



## 1. Introduction and opening remarks

M. EBNER, *President Co-ordinator* of the Intergroup, opens the meeting and welcomes all present and represented MEPs, as well as invited speakers, experts and guests.

Replying to a question from MEP A. LULLING, he briefly informs the present MEPs about the current situation of the “Firearms” Proposal. He explains that most of the issues of concern in the Report by *Rapporteur* G. KALLENBACH (Greens, De) have been solved through compromised amendments but that there probably will be additional amendments for the Plenary vote scheduled for early September. M. EBNER raises a general question of whether the European Parliament, each time the EU needs to ratify an international agreement (such as the *UN Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms* but also the *Agreement on humane trapping standards*), should see this as an opportunity to make major amendments to an existing Directive, or instead just introduce the required technical alterations.

## 2. Sustainability: How to assess it?

Prof. F. REIMOSER briefly introduces the main subject of the meeting, namely how sustainability of hunting can be assessed. Since 1999, after being asked by the Austrian Environment Ministry to research the link between biodiversity and sustainable hunting, his University has been working together with various interest groups (hunting, forestry, nature conservation, tourism, etc.) in trying to develop principles, indicators and criteria to assess the role of hunting from a economic, environmental, social and cultural perspective. The objective of this work is to measure the sustainability of hunting, in order to achieve greater social acceptance for hunting. Even if hunting bag data and statistics are available, other important elements are more difficult to measure, such as the impact of hunting on migratory birds or on other animals that have large distribution ranges.

When it comes to a view on sustainability, there are two trends in Europe. Some experts are in favour of developing guidelines and principles that simply lay down what sustainability is, without specific measures but only general objectives. Others are of the opinion that, in addition to aims and principles, certain tangible and measurable indicators are needed, in order to avoid diverse or even contradictory definitions of the term “sustainable hunting”. In this way, it should be possible to harmonise concepts like nature conservation, wildlife regulation, hunting, tourism, etc. and to bring the debate down from a general level to a more regional, local, and therefore, practical one.

W. LEXER from the Austrian *Federal Environment Agency*, gives a detailed presentation on “*Assessment of sustainable use - Sustainable hunting in Europe*” (the text of which is available from the Intergroup Secretariat). There is growing recognition over the last years for the fact that the use of wild living natural resources, if sustainable, can be an important tool – next to other – for the conservation of biodiversity. There is, however, a need for consistent, coherent and operational concepts and tools to define, guide and measure “sustainable hunting”. In his presentation, he gives an introduction to a number of European projects and initiatives for the development of such tools that may serve as a model for similar processes in other European countries.

These projects mostly rely on self-governance of hunters, namely on non-binding instruments, such as sets of principles, guidelines, criteria and indicator that can be adopted and applied by hunters on a voluntary basis to assess and monitor their activities (both inside and outside of NATURA 2000 sites). He outlines the international policy context on sustainable use, including obligations and provisions arising from binding international agreements and other relevant policy processes, and identifies general guiding principles.

Based on the various impacts of hunting on biodiversity resources and other forms of land use, he underlines the need for hunting to be sustainable. To that end, he describes the major components of (self-) assessment and governance systems for sustainable hunting.

Focusing on examples from within Europe, he reviews various approaches to assess and govern sustainable hunting, ranging from general principles and guidelines to measurable indicators:

- Austria: Self-assessment system of principles, criteria and indicators of sustainable hunting;
- IUCN - ESUSG WISPER Group: Guidelines on sustainable hunting in Europe;
- Austrian research project ISWI-MAB on cross-sector integration of sustainable wildlife management.

He identifies a number of key issues for the development of assessment tools for sustainable hunting as well as strengths and weaknesses inherent to each category of tools. Positive experiences have also been made by applying participatory or collaborative stakeholder processes for the development of assessment tools, *inter alia* because stakeholder involvement fosters acceptance of such tools and commitment to their implementation. In this context, he refers to the book “*Sustainable hunting. Principles, criteria, indicators*”, written by him, Prof. REIMOSER *et al* (also available under <http://www.biodiv.at/chm/jagd/>).

At European level, the goal should be to promote a common understanding and harmonised principles of sustainable hunting in all Member States, which is particularly important for wide ranging species such as migratory birds. The EU could support and fund research and development in this field, i.e. for preparatory comparative studies on hunting systems in the Member States. Best practice and technical guidance on the implementation of sustainable hunting could be advanced by the EU, while at the same time, keeping in mind the need for cross-sector approach to sustainable use.

M. EBNER thanks both speakers for their interesting presentations, and expresses his conviction that Austria is at the forefront in this domain. He asks if contacts exist with other Member States and other organisations and, if so, which criteria these take into account for such assessment.

Prof. REIMOSER points out that they are working closely with organisations like the *World Conservation Union* (IUCN), which regularly updates and compares approaches from different countries with the view to achieve, as far as possible, a degree of harmonisation.

A. SCHIERHUBER asks if the outcome in Austria is already measurable, in particular in relation to wild animal populations.

For Prof. REIMOSER, there are already positive results but a problem remains with the understanding and acceptance by grass-root hunters, and this needs to be better addressed. Most hunters are not sufficiently aware of concepts like “sustainability” or “biodiversity” and therefore do not endorse them, but this will improve if they are informed about the positive results of successful projects.

V. MATHIEU would like to know if the described tools can also be applied inside NATURA 2000 sites as this kind of programme would fit very well with the Intergroup’s project for a strategic plan for sustainable hunting within the EU.

According to W. LEXER, the assessment framework does not differentiate between sustainable hunting inside and outside protected sites and is in principle applicable to all kind of natural areas, on the condition that different conservation objectives and target species and habitats are taken into account.

Y. LECOCQ raises the question of possible “ideological” misuse of such criteria and indicators by certain interest groups; in case “sustainability” becomes measurable, some could indeed argue that *before* hunting can be allowed in a given area, it needs to be demonstrate that a certain percentage of the criteria has been met.

Prof. REIMOSER replies that such misuse cannot be completely avoided, but a lot depends on who sets the criteria. To avoid misinterpretations, the concept of sustainability must be addressed by involving all relevant sectors –in the first place, the hunters themselves - in the assessment process. The aim should be to achieve an evaluation of sustainability that contributes both to the conservation of wild species and habitats, as well as to the preservation of hunting. When this can be demonstrated in a plausible way, the process will actively contribute to a better acceptance of hunting by the general public. To that end, any certification system for sustainable hunting should be based on measurable, transparent and revisable indicators or standards, under the control of an independent body.

For A. SCHIERHUBER, the conclusion is that all parties concerned need to accept to collaborate together and in harmony with science; under these conditions, the outcome will be positive for all sectors.

### **3. Any other business**

No other issues are raised.

### **4. Next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on **Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> September** and deal with the subject of “*Hunting, public opinion and education*“.

S. BERLATO, who will chair that meeting, announces that the Intergroup Members will receive by e-mail the draft agenda in advance.

M. EBNER thanks all guests and participants and closes the meeting.

Max von STEYNITZ  
*Public Affairs Officer*