

By a **Newsnet reporter**



Donald Trump and his new-found aversion to wind farms is dominating the news from Holyrood this week.

However, on the same day that 'The Donald' enlightened the Scottish Parliament with his views – about his fear of having his view spoiled – another environment focussed debate, probably of greater long-term significance, took place in a committee room along the corridor.

The Scottish Parliaments Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment committee yesterday (Wednesday 25th April) heard evidence on the subject of Scotland's peat lands and peat soils.

To put the committee's peatland deliberations into context: the British Isles have around 70% of the world's heather moorland, and 70% of that total is to be found in Scotland.

Heather moorland being of course the land use cover most commonly associated with peatland soils in Scotland and the subject of countless thousands of tourist photos.

Our heather moors may have long been admired by tourists, and treasured by grouse shooters, but the focus of yesterday's evidence session was on the role of their underlying peat soils in the capture and storage of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases.

As recently as 2010, peat soils were viewed with suspicion by climate change boffins. The scientific finger was pointed at peat bogs, moorlands and Scotland's fertile peat farmlands as being responsible for emitting CO₂ and other greenhouse gases.

Last years' 'Facing up to climate change' paper by the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) was one of the first major reports detailing scientific research proving the contrary view. Far from being an emitter of CO₂, carefully managed and conserved peat soils actually act as a sink for the gas.

The RSE report states that, along with other land use and conservation work peatland could play a part in capturing 19% of Scotland's gross greenhouse gas emissions.

The peatland research work of the uber-influential International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), who gave evidence yesterday in the parliament, also concludes that peatland conservation is a prime example of a nature-based solution to climate change.

The IUCN states that when peatland is lost, for example by erosion, or disturbed, there is a double-whammy effect on climate change. The ability of the soil to soak up CO₂ is diminished and the disturbance of the peat emits previously captured greenhouse gases.

Disturbing peat, or disturbing Donald?

The conclusions from the environmental debates at Holyrood yesterday cannot be considered separately. Scotland needs to deal with greenhouse gas emissions and we need the boost to our economy that expansion of renewable energy production looks set to give.

The task of MSP's and Scottish Ministers will now be to consider fully the implications of disturbing Scotland's peat rich soils and world renowned moorland habitats for the construction of on shore wind farms versus coastal turbines which may be no more disturbing than a blip on the horizon.