

Biological Diversity and Sports – Opportunities for Sustainable Development

Opinion of the Advisory Council for Environment and Sports of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

The Advisory Council for Environment and Sports acknowledges the great achievements which have been made possible over the past years by nature conservationists and sports associations which allow a successful coexistence for both uses. Numerous agreements and cooperation initiatives at local and regional level show that a responsible and sustainable use of natural resources for the benefit of sports and recreation is possible even in a densely populated country such as Germany.

The Advisory Council specifically welcomes the progress made in the field of incorporating sports and recreation into nature conservation laws as has been made possible by the amendment of the Federal Nature Conservation Act and calls for a complete incorporation of these provisions into the Environmental Code and the nature conservation laws of the Federal States.

Life on earth exists almost everywhere and the secret of its success is diversity: the higher the amount of species and the more diverse the genetic pool, the better the chances for adaptation to new conditions and for survival. For this reason we must do all we can to preserve and protect biological diversity!

However, this diversity is endangered! Biological diversity and opportunities for exercise and recreation suffer visibly and specifically from fragmentation of habitats and space in the vicinity of settled areas where it becomes increasingly difficult to experience nature. The loss of this formative experience is therefore not only a threat for biological diversity, it also poses a risk to human health, the quality of life and the development of a regional identity.

The way our societies draw on and use their surroundings as well as their lifestyles have been identified by the Advisory Council as further causes for the decrease in biological diversity and consequently the threat for indigenous species of fauna and flora. This is not only a specifically ecological or economic problem, it also reflects the social and cultural alienation of large sectors of society from values and concepts such as appreciation of local natural surroundings or the natural basis for life.

For many people biological diversity has become a term to which a certain abstract value is attributed but in large conurbations in particular, the term is not associated with the preservation of nature and landscape as an indispensable basis for life. We cannot accept any further losses in suitable habitats and the associated loss in species. The Advisory Council therefore supports the Nature Alliance campaign on biological diversity and appeals to sports associations and clubs to further step up their efforts to incorporate sustainability criteria into their programmes and with this to embrace the objectives of biological diversity preservation and conservation, at the same time contributing to keeping up the role model sports have always had.

The Advisory Council for Environment and Sports stands in agreement with the National Strategy on Biological Diversity in its demand for a designation and securing of areas in the vicinity of settlements as areas for sports and recreation activities in harmony with nature. Particular attention has to be paid to their upgrading and sustainable development. This will help to ease the strain of the competition for space where there is a regional lack of semi-natural spaces for leisure and recreation.

Exercise, health and sports activities play a key role and are of major importance for the population in parks and protected areas.

The Advisory Council noted that Natura-2000 sites (under the Habitats Directive) play a major role in the preservation of biological diversity. Sports and recreation activities are relevant and traditional uses in many Natura-2000 sites. Therefore the Advisory Council supports the development of management concepts for sustainable sports and recreation activities in keeping with the conservation targets of the Habitats and Birds Directives. Everything on offer in this respect will have to be geared towards the capacity of the sites to absorb these activities unharmed in ecological and social terms. Involvement of all user groups is the key to acceptance for management plans under the Habitats Directive. Round table discussions are a tried and tested means to incorporate sports and recreation uses into the planning and concrete implementation phases.

The Advisory Council appeals to nature conservation associations, government agencies for nature conservation and sports associations to join forces and make use of the opportunities provided by the link that exists between physical activity in natural surroundings and the potential for education regarding sustainable development. Effective management of sports and recreation activities in protected areas necessitates a clear commitment to the concept of integrative nature conservation, a sound data basis and appropriate management methods.