

Statement to Environment Programme Committee

concerning the outcome of the “Northern Dimension of Biodiversity” Symposium

The European Working Group on Biodiversity asked the Finnish Science Council to organise a symposium on the northern dimension of biodiversity, to focus attention on the unique aspects of arctic and boreal ecosystems.

The Academy of Finland and the Finnish Biodiversity Research Programme organised the symposium as part of the Finnish Presidency series of seminars. It took place in Saariselkä, Lapland, from November 20th - 23rd 1999.

High level scientists presented papers on arctic and boreal ecosystems to an audience including some policy making organisations and funding bodies. Participants came from all arctic and boreal countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Russia, the USA and Canada. The European Commission was also represented by the Director of the Environment programme, the head of unit of the Biodiversity and Global Change unit, and the scientific officer responsible for biodiversity research in that key action.

The earlier activities of the European Working Group on Biodiversity have proved very useful for the exchange of experience and information. It considered topics relevant to the whole subject of biodiversity in the European Union nations, and contributed largely to the formulation of the biodiversity work program in the Global Change key action of the 5th Framework Programme.

This symposium follows on in the direction established by the working group, in encouraging the exchange of ideas and information between states interested in monitoring and conserving biodiversity, in this case in the field of arctic and boreal ecosystems.

The participants felt that the eco-regional orientation of the seminar was particularly interesting and fruitful, and is one that could add value to the EU research in biodiversity.

Apart from important scientific results, the symposium led to some conclusions that may be of considerable significance to the EU biodiversity research strategy. Among them:

- eco-regional meetings allow participants to focus on the particularities of a given eco-region, and to examine the extent to which conclusions may apply to other regions.

- information from such symposia should be prepared and presented in such a way that it may be injected into policy discussions.
- authors presenting papers at such symposia should be drawn from the top level of scientists, who are themselves close to the policy-making process.
- policy-makers with scientific interests should be encouraged to participate, so that a dialogue between scientists and policy-makers can lead to more policy-relevant scientific research, and more scientifically-based policy.

Finland would therefore like to propose to this body the establishment of a “European platform for biodiversity research strategy”.

The aim of this platform would be to allow Member States of the EU, the associated states, the states in the accession process, and the European Commission to discuss strategic issues relating to biodiversity research.

Its focus would be the long-term strategic orientation of biodiversity research in Europe. By giving the opportunity for the Member States to discuss these issues, it would contribute to:

- national and EC preparations for the Subsidiary Body for Technical and Technological Advice for the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity
- national and EC biodiversity research strategies and priorities
- the dissemination of best practices in biodiversity conservation between the Member States
- exchange of information on national biodiversity programmes
- the opportunity to address biodiversity issues in key European ecosystems in a systematic way.

Finland envisages a regular meeting, taking place at 6-month intervals, about 2 months before each SBSTTA meeting. All participants in the FP5 would be invited to send 2 delegates, one a scientist with policy-making interests, and one a policy-maker with scientific interests.

We envisage a 2-day meeting, the first focusing on one particular eco-region of relevance to Europe, and the second on scientific policy issues arising from the eco-region discussion, and on the scientific issues on the agenda of the next SBSTTA.meeting.