

Press Release

Ireland's peatlands are of national and international importance and if managed better they could improve water quality, store carbon, reduce CO₂ emissions and improve biodiversity.

Improving the way peatlands are managed in Ireland will help store carbon, reduce CO₂ emissions, improve water quality and biodiversity states a new [report](#) published today by An Fóram Uisce – The Water Forum.

Ireland's land area is comprised of 20% peatland, with only 18% of all peatlands are in a 'near natural' or 'healthy' state. Consequently, 82% of peatlands are considered 'degraded'. Peatlands consist of 95% water, and degraded peatlands are drained to varying degrees for peat extraction, domestic peat cutting, agriculture or forestry.

Drainage of peatlands and removal of surface vegetation releases nutrients (phosphorous and nitrogen), ammonia, dissolved carbon gives the water a dark colour and sediment into rivers and lakes and this reduces water quality and is a particular issue in drinking water source areas. Drained peatlands have reduced capacity to store carbon as they are not growing, they release CO₂ contributing to climate change and can no longer support plant and animal biodiversity. They are also at greater risk of fire.

Better management through rewetting and restoration of peatlands can reverse these trends and restore the natural peatland functions. Rewetting is not flooding. But blocking drains can restore the water balance within the peatland so that plants can grow and re-establish to provide and improve animal habitats in the bog and downstream rivers. Industrial cutaway bogs will need longer term measures and more intensive restoration programmes to recover.

Changing the function of the bogs and peatlands from their economic use associated with peat harvesting, afforestation and agriculture to use for recreation, tourism and heritage values is best achieved through local community engagement. Communities need to be given the opportunity to lead the change in peatland transformation from being sites of labour and employment to sites of restoration, recreation and conservation. These shifts in values need to occur, in order, to support the development of sustainable peatlands that support ecosystem services for water, biodiversity and climate, and for local communities.

Dr Tom Collins, Chair of An Fóram Uisce adds; *"Generations of Irish children have written loving essays entitled A Day in The Bog. Now we are trying to ensure that future generations of our children can write the same essay with the same innocent trust that some things never change."*

An Fóram Uisce – The Water Forum is hosting a webinar to present and debate these research findings. Taking place online on 21st May, registration is [free](#) and the webinar programme is available [here](#).

[Research Report](#) is also available on An Fóram Uisce website

[Synthesis report](#) is available on An Fóram Uisce website

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Note to editors

An Fóram Uisce| The Water Forum was established as a statutory body in June 2018 to facilitate stakeholder engagement and debate on issues relating to water as a resource, water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and issues associated with the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The Forum consists of 26 representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality. These include consumer, community and water sports groups, business and trade unions, environmental sector, Irish Water consumers, the group water scheme sector and a range of other sectors including education, agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The Forum is chaired by Dr Tom Collins.

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