

# Committed to Green

## ...but where are the Greenkeepers?

**Neil Thomas reports...**

Since its launch in September 1997, 'Committed to Green' has sought to attract interest among golf clubs from across Europe in its attempt to encourage clubs to address environmental issues. In early November a US/Europe Golf Environment Summit met at Valderrama Golf Club in Spain and resulted in "The Valderrama Declaration" signed on behalf of the golf authorities by the Royal & Ancient Golf Club, the United States Golf Association and the European Golf Association and endorsed on behalf of sport and the environment community by other major bodies. The Declaration sets out a forward-looking perspective on the golf community's role in initiating and supporting environmental education, research and conservation programmes.

The Federation of European Golf Greenkeepers Association (FEGGA) was represented at the Summit and a report was subsequently made to the FEGGA Annual Conference held later in November again in Spain. Implementation of 'Committed to Green' will be through the Committed to Green Foundation which became operational from 1 January 2000, superseding the former European Golf Association Ecology Unit headed by David Stubbs, who will now lead the new Foundation.

It became clear during the FEGGA Conference that there had been no greenkeeping representation from Europe during the Valderrama Summit. Indeed discussions in relation to 'Committed to Green' have not included any input from the greenkeepers throughout Europe simply through the inability of the EGA Ecology Unit to consult with the greenkeeping Associations. Published information available to date would indicate a similarly negative attitude to the greenkeeping profession from the new Foundation if the almost total absence of refer-

ence to greenkeepers and greenkeeping is to be taken as the yardstick. Put quite simply, it is greenkeepers who have to work with 'Committed to Green' and be involved in its implementation from the outset.

So clearly something is seriously amiss. The structure for implementing 'Committed to Green' has to be questioned in that there is seemingly little in place beneath a top management tier. An empathy with greenkeepers and their Associations must be established and at present is clearly lacking. Delegates to the FEGGA Conference made it quite clear that the present position is not sustainable and the 17 national Associations present unanimously agreed that the programme could not be supported as presently constituted. This was not to say that the Associations do not support 'Committed to Green', far from it. However, there is a lack of confidence, a feeling that national greenkeeping Associations are being ignored and that there is no recognition of the fundamental role of greenkeepers in implementing the programme.

Yet it is greenkeepers and golf clubs who are moving forward irrespective of 'Committed to Green'. There are two measurable awards in this regard. In Scotland, the Scottish Golf Course Wildlife Initiative currently has 250 golf clubs registered with whom it is working. 34 of these have become eligible for the Scottish Golf Course Wildlife Charter, which is presented to clubs who set up and implement environmental management plans.

Within BIGGA the Environmental Award Competition has now completed a successful fifth year with outstanding industry support from Amazone Ground Care. The award is creating environmental awareness among golf clubs and their members as well as creating a focus for greenkeepers to demonstrate the environmental benefits of golf cours-

es. Both these awards should be embraced by 'Committed to Green' which as yet has little relevance I suspect to the vast majority of golf clubs.

FEGGA was therefore authorised by its member Associations to write to the R&A, the European Golf Association and the PGA European Tour, as the three funding bodies of the Committed to Green Foundation, to express its profound dissatisfaction with the present situation and its serious concerns for the future of the programme if the current ambivalence to consulting with the greenkeeping associations is to continue. For its part, BIGGA's Board of Management has determined to make its views known to the R&A in the hope that this matter can be urgently reviewed.

Furthermore BIGGA has decided that, through the pages of Greenkeeper International, it will address these issues and seek the views of the bodies and individuals involved with 'Committed to Green'. We can then highlight the key role greenkeepers have to play in implementing the programme and how this can be successfully achieved by consultation with the greenkeeping Associations and their representation on technical committees charged with evolving and implementing the 'Committed to Green' programme.

To this end we will welcome contributions to the pages of Greenkeeper International in order that a constructive debate can be initiated which we hope will ultimately be for the benefit of greenkeepers and the golf clubs they represent when they decide to seek the 'Committed to Green Certificate of Environmental Excellence'.

Finally one is reminded of the old adage, 'they also serve who only stand and wait', in this case the greenkeepers. The time has surely come for those in charge to stand and deliver.