

The peatland pathway to 2050: abstract

Hans Joosten, Greifswald Mire Centre / International Mire Conservation Group

The Paris Agreement has made the world simple. We have one common goal: to limit global temperature rise to clearly below 2°. The physical consequence is, that we have to reduce global net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 to 0 (zero). This '0 for all' implies that sectors cannot hide any longer behind others ("I am too important to reduce, so others have to do more") and that after 2050 transferring emission reductions from one sector/company to the other ("offsetting") becomes impossible. A further consequence is that the curve to decreasing emissions has to be reached as soon as possible: delaying the peak with a decade will necessitate a so fast decrease that insufficient time is left to transform the economy. As, furthermore, these goals have to be reached "...in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty", the challenges are enormous. On the other hand, we still have 30 years to reach the 0-emissions goal, so that reduction 'only' has to be 3% per year.

The peatland pathway to 2050 implies the complete fading out of the fossil resource 'peat' and of drained peatland use. For peat as an energy resource, cost-effective alternatives are already available and are rapidly being further developed. For growing media, ample availability of high-quality and cheap peat and the reluctance of the peat industry to seriously look for alternatives have hitherto hampered the development of sufficient climate-friendly alternatives. While promising new alternatives are being prospected, substantial reduction must initially be achieved by shrinkage of lower-quality markets, such as hobby gardening and garden and landscape care. Crucial for the necessary change is that peat industry stops repeating the obsolete argument of peat being a climate neutral biomass and refrains from unjustified claims on the future and on common resources.

The fading out of drained peatland use is not only necessary from the perspective of climate change mitigation but also urgently for climate change adaptation. As the growing demand for biomass implies that the 500,000 km² of drained peatlands worldwide must largely maintain their production function, peatland agriculture and forestry must rapidly advance the development of paludicultures, which – per definition – minimize greenhouse gas emissions and stop subsidence.