

Intergroup
SUSTAINABLE HUNTING, BIODIVERSITY & COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITIES
Intergroupe
CHASSE DURABLE, BIODIVERSITÉ & ACTIVITÉS RURALES
Intergruppe
NACHHALTIGE JAGD, BIODIVERSITÄT & LÄNDLICHE AKTIVITÄTEN
Intergruppo
CACCIA SOSTENIBILE, BIODIVERSITÀ & ATTIVITÀ RURALI
Intergrupo
CAZA SOSTENIBLE, BIODIVERSIDAD & ACTIVIDADES RURALES

Meeting of 14.06.2006
Country estates and wildlife management in the EU

MEPs

BACO, Peter (NI, Sk)	LEHTINEN, Lasse (PES, Fin)
BERLATO, Sergio (UEN, It)	MAYER, Hans-Peter (EPP-ED, De)
DEß, Albert (EPP-ED, De)	PIEPER, Markus (EPP-ED, De)
EBNER, Michl (EPP-ED, It)	PURVIS, John (EPP-ED, UK)
HELMER, Roger (NA, UK)	SCHIERHUBER, Agnes (EPP-ED, At)
HUGHTON, Ian (Greens, UK)	SEEBER, Richard (EPP-ED, At)

Apologised

DIAZ de MERA, Agustín (EPP-ED, Es)	LULLING, Astrid (EPP-ED, Lux)
FRIEDRICH, Ingo (EPP-ED, De)	MATHIEU, Véronique (EPP-ED, Fr)
HOPPENSTEDT, Karsten F. (EPP-ED, De)	WATSON, Graham (ALDE, UK)

Experts/Observers

BLACKETT, Geva (SGA)	SERRANO, Louis (Lodos Secos)
CARETTA, Maria Christina (CONFAVI)	QUIJADA, Margarita (Lodos Secos)
HOGG, Alex (SGA)	

Assistants

GREGORY, George (J. PURVIS)	SCHLERITZKO, Ludwig (A. SCHIERHUBER)
SAID, A. (Ass.)	UNTERKOFER, Myriam (M. EBNER)

Secretariat

HUHTANIEMI, Hannes (ELO)
von STEYNITZ, Max (FACE)

1. Introduction and Opening Remarks

J. PURVIS opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and speakers

2. Restoration Activities in El Castillo

L. SERRANO of Lodos Secos introduced the case of the “El Castillo” plant located in Talamanca de Jarama (Madrid). He explained that the washing of minerals creates sludge (mud) and consumes a lot of water. The sludge is stored in rafts located on the land. In most of the cases, the sludge rafts lose the water by evaporation. The time needed for the drying process could be up to 10 years.

The storage rafts affect great land surfaces (agricultural and forest original uses, etc, with affections to the birds, the flora, etc.). The process of land restoration can take many years. Due to the high risks (for people and animals) associated with the process, competent authorities impose a specific insurance contract (characterised by high premiums)

He explained that, at the moment, sludge generated by the mining industry is not well managed. There are different solutions in the market, most of them very expensive, which need great maintenance. Lodos Secos started as a novel sludge treatment process consisting of the separation of the phases from liquid to solid without using expensive mechanical means and without generating polluting products.

L. SERRANO itemised a number of improvements that have resulted from the application in this plant of the "Integral System of Dry Sludge Management". First, a lot of water is saved. The amount is around 320 million cubic meters a year, roughly the annual consumption of the city of Madrid. Water points are created for birds and other animals with commensurate biodiversity benefits. Second, the sludge rafts are eliminated. In this operation there was a surface affected by rafts of 5 hectares, with the associated environmental problems. These rafts of storage have been eliminated completely and in addition sludge has been used in the restoration of the lands. Third, land has been re-incorporated into the agricultural cycle quicker than would otherwise have been possible. Fourth, risks for animals and people are also eliminated. Fifth, negative visual impacts are avoided.

He concluded by listing the two main awards Lodos Secos has won in recent years.

- National Sustainable Development Award 2005 – Spanish Association of Mining Industry (Asociación Nacional de Empresarios de Fabricantes de Áridos)
- ELO Wetlands and Water Award 2004 for International Conservation.

3. Scotland's Red Grouse and Sustainable Rural Communities

A. HOGG, chairman of the *Scottish Gamekeepers Association*, introduced the topic of grouse-shooting in Scotland. He explained that it was vital for the economic wellbeing of the Scottish countryside, with revenues approximating £3000 per hunter per day, far more than any other mainstream countryside activity. Grouse moors represent delicate habitats, which are not only valuable economically but also from the point of view of Scotland's biodiversity, e.g. for heather.

A. HOGG explained that in the 1990s, a conservation experiment of the hen harrier, a predator bird, was conducted on Langholm moor in the Scottish border hills. The experiment led to an explosion in harrier numbers, from one pair before to a high of twenty. The result was that the grouse on which they were feeding were nearly all eliminated.

A. HOGG said that this led to five gamekeepers losing their job and a sharp drop in local income. The harriers, once deprived of their primary food supply, also declined rapidly.

Despite this dismal failure, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds refused to pin the blame on the conservation effort and insisted it has been a more natural occurrence. A. HOGG however stated that EU law was on the side of the gamekeepers, as the “Birds” Directive requires species to be managed with an eye to the social and economic wellbeing of the local communities. What used to be a source of revenue and way for families and children to connect with the community and learn important skills, as well as help fund public infrastructure such as schools, roads and public services, has become an intractable problem with serious economic, social and ecological consequences.

4. Application of Article 9 of the “Birds” Directive (5 minute intervention)

S. BERLATO intervened on the issue of Article 9 of the 1979 “Birds” Directive dealing with derogations from protected species. He explained that the article is unevenly interpreted and implemented in different parts of the EU. Furthermore, in spite of its own set of published guidelines, the Commission is also adopting a conflicting stance. As a result, there are problems of interpretation not only in Italy but elsewhere. He proposed inviting the Commission to the Intergroup in order to discuss how to obtain a uniform interpretation.

Second, he pointed out that there is an unsatisfactory interpretation of the provisions of the “Habitats” Directive in NATURA 2000 sites. There is a trend towards increasing restrictions on hunting in these sites of natural community interest, with socio-economic consequences for local communities. S. BERLATO suggested that the Intergroup should engage with Commissioner DIMAS on this topic.

Third, he noted that the threat of avian flu is being used by some groups to call for curbs on hunting. He suggested that it is necessary to call an urgent meeting of the Intergroup to get a common line and press of an unequivocal stance from the Commission.

5. Glass eels (5 minute intervention)

M. PIEPER took the floor on the situation of glass eels in Europe. He explained that all eels travel great distances to spawn. We don’t know much about their spawning habits, including how they get into landlocked ponds in the process. He stated that the only explanation is that they travel across land.

He said that there has been a dramatic drop in numbers of eels in Europe, especially amongst the glass eel, stocks of which are only at 1% of previous numbers. Again, we don’t know the full reason, but there are strong indications that over-fishing, especially when glass eels are at a young transparent stage, is to blame. Furthermore, obstacles on their migratory routes, such as dams, weirs and turbines in power stations are also at fault.

M. PIEPER said that MEPs should call for measures from the Commission to replenish eel stocks. There are already certain measures in the pipeline, including targets and limits for fishing eels for Member states. He stated that nonetheless more stringent measures were needed to protect young glass eels, for example in the form of a ban on consumption of on exports. The adoption on 16 May 2006 by plenary of the report of MEP J. MAAT on protecting eel stocks already goes some way in this direction. M. PIEPER suggested that the Intergroup take up annual monitoring of eel numbers, as the cross-border migratory nature of the problem lends it a necessary European dimension.

6. Debate and discussion

M. EBNER pointed out that in recent years Europe has seen much sharing of best practice across Member States as a way to move forward. He asked L. SERRANO whether Spain or Lodos Secos were working on any agreements to export their best practice in sludge-management.

L. SERRANO replied that so far this has not been done. He emphasised that he was here to provide information about the revolutionary system in place in El Castillo, and thus to contribute to the sharing of best practice. He repeated that with water saving equal to the annual consumption of the city of Madrid, there is a strong desire to see this technology in the service of one of our main resources – water – spread elsewhere.

R. HELMER asked how it is possible to engage with conservationists and others who bring an end to sustainable managed countryside practice with misconceived notions of animal welfare.

A. HOGG stated that the key to winning them over was to educate the younger generations in the imperatives of sustainable countryside management. What people don't realise is that gamekeepers are the real conservationists, not protectionists. The general public needs to be brought on board and this popular backing will help reverse the negative trend.

MEP J. PURVIS added that there was also a degree of envy amongst conservationist groups, which led them to refuse going back on misconceived notions.

M. EBNER stated that he will be bringing all of the subjects discussed up with the Commission, and he hoped for support for other MEPs and attendees. He asked whether S. BERLATO could put a written question to the Commission on the points he raised. M. EBNER concluded saying that the July meeting of the Intergroup would deal with how to establish a stronger countryside alliance, looking how best to represent rural world, and its rights, without having to submit to more and more regulations made by city-dwelling population prejudicing countryside traditions and practices.

7. Any other business

No other topics are raised in this part of the agenda.

8. Next meeting

J. PURVIS closed the meeting by thanking all speakers and attendees. The next meeting deals with the issue "Towards an alliance of countryside organisations", and will be held on **July, 5th 2006**.

European Landowner's Organisation (ELO)