



The role of the European Peat And Growing Media Association (EPAGMA) in representing the peat and growing media industry's viewpoint within the EU's political, legislative and administrative institutions

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Summary

The European Peat and Growing Media Association was set up in 2004 with the express aim of contributing to the socio-economic development of regions and communities where peat is sourced and used by ensuring that peat is an acceptable means for growing media and energy within the EU. Since its establishment its activities have, of necessity, principally focussed on representing the viewpoint of its members and others in the industry within the EU's political, legislative and administrative institutions. On the energy front the association has had to tackle the treatment of peat under the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), whilst striving to deal with the lack of harmonisation of standards and labelling in the growing media sector. This paper presents a summary of the peat industry within the EU, its importance both to the horticulture industry as well as to security of energy supply and it argues the sustainability of the industry. It then describes EPAGMA in detail, outlining its structure, the relevant projects and activities, gives a view on the degree of success to-date and indicates the current and likely future agenda.

Key index words: peat, growing media, EU, emissions trading, harmonisation

Introduction

The peat industry that operates within the EU has found itself facing ever-increasing challenges of a regulatory nature born of European Commission initiatives undertaken with the general aim of environmental protection. The Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive and the more recent Emissions Trading Directive that already significantly impact the European peat industry are now being followed by proposed Directives relating to Soil Carbon and Renewables that will, in their current form, make life even more difficult.

Considering the contribution that peat-based growing media makes to the multi-billion euro horticulture industry in Europe as well as the important part played by energy peat to the security of energy supply to some EU member-states, and considering the relatively small environmental impact of the industry's peat production operations, the industry believes that it deserves a more balanced treatment from the EU regulators.

Peat industry in the EU

There are two main uses for peat within the EU:

1. Peat offers an ideal substrate for horticultural plant production.

2. In several countries, particularly in Ireland and the Nordic and Baltic regions, peat provides an important indigenous source of heat and power.

Peat is a key component of most growing media that meet the criteria of being readily available, easily processed, uniform, high performing and cost-effective.

The main user countries of horticultural peat in Europe are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

As a local fuel, it plays an important role in a decentralized and diversified energy system, providing employment and securing energy supply. Economically speaking, it is a competitive type of energy.

Energy peat is produced by 640 European companies and entrepreneurs. There are 3 large companies, about 70 middle-size companies and 550 entrepreneurs or contractors. For example, the value of fuel peat sales in the EU is about 320 million euros, and the value of international trade 18 million euros (Paappanen, T., Leinonen, A., Hillebrand, K. 2006).

The horticultural peat producer profile is similar to that of energy peat. In volume terms the EU market is currently estimated at 32.5 million cubic metres per annum, and is valued at €1.5 billion. The top five country users are Germany, Netherlands, Italy, UK and France and together



these account for just over 70% of the total EU market (Altman, M. 2008)

In rural and remote areas, the peat industry represents a good source of employment. The total employment effect of peat production and use in Europe is 25,000-30,000 man-years, including direct and indirect employment (Paappanen, T., Leinonen, A., Hillebrand, K. 2006 and Altman, M. 2008)

Peat is also used to make activated carbon and as a biofiltration medium.

Sustainability of European Peat Industry

The European peat industry is committed to the sustainable use of peat by ensuring a careful choice of peatlands and peatland restoration, by developing techniques to minimise the contribution of the sector to the greenhouse effect and by focusing on the socio-economic development of the regions involved. EPAGMA and its members are committed to the principles of wise use of peat, drawn up jointly by the International Peat Society (IPS) and the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) (Joosten and Clarke, 2002).

The industry has committed itself to extract peat only from affected lands which already release greenhouse gases. The extracted peat is used to produce growing media and fuel to replace oil and coal.

When the drained peat layers have been extracted the associated emissions of GHG's are eliminated. In addition, these bogs are then converted to carbon sinks in the form of forests (afforestation), energy croplands (such as reed canary grass) and natural scrublands and in some cases to wetlands (paludification) and lakes and actually become important biotopes.

Both the extraction phase of peat production and the combustion of peat as energy (similar to wood combustion) release greenhouse gases. However, the carbon sinks that are subsequently created mitigate the climate impact and the entire cradle-to-grave process can be shown to be carbon favourable on a life-cycle basis. The production and use of peat is sustainable based on this life-cycle approach.

On a global scale more peat is accumulated than is actually extracted (Joosten and Clarke, 2002). Up to 10 times more carbon is being sequestered annually through peat accumulation on mires than is being released through (managed) peat combustion.

Introduction to EPAGMA

EPAGMA, the European Peat and Growing Media Association, is an industry association that was established on 1 May 2004 to represent the peat and growing media industry at a European level. The overarching objective/vision for EPAGMA is to ensure that peat becomes a highly accepted means for growing media and energy within the EU.

The organisation currently has 16 member companies in 11 EU Member States – in Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden. In volume terms EPAGMA members account for an estimated 65-70% of all peat harvesting within the EU.

EPAGMA is committed to high environmental practices in peat extraction, to the sustainable use of peat as a local energy source and to promoting the unique properties of peat as a substrate in horticultural plant production.

Structure

EPAGMA operates a two-level structure:

The Directors' Board comprises one person from each member company. These Directors are in all cases drawn from senior management in their respective companies, many being CEO's. The Chairman is MD of Vapo (Finland) the largest producer of peat in the world; the Vice-Chairman is MD of Klasmann-Deilmann (Germany), the largest producer of peat-based growing media worldwide. This group meets twice-yearly (spring and autumn) and sets policy and direction.

An Executive Board responsible to the Directors for ongoing activities meets either physically or by conference call at least monthly. This is made up of five members, one of whom is also a Director. The remaining four members also attend the Directors' meetings, but are from companies that already have a Director. The Chairman of the Executive Board is from Bord na Móna.

EPAGMA retains a Brussels-based public affairs consultancy, Burson-Marsteller, to provide both a secretariat as well as relevant consultancy to the association.

Modus Operandi / Main activities

The Executive Board working closely with the consultant identifies relevant issues and undertakes appropriate actions. These are typically in the form of drafting submissions, commissioning reports and meeting with relevant EU officials and politicians with the objective of lobbying for EPAGMA's point of view to be taken into consideration.

The consultant also provides an ongoing monitoring service to EPAGMA.

Key document outputs

To date EPAGMA has prepared the following documents:

- The use of peat in energy in the EU
- A socio-economic study on the impact of the European peat and growing media industry on horticulture in the EU
- Report on the principal laws governing the extraction and use of peat in the EU
- Packaging guidelines for professional growing media
- Charters on Sustainability and CO₂
- Q&A style briefing paper

Results to date

The activities of EPAGMA have so far resulted in (a) the raising of the profile of peat and the peat industry within EU institutions, (b) the ongoing defence of the interests of the peat industry at EU level and (c) a strengthening of moral ties between its members.



Current issues

These fall largely under either Energy or Growing Media.

Current energy matters are concerned principally with the European Commission's Renewable Energy Package that includes both the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) and the Biofuels Directive.

On the growing media front EPAGMA is lobbying to have a Directive that would deal with standards across the industry thus reducing barriers to trade.

EU initiatives on biodiversity are common to both parts of the peat industry.

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