

River Inny

18.6.2009

To: The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Micheal Martin T.D.

Dail Eireann

Leinster House

Kildare Street

Dublin 2

Dear Minister,

It is surely the least we can expect from our Ministers that when they speak that at least the minimum of research has been done to ensure that they are speaking the truth.

On January 14th 2008 [trade mission to South Africa] you singled out Harte Peat for praise. "Harte (Peat) have developed a quality environmentally friendly product", you stated. "Harte Peat is a true example of how Irish industry has developed expertise in a wide range of areas," you said, and concluded with, "I was delighted to meet Managing Director Thomas O'Harte. He briefed me on the company and planned future developments".

I wonder if Thomas O'Harte mentioned to you during the meeting the effect that Harte Peat's harvesting (in company with Westland) has had in the Coolnagun area of Co. Westmeath? Environmentally friendly? About six miles of the River Inny has been made into a dead zone by the careless leakage of peat into the water.

Acres of bog and most wonderful wild life habitat have been permanently destroyed. The "environmentally friendly" practice has been to deep-dig the peat down to base-rock level leaving no hope for the process of re-growth to develop. No form of screening was ever attempted to prevent wind-blown peat dust reaching the river. The provision of settling beds was either inadequate or non-existent. And by dealing with the Co. Council as if the whole area was made up of individual small lots the question of planning permission was evaded.

I enclose information on the case and some reproduced photographs and we are happy to issue an open invitation to you to come and see the problems for yourself. And we would very much appreciate it if you would use your good offices to persuade Harte Peat to take responsibility for the dreadful state in which they have put the river and the bog.

We look forward to your speedy reply.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Murphy P.R.O.
Westmeath Environmental Group