

President's address at the Opening Session at the 13th International Peat Congress, Tullamore, Ireland, June 2008

For decades, peat has been burned in Ireland for domestic heating in its country homes, cottages and castles – while also providing an incredible ambiance that is hard to explain with mere words, just like many of Ireland's fantastic people and breathtaking landscapes. Irish peat has also become a staple in the pubs, restaurants and hotels of Ireland, burning throughout the day and night while the Guinness, stories and music flow. In places like Gus O'Connor's Pub in Doolin, visitors have been enjoying their draught while drying their soggy shoes by the peat-filled hearth since 1823.

So if you're looking to enjoy the unmistakable aroma and sight of Irish peat burning in your own fireplace, you've come to the right place. Irish Peat can now be ordered online and delivered right to your doorstep, www.irishpeat.com. The advertisement, which I found on the internet, while plucking the strings of homesickness comes to the nucleus of Irishness, the peat fire. After the forthcoming week here in Tullamore many of us are probably ordering a bale of genuine Irish Peat for about 30 dollars. For the next while however we are here in the heart of the Irish peatlands to enjoy the Irish magic and hospitality as they appear where they are born.

The Organising Committee of the 13th International Peat Congress has come a long and laborious way to reach this point. When I was planning this address at the opening session of the Tullamore Congress I opened one of the thick folders containing documents of the previous Congress in Tampere. Memories from the numerous meetings and consultations of that time returned to my mind. It was easy to put oneself into the position where the organising committee and all involved are at this moment, on one hand full of relief and at the same time full of shiver about how everything planned and prepared will work. I share both feelings and take this opportunity to thank you for all you have done so far. I am convinced that there will be even more reason for thanks on Friday at the closing ceremonies after all the experiences and education we have taken with us from Tullamore.

Having this opportunity to address the Opening Session, I can't help expressing my base line knowledge of our interesting host town. It would be unbelievable if I would not start with Tullamore Dew, the famous Irish whiskey known all over the world. My understanding before I made my base line study was, that Dew stands for something romantic like water drops in an early morning on green grass. Now I know that it comes from the initials of one of the former owners of the Tullamore Distillery, Daniel E Williams. The name Tullamore sounds well to my Finnish ear may be nicer when in Irish pronounced *Tulach Mhór*, meaning 'big hill'.

Tullamore is in the heart of Ireland's finest grain-growing region, a rich agricultural area in the centre of Ireland providing both the fine barley and pure water essential to the creation of good whiskey.

If you still allow me one more time to stay on whiskey, there is a serious reason for me to apologise to Irish people. For years I have believed that peat has an essential role in whiskey production. Countless times I have proudly as President of the International Peat Society explained that peat smoke is needed to stop the malting of barley on a stony floor. My argument was that without peat smoke there is no whiskey. I thought that what I had learned once in Dundee Scotland was applicable to whiskey production everywhere. Then I came to study Tullamore Dew and Irish whiskey as a whole and realised from the first documents that there is no peat smoke needed or even allowed in the creation of Irish whiskey. The malting effect is stopped in Irish whiskey distilleries by heat from burning coal. I would at this moment express my deepest apologies to all four million Irish people in Ireland and forty million outside the island for my ignorance.

To this date Tullamore town shield depicts a phoenix rising from the ashes. This is to recall May 10th 1785, when the town was seriously damaged when the crash of a hot air balloon resulted in a fire that burned down about 100 houses, giving the town the unusual distinction of being home to the world's first aviation disaster. From Thursday 17th to Sunday 20th July there will take place the Tullamore Phoenix Festival, celebrating Tullamore's resurrection from the ashes. So you may consider extending your hotel reservation for an extra month.

The IPS has 40 years of an eventful journey behind it. We strive to ensure that peatlands are managed for the benefit of mankind, now and in the future. The International Peat Society is the only international organisation of scientific, industrial and regulatory stakeholders dedicated to fostering the advancement, exchange and communication of scientific, technical and social knowledge and understanding for the wise use of peatlands and peat.

The IPS has chosen a difficult mission as not being an advocate of one single issue but representing the field of peat and peatlands in a versatile way. A nice example of this is the Wise Use Guidelines Books published, distributed, and promoted in co-operation with the International Mire Conservation Group. To bring the Wise Use Guidelines to public attention has been one of the main goals for the organization.

For the two last years the IPS has run a multidisciplinary research exercise on the role of peatlands in Global Climate Change. The results of the work of the tens of top peat scientists are bound under the title *Peatlands and Global Change* and will be published here in Tullamore.

Moving into the next Peat Olympiad from Tullamore to Stockholm, the next big task for the International Peat Society will be the certification of peat and peat production in a globally accepted way, based on appreciation of the only international organisation of scientific, industrial and regulatory stakeholders of peat and peatlands. But that's already another subject.

In my capacity as the President of the International Peat Society I take this opportunity to wish you all the most successful and also enjoyable 13th Peat Congress in Tullamore, Ireland.

Markku Mäkelä
President of the International Peat Society