

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
BIODIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH STRATEGY

Meeting under the Greek Presidency of the EU
Lesvos, Greece, 23rd – 26th May 2002

"The economy is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the environment. All economic activity is dependent upon the environment.... The economy, in reality, is just a subset of the ecological system." – Gaylord Nelson

To gain the knowledge necessary to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, high priority is placed on research to:

1. investigate and develop strategies for sustainable development integrating environmental management, social equity and economic development, and identify case studies of the successful integration of these aspects;
2. establish criteria for the sustainable use of biodiversity;
3. develop methods to understand changes in biodiversity and the corresponding goods and services it provides, and develop monitoring systems through the establishment of baselines and indicators to give early warning of unsustainable practices;
4. provide criteria for determining when precautionary measures to prevent unsustainable use of biodiversity are justified;
5. improve the scientific basis and reliability of environmental impact assessments, and planning instruments;
6. improve methods to determine all values of biodiversity;
7. develop methods to improve the ecological and cost effectiveness of conservation policy instruments;
8. improve understanding and models of the effects of environmental variability and natural disasters on ecosystem processes and services, and further develop sustainable management strategies taking account of variability and system resilience;
9. determine the appropriate scale for action to reach sustainable management of biodiversity;
10. investigate and develop effective ways to improve environmental education and awareness, to encourage public participation and to stimulate the involvement of stakeholders in biodiversity management and sustainable use of resources;
11. investigate and further develop participatory methods for integrating scientific and local knowledge for the sustainable use of biodiversity;

12. investigate and develop (e.g. by using case histories of best practice) rights for access and methods for supporting that the benefits derived from biodiversity are equitably distributed and shared.

The above research priorities stemmed in particular from the following considerations:

- The 2001 European Council meeting in Göteborg, the 6th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the WSSD agreed that natural resources are a strategic priority for sustainable development.
- Strategies for sustainable development aim, by integrating environmental management, social equity, and economic development, to ensure a reasonable quality of life for people today without compromising the ability of tomorrow's generations to meet their needs.
- Humans are wholly dependent on biodiversity and the goods and services it provides;
- Human activities often conflict with the conservation of biodiversity;
- Those who benefit from activities that erode or destroy biodiversity hardly ever pay the full cost of the loss¹, while those who carry out biodiversity-enhancing activities often are not adequately rewarded;
- Unsustainable development and unsustainable consumption lead to biodiversity loss or ecosystem damage
- Strategies and plans for sustainable development must take account of biodiversity;
- Biodiversity can be managed in a sustainable way only if the management plans take proper account of the socio-economic context. This may include a requirement to develop jobs based on the sustainable exploitation of biodiversity, and ensuring that biodiversity conservation is carried out in a socially acceptable and cost-effective manner, in such a way that, wherever possible, it benefits the local population.
- Traditional knowledge may provide indications of uses of elements of biodiversity that could lead to sustainable exploitation and low-impact uses of natural and semi-natural areas.
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play an important role in biodiversity conservation and research and in bringing the issue to the attention of the public and policy-makers.

¹ This is an example of the "tragedy of the commons" in which, because benefits are localised but costs are shared, economic logic leads to ecological over-exploitation. More technically, negative externalities arise when those who carry out an activity do not bear its full costs.