

Message of Greeting

Prime Minister Christian Wulff



The German Commission for UNESCO has been using the occasion of its 67th General Meeting to particularly emphasize the theme of 'UNESCO biosphere reserves – model regions with a global reputation'. I am delighted to be able to express my appreciation for this work in the journal 'UNESCO today'.

You have chosen this date prudently as it is 15 years ago that the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro defined sustainable development as being a globally authoritative principle and made extensive recommendations for the realisation of the formulated goals. Sustainable development is an issue that the biosphere reserves feel particularly committed to and also bring to life. It is time to take stock of what has already been achieved, to take up the future challenges and to more firmly establish and extend the role-model function of the biosphere reserves as regions for an environmentally friendly and sustainable development.

The programme 'Man and the Biosphere' (MAB), which was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in 1970, is a success story as far as its realisation is concerned. In 1974 the concept of the biosphere reserves was developed within the framework of the MAB programme. In 1995 the 'Seville Strategy' as well as the 'International Guidelines for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves' provided a groundbreaking basis for the preservation and development of UNESCO biosphere reserves.

Today there are 529 biosphere reserves worldwide in 105 countries. Thirteen of them are in Germany. The north German coastal landscape is, as one of the last large-scale nature landscapes in Central Europe an integral part of the world network through the three Waddensea biosphere reserves of Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg. Lower Saxony has not only contributed

widespread areas of the Lower Saxony Middle Elbe into the trans-federal-state and largest German biosphere reserve 'Elbe River Landscape'. It was also the first Federal State to have areas of a UNESCO biosphere reserve on the Middle Elbe designated by law on the basis of the Federal Nature Conservation Act. The objective is to uniformly preserve and develop the area with its landscapes, cultural and socio-economic values and functions, oriented towards the coexistence of mankind and nature.

Biosphere reserves offer new opportunities for regional and tourist development. They create incentives for ecological cultivation and marketing of regional products. They are also locations for experiencing nature, for environmental education and research. Biosphere reserves go far beyond nature conservation. New challenges for biosphere reserves are emerging with regard to the looming issue of climate change.

I would like to emphasize that the work in the biosphere reserves is oriented towards involving the local population and winning them over as responsible supporters for the development of the biosphere reserves. Only if the local and regional players can identify with the idea of biosphere reserves and sustainability as such, progress can be made, which can, in turn, serve as an example for other regions.

The policy of the government of Lower Saxony is particularly committed to the principle of sustainability, developing and monitoring a modern and comprehensive sustainability strategy – relating to all policy areas and all departments. Thus we submitted a report on sustainability in 2006 and created a special unit dealing with sustainability at the Ministry of the Environment. We are in the process of developing an 'Alliance for Sustainability in Lower Saxony' together with the industrial sector.

Furthermore, sustainability regions have been defined. The draft of a funding programme 'Experience Nature and Develop Sustainably' is, at present, in the process of being approved.

The Lower Saxon 'Elbe River Valley Meadows' biosphere reserve, designated by law – as part of the trans-federal-state UNESCO biosphere reserve 'Elbe River Landscape' – as well as the biosphere reserve Wadden Sea of Lower Saxony are included in these considerations with priority.

I would like to wish the German Commission for UNESCO and the German MAB National Committee continuous good luck in their work and sincerely hope that the journal about the UNESCO biosphere reserves is widely and well received.

Hanover, September 2007

Christian Wulff is Prime Minister of Lower Saxony and has been chairman of the Conference of German Prime Ministers in 2006/07.



UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea and Hallig Islands

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