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## Committed to Green and Valderrama Declaration

I was disappointed to see last month's articles by Neil Thomas and Gordon Child, which gave a very distorted picture of the Committed to Green programme and in particular the golf-environment summit held at Valderrama last November. The event had originally been planned as a joint meeting between the USGA Turfgrass and Environmental Research Committee and the ecology officers of the different national golf federations here in Europe, along with a number of other researchers and specialists. The main purpose was to review progress on both sides of the Atlantic in terms of environmental research and application programmes (such as Committed to Green and the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program), to discuss technical aspects of biodiversity conservation, watershed management and recognition systems, and to look at future initiatives.

As the summit programme came together we also found we had the opportunity to bring together the top officials from the golf authorities and from the major environmental bodies. This led to the idea of producing the Valderrama Declaration, a statement on golf, the environment and sustainability, which could be jointly signed by these key organisations.

On the day we had the Presidents of the USGA and EGA, the Secretary of the R&A along with the Director Generals of the World Wide Fund for Nature International and European Commission Environment Directorate. Supporting statements were sent by the International Olympic Committee

and United Nations Environment Programme. You do not often have the chance to get such a gathering in one place, and it was a unique opportunity not to be missed.

All parties shared a common platform, spoke of the importance of the golf-environment relationship and the need for a positive, collaborative way forward. The signing of the Declaration demonstrates that the golf authorities recognise the importance of environment in the development and management of golf, and likewise that the environmental authorities accept that golf is a serious player in the field of sustainability and environmental stewardship. That is a remarkable coalition of support for what we are doing and it represents a major step forward for golf and for all those working in this field.

We fully appreciated the need for greenkeeping organisations to be represented at the summit and we went to considerable effort to ensure that there were two FEGGA delegates in attendance, as there were also from the GCSAA. The next step was to invite other interested organisations to offer their support and endorsement of the Valderrama Declaration, to give it further weight and momentum.

The declaration makes five essential points: (i) golf is intimately associated with nature; (ii) the growth of the modern game has exposed golf to a wide range of environmental challenges, (iii) the popular appeal of golf gives it scope to be a major force for promoting environmental care; (iv) the golf authorities recognise the importance of environmental issues

and have already been doing much work in scientific research, education and conservation programmes; and (v) golf is committed to continuing its efforts in this field through specific, tangible programmes" i.e. Audubon and Committed to Green.

The Declaration places the traditional values of golf and respect for its natural heritage firmly to the fore. There is nothing here which I can see being objectionable to greenkeepers anywhere. It is certainly not American-biased, nor was the summit, and to suggest otherwise is a gross distortion.

This is doubly unfortunate as we risk taking our eye off the real ball, when we have so much in common. The new Committed to Green Foundation shares many of the goals of the greenkeeping profession and we are certainly keen to work more closely together. I ask FEGGA and its constituent organisations to look again at the Valderrama Declaration, to consider how we can cooperate on the Committed to Green programme, and to add their support to this positive and constructive initiative.

Despite these current problems and misunderstandings I am glad to note that Greenkeeper International wishes to open a running debate on Committed to Green and environmental issues generally. Together, I am sure we can work towards a more positive understanding and achieve mutual goals.

**David Stubbs, Executive Director  
 Committed to Green Foundation**

## Committed to Green: Lack of interest?

I write in response to the comments made with regard to the apparent lack of greenkeeping interest shown by the Committed to Green foundation in Greenkeeper International - January edition.

I am sure that everyone expressing an interest in golf will widely accept that the concept of Committed to Green, i.e. to provide a platform and standard for European Golf Clubs to demonstrate objectively their environmental performance, is to be commended.

The Committed to Green initiative, once fully operational, will provide a very positive way in which individual clubs and the golfing industry can show true environmental commitment. Given this, it is essential that we all work to the same end, this will involve a sharing of information, of problems, practical difficulties and solutions.

There is clearly a need for greater greenkeeper representation throughout the development stages of Committed to Green. To date greenkeeping interests have largely been covered by two European representatives on the Technical Working Panel, both have greenkeeping experience, and by myself and Jonathan Smith, who, when working closely with greenkeepers on a day-to-day basis do ensure that the greenkeeping interests are being considered. I did, prior to the Valderrama summit, stress to BIGGA that I would highlight the deficiencies and make the Panel aware of the need to give greater reference to the greenkeeping body. This I did and was applauded for it by Ron Dobson, of the USGA Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programme. The Federation of European Golf Greenkeeping Associations (FEGGA)

were also represented at the summit part of their role must surely be to pass information back down to ground level.

Now that the foundation and infrastructure of Committed to Green have been put into place, it is time to consider practical issues and in particular practical solutions to a number of difficult problems. Grass clippings and grass waste disposal springs to mind and this was a case I made clear at the Valderrama summit. The newly formed Committed to Green Foundation will I hope offer a new opportunity to which greater greenkeeping representation can be built in and I do hope that personalities aside, we can all work together to promote what must be a very positive step forward for the European Golfing Industry.

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