development.



Recommended phases for the development of the EPI

The exploratory phase was initiated after COP26 in November 2022 and will continue until the next high-level event where a concept note, and Letter of Intent will be agreed upon in late 2022.



Timeline for the exploratory phase of the EPI



3. Results - An outlook for a European Peatlands Initiative

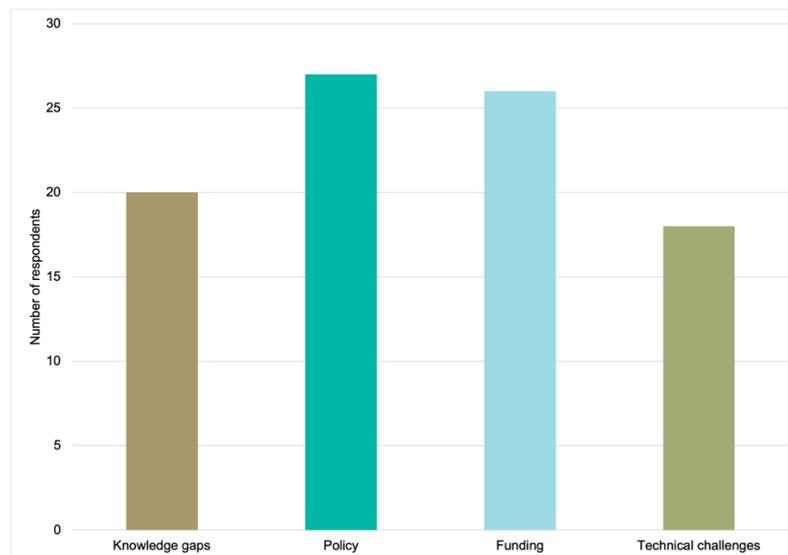
The results of the EPI exploratory study (interviews, survey, workshops) can be organised as follows:

- (i) Challenges for peatland restoration
- (ii) Emerging needs for an EPI
- (iii) High priority needs for an EPI
- (iv) Benefits for peatlands
- (v) Support, roles, and contributions
- (vi) Risks of developing an EPI
- (vii) Existing networks

(i) Challenges for peatland restoration

The interview and survey revealed key challenges across a broad range of issues in peatlands restoration. The main challenges identified fell under the topics of knowledge, funding, and financing, technical and practical and policy. Participants could choose multiple categories.

What are the main challenges you or your organisation face in relation to peatlands management and restoration?



Policy was identified as the main challenge, followed by funding, knowledge gaps and technical challenges. These challenges are complex and multifaceted. The key responses related to each category are summarised below.

Knowledge, research & science

- Lack of robust digital databases
- Lack of a common knowledge exchange platform
- Underdeveloped GHG monitoring and measuring tools
- Lack of awareness of peatlands' benefits across society
- Lack of intergenerational knowledge transfer
- Lack of comprehensive understanding of peatlands function, vegetation, soils
- Shortage of peatlands experts with specific knowledge about restoration techniques or research

Funding & financing

- Lack of long-term financial models or funding strategies (e.g., carbon credits, PES, results-based payments, subsidies)
- Lack of large, scalable, and proven success cases
- Underdeveloped supply chains for paludiculture crops
- Lack of resources getting to the ground or community level (e.g., staffing, volunteers, practical measures)
- Lack of long-term supply agreements for alternative products

Technical/practical

- Insufficient practical knowledge of restoration practices and techniques
- Continued issuing and maintenance of active licences for peat cutting and peat export
- Land-use competition with "traditional" agricultural farmers
- Lack of peat alternatives in horticulture (e.g., mushroom substrates)
- Shortage of qualified contractors for restoration works
- Lack of private industry involvement to encourage economic sustainability
- The need for management of the effects of peatlands on the water catchment area and neighbouring farms
- Biosecurity complications for the supply of restoration materials (e.g, Sphagnum moss)

Policy

- The need for strong political support and action across countries
- Lack of harmonisation across government or regional policies and issues with competing needs of energy and nature conservation
- Lack of effective data on peatlands to inform accurate and sufficient legislation
- Large agricultural monopolies discourage farmers from changing practices
- Shortfall of focal regulations and laws for peatlands protection
- Peatlands management requires an integrative approach (biodiversity, water, climate, energy)



(ii) Emerging needs for a European Peatlands Initiative

The exploratory study resulted five emerging needs regarding peatlands management in Europe, based on the challenges for peatlands. These needs describe the ways in which stronger collaboration could help overcome policy and action barriers for peatlands restoration, protection, and management.

A. Government-backed support



Grow political advocates

Government-backed collaboration to bring larger-scale action, overcome political blockages, and mainstream peatlands management across sectors, through a stronger influence on all international and national strategies.

Unlock large-scale funding

Mobilise large-scale government funding for restoration and to drive ongoing funding for research.

Drive exchange on all levels

Advisors at governmental level sharing best practices for national strategies and government frameworks for carbon markets.

Bridging the gap between scientists and policymakers to increase science-based decision-making.



B. Increased harmonisation



Outline a common vision

A clear and consistent unified vision for peatlands across Europe supported, where possible, by the alignment of national and regional policies, regulations, and legislation.

Create comparable approaches

Support for common, accessible, and usable standards for conservation, restoration, and sustainable management at scale because there is a lack of easily available criteria, guidance and a method for monitoring and reporting GHG emissions.

Support coordinated actions

Increased coordination of activities in projects, research, and initiatives to maximise efforts, avoid duplication of work and direct resources to have maximum impact at ground level.

C. A unified & coherent voice for peatlands

A trusted voice

A trusted, scientific, and government-backed voice for peatlands to find a credible and robust way to bring in public and private capital resources.

Household awareness

Raise the profile of peatlands as climate change champions and ensure farmers, landowners and communities are aware of the value and potential peatlands hold. This includes a need to build a positive vision of what the role of land custodians of re-wetted land across Europe should be.

A louder joint voice

A need for a strong advocate for peatlands amongst policymakers and leaders. There is a need to put peatlands on the table alongside climate discussions and ensure they are not overlooked.



D. More viable solutions for farmers & landowners at scale



*Vegetation growth on a floating island in Poland, Slowinski National Park.
Photographer: Klub Przyrodników*

Long-term economic incentives

Build profitable and secure financial incentives for farmers and landowners to rewet, maintain and restore peatlands, e.g., carbon credit schemes, Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), and results-based payment schemes.

Accelerate peatlands economy

Create alternative peatlands economies and funnel commercial finance into a set of activities (agriculture, communities, ecotourism, water supply, etc.) that support rewetting peatlands and biodiversity e.g., an integrated paludiculture value chain.

Large-scale demonstrations

Increased funding and resources to implement large-scale demonstrations of restoration and paludiculture cases to build proven success case studies and show the economic viability of production.



E. A pan-European, integrative approach with multi stakeholder collaborations

Open & transparent dialogue

Peatlands need an open collaboration between all countries and peatland stakeholders across Europe in order to achieve the best outcome for peatlands.

Cross-sectoral & on all levels

Peatlands require a multifaceted approach across governments, regions, and industries. This requires the right players working together with representation from all stakeholder groups. There is a need to strengthen the nexus between climate, biodiversity, water, and bioeconomy.

Built on existing initiatives

An EPI could leverage already developed networks and expertise to provide more direct support to European countries. Effective collaboration should avoid duplication of efforts but rather add another meaningful layer to bring players and generations together.



The Carbon Connects project partners coming together to explore innovative solutions for peatlands across Europe. Kamp, Germany.



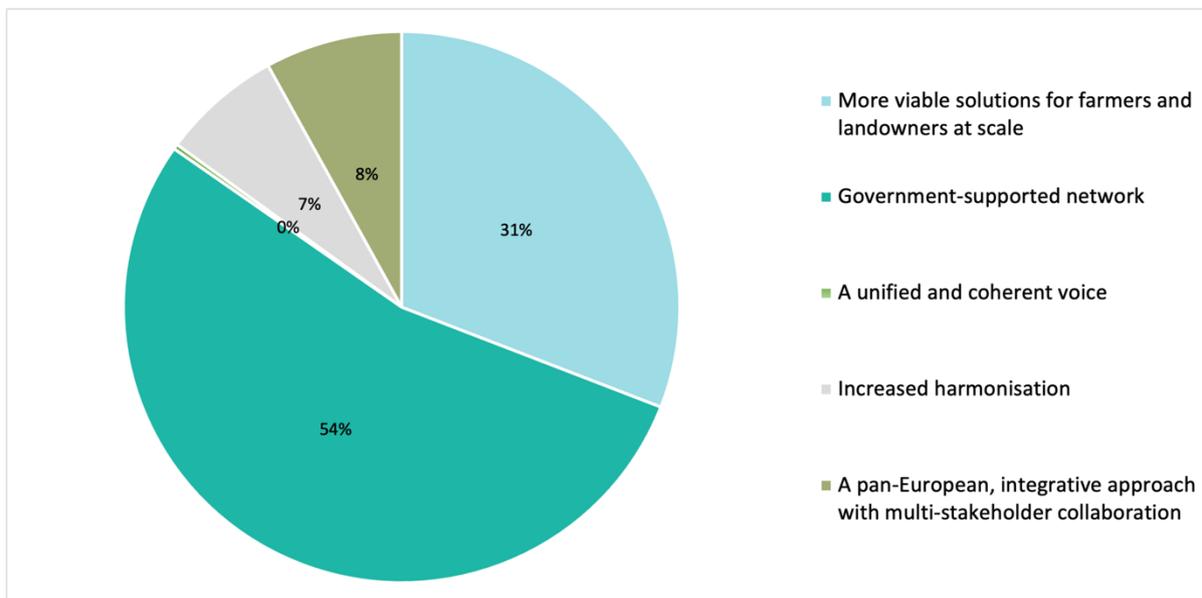
(iii) High priority needs for a European Peatlands Initiative

During the in-person workshop, participants were asked to prioritise and rank the five main needs identified throughout the exploratory study set out below and then to express any additional needs they or their organisation have identified.

The graph below shows that over 50% of the participants agreed that government-support is the highest priority. 31% saw more viable solutions for farmers and landowners at scale as the highest need and below 8% ranked increased harmonisation or a pan-European integrative approach with multi-stakeholder collaboration as the highest priority.

Attendees stated that all the needs identified are connected. For example, it was felt that a unified and coherent voice for peatlands (e.g., household awareness) is important because it increases awareness which would lead to government-backed support.

Needs with the highest priority agreed by each of the five different groups at the workshop

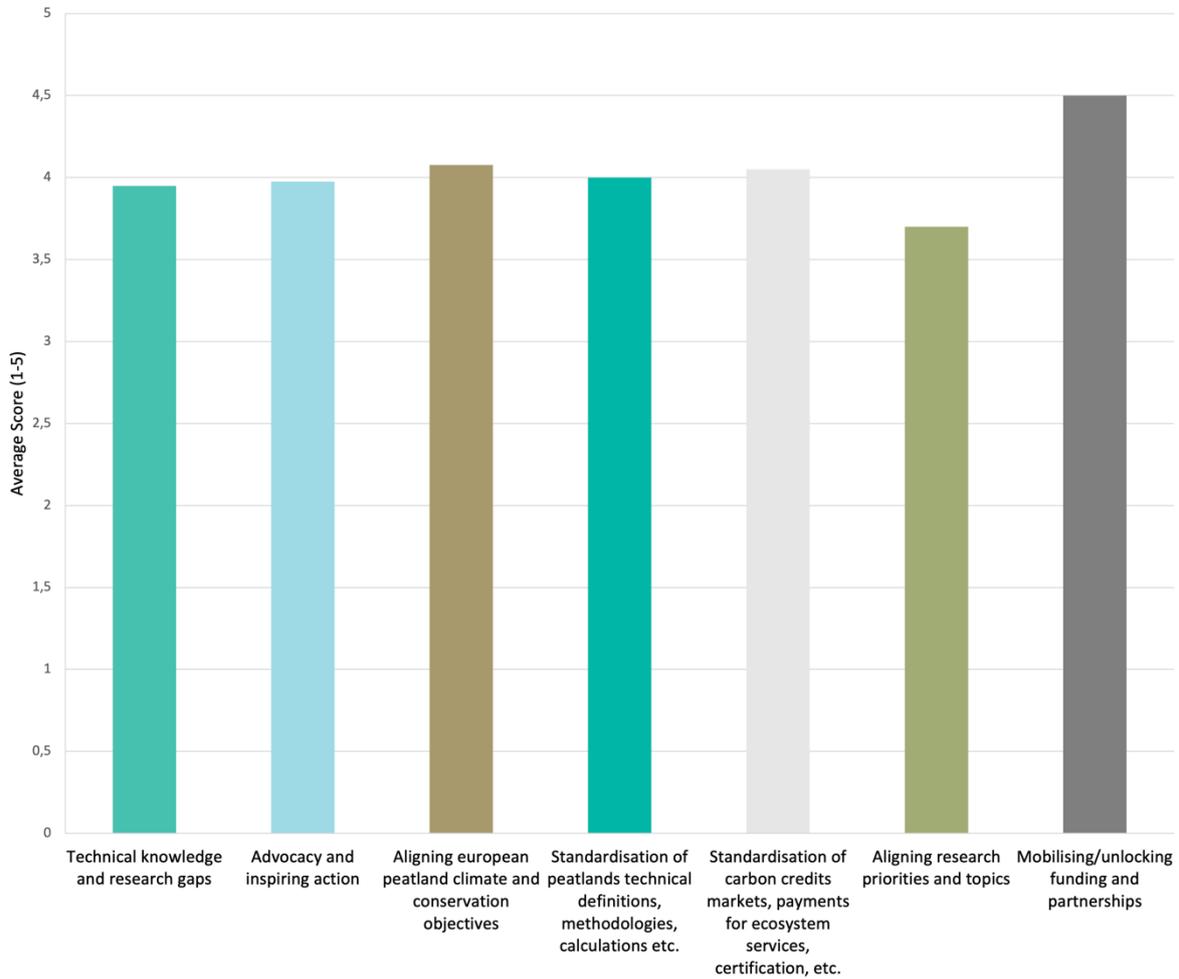


(iv) Benefits of a European Peatlands Initiative

Participants were asked to give each topic a score from a 1-5 (low-high) to reflect if they thought an EPI could be of benefit in the areas represented in the graph below. Overall, the scores were relatively even across all topics with a marginal increase for “Mobilising/ unlocking funding and partnerships”. Participants scored “Aligning research priorities and topics” slightly less favourably. All aspects were marked quite positively with high overall average scores, expressing a positive attitude towards each potential benefit.

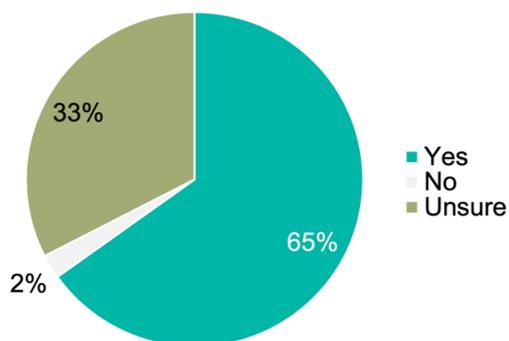


How could an EPI best benefit peatlands across Europe?



(v) Support, roles, and contributions for a European Peatlands Initiative

Would you/your organisation be interested in supporting the development process (e.g., attending workshops, representation at a working group, signing a statement of intent, etc.) of an EPI?

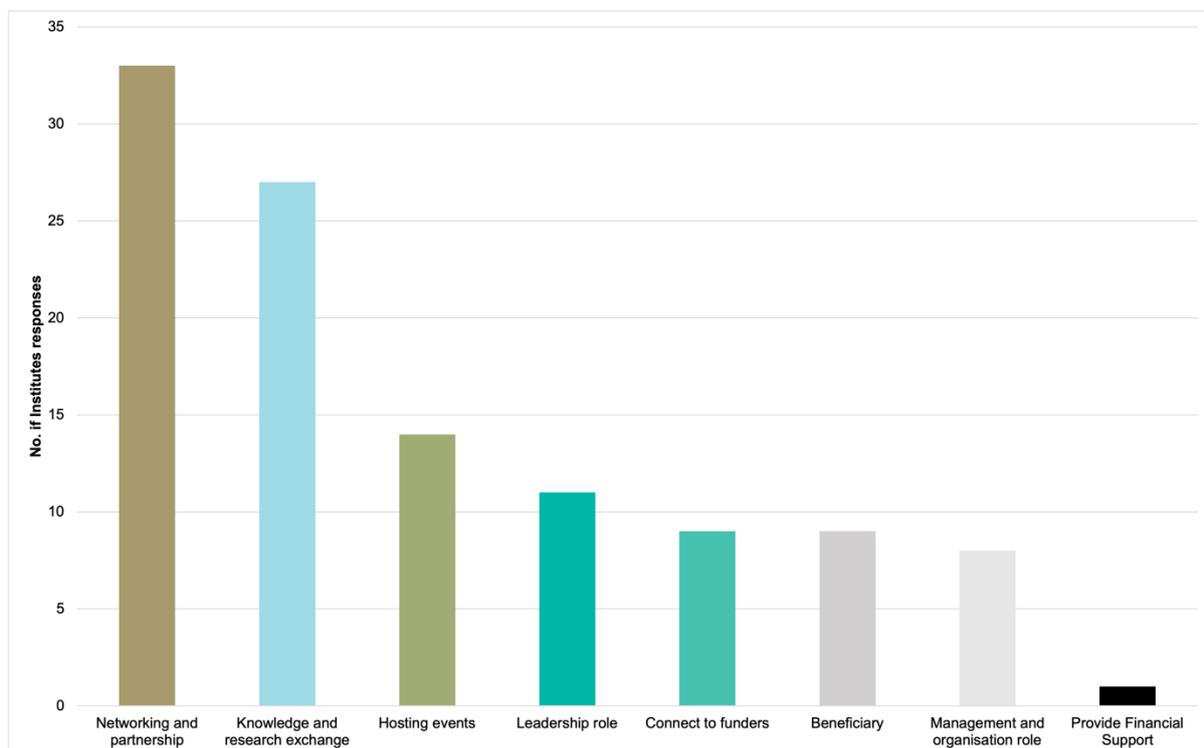




Participants indicated how they envisioned their role or participation in an EPI across eight categories; networking and partnership, leadership role, knowledge and research exchange, connection to funders, hosting events, beneficiary, or a management, providing financial support, and organisation role. Participants could choose multiple categories. There was a clear preference for networking and partnerships and knowledge and research exchange with most respondents stating they would possibly be interested in supporting an EPI in these capacities.

65% of the participants indicated that they would be interested in supporting the development process (e.g., attending workshops, representation at a working group, signing a statement of intent, etc) and 33% indicated that they would be unsure of their involvement due to the following reasons; dilution of global scale, need for community-level involvement, lack of financial and time resources, and the need for clear aims to be established first.

How would you envision your role or participation in a European Peatlands Initiative?

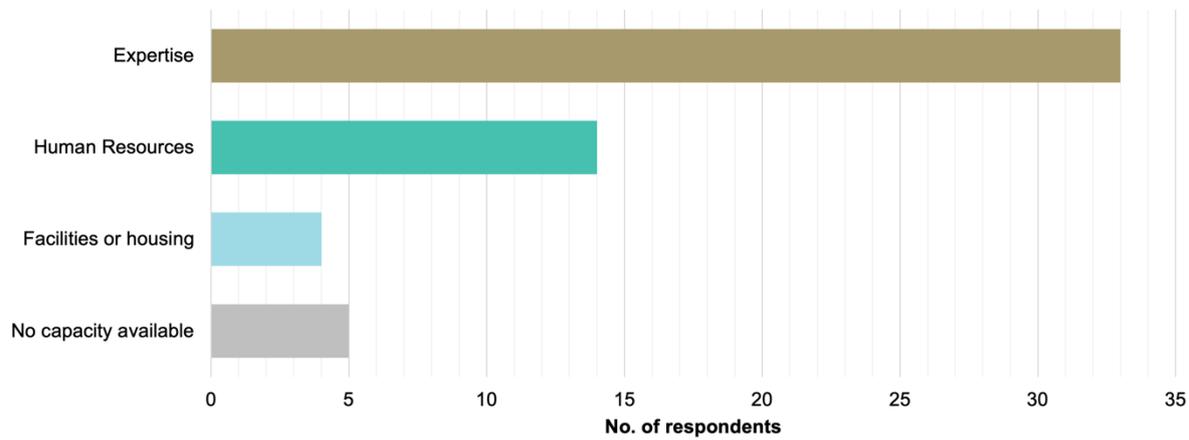


The majority stated they would be able to provide resources to the EPI through the provision of expertise (77%), followed by the provisions of human resources (33%). Only 9% of respondents stated that they could provide facilities or housing of the initiative. 12% revealed



no capacity available. This high response to expertise is also related to the responders who mainly came from research and science backgrounds.

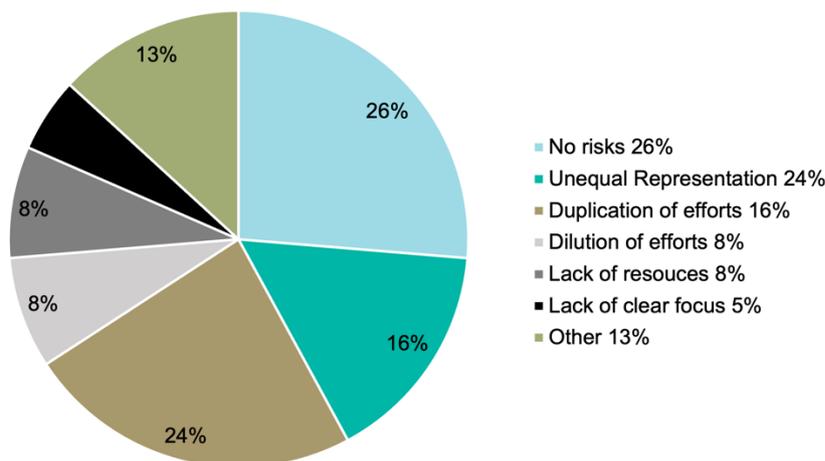
If applicable, in what capacity could you provide resources to a European Peatlands Initiative?



(vi) Risks of developing a European Peatlands Initiative

Participants were asked about their perceived risks of setting up an EPI and to identify potential barriers to the EPI strategic goals. 26% of participants responded that they could identify no risks. The biggest perceived risk by respondents was unequal representation within an EPI, at 24%, followed by the duplication of efforts, 16%.

Do you see any potential risks associated with the development of a European Peatlands Initiative? If so, please specify.



Risk 1: Unequal representation or improper representation

There were concerns raised regarding the potential lack of inclusion of all stakeholder groups in an EPI, especially at the community level and for smaller farmers or landowners. In addition, it was felt that there should be representation from all countries with peatland coverage in Europe - particularly when considering European-wide policy recommendations.

A broad top-down policy approach from governments could encounter public resistance as stakeholders may feel excluded from the process. Therefore, early, and local stakeholder engagement is considered very important to avoid resistance later at the policy implementation stage.

Risk 2: Duplication of efforts

Participants suggested that the EPI has potential to overlap with existing peatland initiatives and organisations. There is a risk of creating layers of unnecessary bureaucracy that will halt or make actions more administrative and onerous. This points to the fact that an EPI should be built on strong existing networks and avoid creating a network that requires a duplication of resources and administration.

Risk 3: Dilution of efforts

Participants indicated that there is a risk of diluting (weakening through overspreading resources) global efforts if existing efforts and stakeholders are not well aligned. Therefore, finding a common vision with a clear and unique focus and including all stakeholders is important.

Risk 4: Lack of resources to participate

Several stakeholders and participants of the exploratory study were concerned that a lack of adequate staff and funding could be a limiting factor to collaborating and contributing to the development of an EPI. For this reason, it is important to consider the process of identifying, and subsequently accessing, funding and resources to achieve the desired impacts.

Risk 5: Lack of clear focus or niche

Participants of the exploratory study mentioned that there is a risk that an EPI may not find its niche, and instead find itself in competition with, and as a result weakening, existing structures. Moreover, a clear understanding of the terminology is important to prevent any misunderstanding between, for example, peatland conservationists and peatland developers. Again, this indicates that an EPI must have a clear focus that uniquely provides added value.

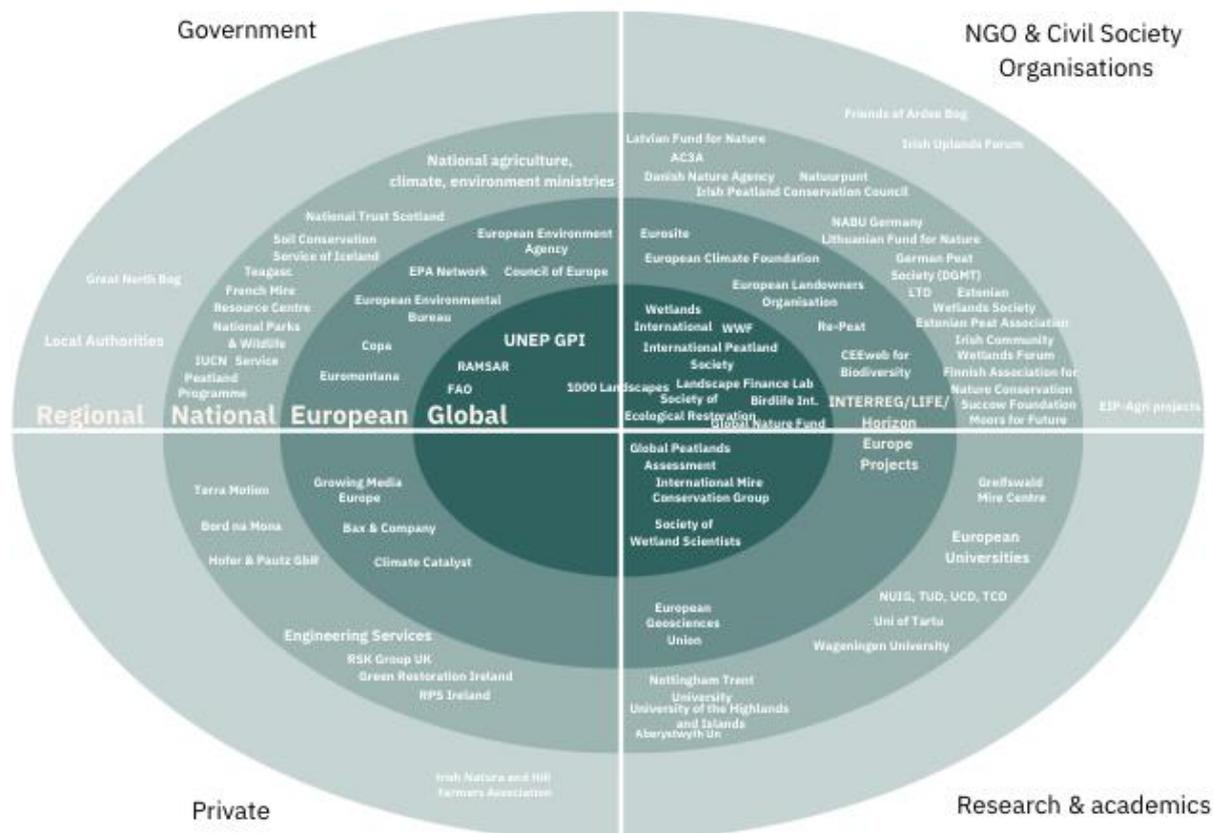


(vii) Existing Networks

On a global level, there are large initiatives that work with peatlands, for example, The Global Peatlands Initiative, the ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative, the German “MoorDialog” and the Nordic Council of Ministers. Participants listed networks that they are part of to collect a base of existing organisations that can be built upon and leveraged. All organisations are listed in the Appendix.

Participants agreed that the involvement of farmers, peat producers and users through an open participation process would be crucial to ensure they have a voice, to learn from them and to create a balance of the diverse views that exist regarding peatlands. Developing a strong vision for the EPI and identifying the benefit for different stakeholders in terms of restoring peatlands was a recurring requirement. To achieve this, it would be essential to involve stakeholders with diverse views on peatlands management.

Mapping of the peatland-related organisations and networks





4. Conclusion and next steps

This European Peatlands Initiative Exploratory study identified emerging needs for a government-supported network for peatlands across Europe through engagement with multiple Irish and international stakeholder groups.

These can be defined as;

- **A government-backed support** to grow political awareness, unlock large-scale funding and drive exchange on all levels;
- **Increased harmonisation** to outline a common vision, create comparable approaches and support coordinated actions;
- **A unified and coherent voice** for peatlands that is backed by science and governments, raises the profile of peatlands and forms a louder joint voice;
- **More viable solutions** for farmers and landowners at scale that focus on long-term economic incentives, accelerate the peatlands economy and support large-scale demonstrations;
- And **a pan-European, integrative approach** with multi-stakeholder collaborations that provides an open and transparent dialogue, is cross-sectoral and on all levels, and builds upon existing initiatives.

The European Peatlands Initiative could draw upon the UNEP-led Global Peatlands Initiative (and other existing networks) experience, members expertise and lessons learned. The study found that through government backed support across Europe and with the support of multi-stakeholder partners, an EPI, linked to established networks, represents an opportunity to create momentum and share knowledge, learn from each other, and increase investment in peatland protection and restoration by establishing strategic partnerships for peatlands. An EPI could help countries work collaboratively towards the joint purpose of conserving valuable peatlands across Europe and contribute significantly to the global efforts in advancing action for nature, climate, and people.

Recommendations

The next step in the development of an EPI is to build the initial vision and concept. This should be co-developed with other European countries and experts in preparation for an international meeting towards the end of 2022 to further develop the concept of an EPI. After the exploratory phase, a Preparatory Phase should be initiated, including a preparatory group mainly made up of European government representatives and peatlands experts, co-development of an organisational plan, and organisation of various events.



During the Preparatory Phase, the preparatory group should develop a strong network of new connections between representatives of policy and science, explore and articulate the key steps for peatlands action in Europe, mobilise resources for action and research on peatlands, and magnify the profile and enthusiasm for peatlands through exciting and dynamic events.

At the end of the Preparatory Phase, the key aspects of the EPI should be formulated, defined, and agreed upon, so that the EPI development is prepared to move to a Building Phase, taking place over 1- 2 years and beyond.

Appendix

Exploratory Study Methodology: Further Details

Interviews

The interviews followed predefined questions and were approximately 45 minutes long. The survey was conducted via an online survey-management system and consisted of 20 questions, out of which 13 were open questions and seven single-choice questions. 43 respondents from over six European countries (with an average organisation size of 1000-10,000 people) answered the survey questions. The survey was shared with selected peatlands stakeholders identified before the process and through Twitter and LinkedIn. The survey was open from February to March 2022.

Workshops

The in-person workshop had the following agenda:

Session 1

Key speeches

- *Welcome & Introduction* - NPWS of the Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage - Suzanne Nally
- *Global Peatlands Initiative* - UN Environment Programme - Dianna Kopansky
- *Building upon existing initiatives* - Eurosite - Wojciech Mróz
- *Emerging needs for a European Peatlands Initiative: Findings so far* - Bax & Company - Cisca Devereux
- *Message from Minister of State* - Malcolm Noonan TD

Canvas: Deep dive into the key needs that could be addressed by an EPI

- *What are the key needs for collaboration in Europe? (Prioritising from high to low priority)*
- *How could a European collaboration add value to these needs?*

Session 2

Scoping the potential roles, initiatives, and contributions that the EPI could be built upon

- *What additional peatlands initiatives & organisations can an EPI be built upon? How do we involve stakeholders with diverse views on the current and future management of peatlands?*
- *How do you envision a European Peatlands Initiative in terms of Activities, effective structure, and resources?*

List of existing networks working with peatlands

1000 Landscapes Initiative	GLOBAL
4 Returns Partnership	NL
Birdwatch Ireland	IE
British Ecological Society Special Interest Group (Peatland)	UK
Ceeweb for Biodiversity	GLOBAL
Cell Explorers	IE
Community Wetlands Forum	IE
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Moor und Torfkunde e.V.	DE
EC Horizon Green Deal Cluster	EU
Estonian Wetland Society	EST
EU CAP	EU
Europarc Euromontana	EU
Flow Country Research Hub	UK
German Peatland Society	DE
Global Nature Fund	DE
Global Peatland Assessment	GLOBAL
Global Peatland Initiative	GLOBAL
Greifswald Mire Centre	DE
Growing Media Europe	EURO
Harte Peat	NL
Industrieverband Garten e.V.	DE
International Mire Conservation Group	GLOBAL
International Peatland Society	GLOBAL
International Tropical Peatlands Centre	GLOBAL
Interreg CANN project	EU
Irish Peat Community	IE
Irish Peatland Conservation Council	IE
IUCN Peatland Programme	UK
Living Lakes	UK
Local Authority Heritage Officer Network	IE
Louth Leadership Partnership	IE
Lund University	SE

Monaghan Wetlands Network	IE
NABU Deutschland	DE
National Parks and Wildlife Service	IE
National Parks England	UK
National Peatland Group (Scotland)	UK
New Peatland Research Group at the University of Plymouth	UK
NUIG AgInnov	IE
Peat East	UK
Peatland Early Career Researchers Network @Peatlands_ECR	USA
RePeat	EURO
Scotland wide Peatland ACTION run by NatureScot	UK
Society for Ecological Restoration	GLOBAL
Society of Wetlands Scientists	GLOBAL
Suoseura (Finnish Peatland Society)	FIN
TCD Environmental Engineering	IE
The Living Bog	UK
Wales-Ireland	IE
Wetlands International	GLOBAL
Youth Academy	GLOBAL

With thanks to the participating organisations, projects, institutes or companies in the workshop, interviews, survey, and online session, which were the following:

AC3A	FR
Birdwatch Ireland	IE
BOKU University Vienna	AT
Bord na Mona	IE
CAN Europe	EURO
CANN Project	IE
Care-Peat	NWE
Climate Catalyst	UK
Coillte	IE
Community Wetlands Forum	IE
Danish Nature Agency	DK

Deutsche Landschaftspflegeverband	GER
Durham County Council	UK
European Investment Bank	EURO
European Protection Agency	EURO
Eurosite	EURO
ERINN Innovation	IE
Estonian Fund for Nature - LIFE Mires Estonia	EE
European Landowners Association	EURO
FAO	UN
University of Limerick	IE
FarmPeat	IE
Green Restoration Ireland	IE
Greifswald Mire Centre	GER
Inishowen River trust	IE
International Peatland Society	GLOBAL
Irish Peatland Conservation Council	IE
Irish Peatland Society	IE
Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee	IE
IUCN- UK Peatland Code	UK
Landscape Finance Lab	AT
Latvian Fund for Nature	LV
Lithuanian Fund for Nature	LT
LTO Noord	NL
Michael Succow Foundation	GER
NABU	GER
Natuurpunt	BE
North Pennines AONB	UK
NUI Galway	IE
Wetland Products Foundation	NL/GER
Pelkiufondas	LT
Ramsar	GLOBAL
Re-Peat	GLOBAL
River Trust Ireland	IE
RPS- Belfast	IE

Teagasc	IE
Trinity College Dublin	IE
TU Dublin	IE
UC Dublin	IE
University of Plymouth	UK
University Tartu	EE
Van Hall Larenstein	NL
WaterLands	IE
Wetlands International	GLOBAL

Survey Questions

- (viii) What is your role?
- (ix) If applicable, what type of organisation is it?
- (x) If applicable, what size is your organisation?
- (xi) What are the main challenges you or your organisation face in relation to peatlands management and restoration?
- (xii) What other challenges do you or your organisation face in relation to peatlands?
- (xiii) Which of the following aspects would be most beneficial for a European Peatlands Initiative to address?: Technical knowledge and research gaps
- (xiv) Which of the following aspects would be most beneficial for a European Peatlands Initiative to address?: Advocacy and inspiring action
- (xv) Which of the following aspects would be most beneficial for a European Peatlands Initiative to address?: Aligning European peatland climate and conservation objectives
- (xvi) Which of the following aspects would be most beneficial for a European Peatlands Initiative to address?: Standardisation of peatlands technical definitions, methodologies, calculations etc.
- (xvii) Which of the following aspects would be most beneficial for a European Peatlands Initiative to address?: Standardisation of carbon credits markets, payments for ecosystem services, certification, etc.
- (xviii) Which of the following aspects would be most beneficial for a European Peatlands Initiative to address?: Aligning research priorities and topics
- (xix) Which of the following aspects would be most beneficial for a European Peatlands Initiative to address?: Mobilising/unlocking funding and partnerships
- (xx) Do you see any potential risks associated with the development of a European Peatlands Initiative? If so, please specify.



- (xxi) How would you envision your role or participation in a European Peatlands Initiative?
- (xxii) If applicable, in what capacity could you provide resources to a European Peatlands Initiative?
- (xxiii) What existing networks are you already part of that could be built upon for the European Peatlands Initiative, if any? Do you know any other relevant organisations?
- (xxiv) Do you have any suggestions for how a European Peatlands Initiative could be set-up and operated (i.e. structure, funding source, leadership type, partnership, etc.)?
- (xxv) Would you/your organisation be interested to support the development process (e.g., attending workshops, representation at a working group, signing a statement of intent, etc.) of an EPI?
- (xxvi) Would you be interested to discuss this further? If so, please provide contact details and an email address.

Peatlands may not be regarded as the heart and soul of the nation – they are more aptly considered its liver and kidneys – a crucial part of our anatomy and psyche that we give far too little attention to.

They ought to be our greatest treasure and yet for decades we've either ignored, exploited or actively destroyed them.

Manchán Magan

(Irish writer & broadcaster)

For more information on this report, please contact:

DHLGH: Adele Shelton peatlandsmanagement@housing.gov.ie

DAFM: Joan McDougall EPIProject@agriculture.gov.ie

Bax & Company: Cisca Devereux, Lisa Wiatschka & Sebastiaan Van Herk epi@baxcompany.com