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- Preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems is a key issue.
- The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report clearly showed that biodiversity and ecosystems are seriously threatened.
- Some of the root causes are: *water stress, deforestation and insufficient connection between ecosystems.*
- But also climate change affects ecosystems. This is problematic, because their preservation is crucial to our efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Against this backdrop we will have to step up our efforts.
- The question is: how can we maintain and realise robust ecosystems and establish ecological networks.
- In my country we face a serious dilemma in preserving vital biodiversity. Industrial expansion and growing needs for housing and recreation put pressure on our protected areas. To cope with this problem we have opted for integrated planning in land use and management. We advocate prudent use of land for human activities in order to preserve our protected areas. This requires adequate policy instruments for spatial planning. Moreover, we do our utmost to establish ecological networks. Special policy measures are in place to achieve this goal.
- We are not the only country that struggles with the dilemma between socio-economic growth and preserving biodiversity and ecosystems.
- More efforts on a [pan] European level are needed along the same lines I described. And we should align these efforts with the much-needed efforts to adapt to climate change. Ecosystems need to be sufficiently robust to be able to offset the effects of climate change. So, the completion of a coherent network of nature areas – such as the EU's Natura 2000, cannot come a moment too soon. I see wetlands, forest and peat bogs as important ecosystems in which biodiversity and climate policy can strengthen each other, also at a European scale.
- Finding the right incentives, new forms of financing and the establishment of new funds for the sustainable use of valuable ecosystems will be crucial

topics. The upcoming conference of parties of both the Climate Change Convention and the Convention on Biodiversity will discuss this issues and I do hope we can move forward.

- But we don't have to wait for these Cop's to take action. In the Netherlands we have made the preservation of biodiversity and natural resources one of our key priorities. We do find it crucial that our use of major resource flows like soy, palm oil, wood, and biomass will become sustainable. I am actively engaged in activities in this context. Setting up, testing and implementing a set of sustainability criteria for the use of biomass for energy purposes is one of the priorities. I do that together with other countries and in partnerships with businesses and ngo's. I sincerely hope we can give an impulse to the creation of sustainable markets for biofuels. We have formulated the sustainability criteria. Now we need to take action to implement these criteria.
- At a pan European level we can contribute to many of these actions I have outlined. We made a start. Yet we have to step up our efforts to implement decisive and proactive measures to preserve and establish robust ecosystems. I trust that this meeting today will help us to realise this challenging ambition.