

HOW INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND AGREEMENTS AFFECT PEATLAND AND PEAT INDUSTRIES

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From its formation 50 years ago in 1968 “the principal aim of the International Peatland Society has been to promote international contact and co-operation on all matters concerning the study and utilization of mires, peatlands, peat and related materials in order to advance knowledge and understanding in the scientific, technical and economic fields.”

In those early days there was little interest in the biodiversity of peatlands and talk of climate change was not even on the horizon. There was much more interest in peat resource survey, classification, and terminology.

Things have changed and now there is increasing concern about the environment, especially loss of biodiversity, restoration, carbon emissions and climate change. There is also much more regulation of the operations of peatland and peat industries and downstream companies in their supply chains. Many of these legal frameworks and constraints that affect the operations of peat industry companies originate in one of the many international conventions, agencies, agreements, or programmes that have mushroomed over the last 50 years.

Peatlands are now of global importance because they are a greater carbon store than any other land type. They are used in agriculture, forestry, and horticulture, and as a source for fuel to produce energy. Responsible management of peatlands, in which conservation of peat is a key element, is a priority for peatland and peat industry companies.

In 2014 the IPS carried out a survey of the international organisations contributing to policies on the importance of peatlands and the use of peat that are implemented by national and regional governments. This was published in the handbook ‘International Conventions, Agencies, Agreements and Programmes’.

It identifies 19 international bodies that have implications for peatlands and peat in their objectives and actions. Many, for example CBD and UNFCCC were established by the United Nations or an Agency of the UN such as FSO. Some have general remits that cover important global issues of which peatlands form part. A few, such as Ramsar and IUCN were formed in response to specific environmental conservation needs and pressures, independently of the UN but linked to it

Some, perhaps the most important, are international conventions to which nation states, in some cases regional groupings of states (e.g. EU) or customs unions, have signed up to because they agree with the aims and objectives and decisions taken at Conferences of the Parties (COP).

It is hoped that this presentation will help to unravel the complex workings of these international agreements and regulations and implications they have for management of peatlands, peat processing and peat transportation for the better understanding and wise use of this important and valuable local, regional and global resource.