

Urgent Call to Action: Power to the Peatlands - A Critical Transition for the Dutch Horticultural Sector

[Antwerpen, September 19-21st] - The Dutch horticultural sector, renowned for its innovation and global influence, faces a critical juncture. To comply with the Paris Agreement, a switch to sustainable growing media has to happen. In a clarion call to address one of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time, a group of 500 eminent scientists, environmentalists, and advocates have come together in Antwerpen to underscore the urgency of ending the use of peat in horticulture. The preservation of peatlands, science tells, is essential to mitigating climate change and safeguarding biodiversity.

Peatlands, often underestimated for their immense ecological significance, are vast carbon stocks that play a pivotal role in storing and regulating water, nurturing unique biodiversity, and providing significant social and cultural benefits.

Nevertheless, the health of peatlands is at risk. Drained peatlands result in disastrous economic and environmental consequences by releasing previously stored carbon, contributing to double the greenhouse gas emissions of air travel. It is imperative to act collectively and decisively to prevent further damage.

"We feel the urgency, and we know what to do. We must act now!" the coalition of 500 scientists, environmentalists, and other advocates emphasized. Land users, landowners, decision-makers, NGOs, scientists, and industry should commit to preserving peatlands, combating climate change, promoting biodiversity, and supporting sustainable livelihoods.

The delegates of the conference produced this declaration with a focus on conservation, rewetting, restoration, and sustainable horticultural practices, which more than 100 participating organizations signed:

Preserve All Natural Peatlands and Organic Soils:

- Immediately cease any further drainage or reclamation.

Accelerate Rewetting of Drained Peatland:

Rewet to halt CO2 emissions and enhance water retention, water quality, and biodiversity.

Move Rapidly to Sustainable Business Models and Wet Peatland Use:

- Integrate environmental benefits, rural income generation, and production of high-quality biomass.
- Phase out all drainage-based land use and public payments encouraging these.
- Encourage innovative entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector.
- Progress rewetting, paludiculture, and carbon farming in agricultural policy and payment schemes.
- Halt all extraction and use of peat.

Make High-Resolution Open-Source Data Available:

- Support peatland mapping, monitoring, and research to improve national greenhouse gas inventories, biodiversity reporting, and carbon standards.

Acknowledge the Central Role of Water:

- Treat peatlands as integral components of catchment areas to enhance landscape-wide water security.

Include Ambitious Peatland Restoration Targets in the Nature Restoration Law:

- Align the Nature Restoration Law with overarching EU and global policy targets and commitments.

The urgent call to action, titled "Power to the Peatlands," serves as a rallying cry to protect these vital ecosystems and underscores that the Dutch horticultural sector's sustainability is intertwined with the health of our planet.