

GERMAN LAW ON STANDING TO SUE

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FOREWORD

As part of its general concern with maintaining environmental quality, IUCN has established in Bonn an Environmental Law Centre. Over a period of years, the Centre has gathered legislative and regulatory texts relating to the environment and this documentation is now probably the largest collection of its kind existing anywhere.

The staff of the Centre is analyzing the material in its possession for a variety of purposes, and legally-trained personnel from various jurisdictions have been invited to participate in this programme. The present series of reports has been instituted as a medium for publication of the results of such analytical work and related studies in environmental law.

The initial papers in the series will be concerned with new concepts and procedures that might have application in jurisdictions other than those in which they originated. It is hoped that these studies may stimulate action to adapt the new ideas for use in other legal regimes.

A discussion of standing to sue in environmental litigation in the United States forms the subject of IUCN Environmental Law Paper No. 2, and has been written by David Gregory.

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THE AUTHOR

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of standing to sue under German law is embraced by the term "Klagebefugnis", which denotes the right to bring a lawsuit before an administrative court and thereby start proceedings for the review of an administrative act or the omission on the part of a public agency to perform such an act which, in the opinion of the plaintiff, is illegal. Almost without exception, procedural rules under German public law provide that only the plaintiff who asserts that he has suffered personal injury has standing to sue. Only such a plaintiff can seek a court decision to annul an administrative act by a government agency or to require such an agency to perform an act of this kind which it has either illegally refused or omitted to do;¹ under section 42, paragraph 2, VwGO, the action is admissible if the plaintiff asserts that his right has been infringed. The same principle applies to the review of administrative rule-making (section 47 VwGO) introduced in some of the states (Länder) by virtue of an authorization under federal law; section 47 VwGO requires that the person bringing the action has suffered a "disadvantage" or is likely to do so.

Furthermore, the constitutional complaint provided for under federal law and serving to protect the citizen against any violation by the state of the basic rights laid down in the Basic Law² is admissible only if the plaintiff asserts that his rights have been infringed.³ The purpose of all these provisions is to restrict standing to cases where injury to an individual is involved and thus exclude a "Popularklage", i.e. the possibility of proceedings being introduced by a party not directly affected.⁴ Actions before the administrative court are designed to protect individual rights, that is, to safeguard the citizen against any infringement of his rights by a public agency. According to the general view, the administrative action is not intended, at least not primarily, as a means of controlling administrative agencies and ensuring, in the interest of the general public, that actions by government agencies are in keeping with the law.⁵ But traditionally the administrative process both afforded protection to individual rights and served as a means of control of official action.⁶ This dual function is still manifest in the procedural principles contained in the VwGO (especially the principle whereby the court must ascertain all relevant facts of the case, section 86 VwGO), so that it seems doubtful whether the prevailing view is correct.

CHAPTER 2

PRINCIPLES OF GERMAN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURAL LAW

Where an administrative act is challenged, mere injury in fact resulting from objective illegal action on the part of a government agency is not in itself sufficient ground to grant standing; the plaintiff must also have suffered damage to his legally protected individual interests. It is necessary that the illegality of an agency action claimed by the plaintiff derives from the violation of a provision which places the plaintiff in a subjective legal position, and affords protection to interests which he contends have been injured by the action. The mere violation of rules of law exclusively enacted in the public interest is not sufficient; the rule of law in question must be one enacted in his own interest (the so-called "protective law theory").⁷ The same principle applies with respect to litigation for review of the constitutionality of agency action, whereas in the case of administrative proceedings instituted with a view to requiring a public agency to perform a duty incumbent upon it the conditions establishing standing to sue are less exacting,⁸ though the protective law theory is applicable when the matter is considered on the merits.⁹

Where official action is directly addressed to the citizen, the plaintiff always meets the requirement of the standing doctrine since his personal rights are obviously affected. The problem lies where the injury to the citizen does not ensue from the fact that action by a government agency was addressed to him but to a third party. Typical of this category are proceedings by a concern against the granting of a licence to a competitor and actions taken by a landowner against a building permit granted to a neighbour. This is where the protective law theory has to make its most subtle distinctions. The courts try to ascertain from the meaning, the purpose and genesis of the rules of law in question (including zoning regulations, which in Germany are issued with force of law) whether they (also) serve to protect the plaintiff's individual interest or are enacted exclusively in the public interest.¹⁰ No uniform interpretation has emerged in this respect, especially with regard to building zoning and planning legislation for which the court of last instance is in most cases the state (Land) higher administrative court, not the Federal Administrative Court. A major criterion for the interpretation of such legislation is the endeavour to keep the category of persons with standing to sue as small as possible. Here

the courts require a "clear decision on the part of the legislator in favour of an adequately defined category of persons".¹¹

If the review of the law or laws which the plaintiff claims to have been violated shows that they have been enacted solely in the public interest, the lawsuit in exceptional cases, may be still admissible. Indeed, the Federal Administrative Court has of late alternatively related standing to sue to the infringement of basic rights. Where "blatantly faulty decisions" have been taken under building legislation, for instance, the court would grant standing to the owner of land adjacent to another plot to be built upon if the building permit, even though violating only a law which solely serves the public interest in rational planning, lastingly alters the situation of plaintiff's property and thereby causes him "serious and intolerable" injury.¹² In such cases the owner of the neighbouring plot has direct recourse to article 14 of the Basic Law, which guarantees the right of property. Under this aspect not only the owner's interest in the use of his own property can be asserted but also the right to run a business without illegal interference (e.g. where a serious and intolerable interference is caused by water pollution or by a restriction of the flow of water).¹³

The narrow standing doctrine also has significance for the treatment of actions brought by associations ("Verbandsklagen"). Under German law there is a strong view opposed to accord standing to associations. Up to now this has prevented any statutory widening of standing (a measure which, in the case of associations, would be possible under section 42, paragraph 2, VwGO) and has proved to be an even greater obstacle to the development of the right of standing on a non-statutory basis. Regardless of whatever type of procedure is involved - whether an appeal challenging agency action or requiring such agency to perform a duty incumbent on it, an action for the review of administrative rule-making, or whether in the form of a constitutional complaint - organizations are rigorously denied the right to assert the interests of their members. Their standing to sue remains limited to the assertion of their own interests, which are very narrowly defined.¹⁴

There are further limits to administrative court actions in respect of substantive law, that is, on the merits. Courts tend not to review comprehensively actions brought on the ground of infringement of a protective law or a basic right, but rather to confine themselves to the legal point of view under which the court has granted standing. Whereas in the case of complaints for annulment of an administrative act directly addressed to the plaintiff the court examines every aspect of the legality of the agency

action irrespective of whether any illegality could result from a rule of law affording protection to the plaintiff or only to the public interest, in case of complaints by third parties the court merely considers whether a protective law or a basic right invoked by the plaintiff have been infringed.¹⁵ Thus, in seeking to challenge administrative action affecting his personal rights, the plaintiff cannot at the same time assert damage to the public interest.

Where the plaintiff seeks to compel agency action it has always been clear that the court considers only whether the plaintiff is entitled to demand implementation of the action which the agency has either refused or failed to take.¹⁶ The private citizen may also be entitled to such claim on the basis of the right to sound use of administrative discretion as recognized by case law and expert legal opinion.¹⁷ However, even then the protective law theory applies. The citizen has no general right to require that in matters involving him factually the agency concerned must exercise without error the discretionary powers granted by law. He has such a right only where the rule of law authorizing the agency was enacted in his individual interest and not merely in the public interest. Court decisions in this respect show no uniformity, however, and there is a growing tendency to widen the scope of the right to sound use of discretion.¹⁸ Of course, the courts do not simply substitute their own discretion for that of the agency but confine themselves to cases where agency decisions are obviously erroneous (section 114 VwGO).¹⁹

CHAPTER 3

APPLICATION IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The above principles of German procedural administrative law apply also in the field of environmental protection. In practice, they mean that the private citizen has only very limited possibilities for challenging illegal actions by public agencies in order to preserve natural resources.²⁰

Persons living in the vicinity of an industrial establishment have always been granted standing to sue where they invoke their right to protection from emission. They are entitled to seek in court the annulment of a permit granted to the operator of such plant on the ground that the plant causes unlawful air pollution, molestation by noise, and radiation.²¹ They can also take court action to require the competent authorities to take appropriate steps against installations causing environmental hazards which either require no permit at all or fail to satisfy the conditions laid down by the permit, thus applying the principle of the right to the sound exercise of discretionary agency powers.²² Up to now, however, no such lawsuit has ever been successful.

The same applies in the field of water pollution, where the lower proprietor of a river can contest in court any permit under which the use of the water by others would constitute an environmental hazard and hence damage his own rights.²³ The rules of law applicable to protection from emission and effluents are deemed not merely to serve the public interest by ensuring the rational use of natural resources but also by protecting a neighbour's individual interest, although any such action taken by a neighbour, because of the limited scope of review, does not cover all the aspects that have to be taken into consideration when deciding on a permit. Environmental hazards caused by emissions from industrial plants, such as nuclear power stations, affect only the public interest insofar as they extend over large areas, have only indirect effects or wide-ranging implications; therefore, they fall outside the scope of review of a neighbour's action.

The question of standing to sue is doubtful where an agency decision, especially with regard to the use of biocides and the setting of tolerances for biocide residues in food-stuffs affects the health of every consumer. The relevant provisions of legislation relating to biocides and food-stuffs meet per se the requirements of the courts

that legally protected individual interests are affected, for, in this case, the public interest is fully identical with the interest of the community at large. On the other hand, the courts have in other cases mostly refused to grant standing where it has not been possible to determine the category of persons entitled to judicial review.²⁴ Even if standing to sue were confined to consumers, it would, nonetheless, de facto be a genuine case of a "public action" since every citizen is also a consumer.

The possibilities open to the citizen to institute court proceedings for a review of zoning regulations, variances from such regulations, and building permits in order to protect the environment are rather limited. Unless it is a case of a neighbour seeking protection from emission that constitutes a direct environmental hazard, standing tends to be denied. The principles relating to zoning regulations and building permits contained in the relevant laws, in particular the Federal Building Law of 23 June 1960,²⁵ are for the most part deemed to have been enacted in the public interest.²⁶ But here there is a slight correction which makes it possible to grant standing on the ground of a violation of article 14 of the Basic Law in cases where, as a result of a blatantly wrong planning decision, the owner of neighbouring property is "seriously and intolerably" injured.

This was the criterion underlying a decision by the Gelsenkirchen administrative court,²⁷ though it is not yet final. The court found in favour of a group of citizens who complained against the decision by the town of Gelsenkirchen to grant permission for the establishment of a huge industrial plant on a site in between two residential areas which had long been used as garden plots. The court did not go into the question, likewise disputed, of whether air pollution law had been violated; but it based its findings on the argument that the town authorities had failed to take into account that one of the declared objectives of the Federal Building Law was to ensure that the mistakes of the past in the housing sector which affected broad sections of the population would not be repeated and that, where possible, healthy, peaceful living conditions should be created. The court was of the opinion that in view of the various detrimental effects caused by industrial establishments, not all of which were merely a question of air pollution but affected living conditions as a whole, residential and industrial areas should not be intermingled, and that local authorities which did not have enough suitable land would have to forego the establishment or extension of certain industries within their boundaries. The court held that the local authorities had obviously improperly fulfilled their planning function

which constituted a grave and intolerable encroachment upon the property of the plaintiffs. All the same, litigation in its present form based on article 14 of the Basic Law cannot serve as a medium for the comprehensive correction of erroneous planning causing environmental hazards because the sole test is still the effect of such planning on the property owner's ability to enjoy his rights of use and not the interest of the public at large.

Under legislation for the conservation of nature and the protection of the landscape and municipal regulations governing green areas, as well as regards recreational facilities, the private citizen has no standing to sue at all with a view to protecting the environment. The applicable laws are deemed to have been enacted exclusively in the public interest. Typical of the general attitude and, at the same time, evidence of the rejection in principle of standing of private interest groups, also in the matter of legislation relating to environmental protection, is a decision taken by the Lüneburg higher administrative court in 1969²⁸ in proceedings for the review of the pertinent zoning regulation. In that case the "Deutsche Naturschutzring e.V." and the "Verein Naturschutz der Insel Sylt" requesting that a decision changing the status of a protected area (Naturschutzgebiet) into that of a building area be declared invalid. The applicants urged a wider application of section 47 of VwGO, although up to then there had been only one court decision in this respect,²⁹ and contended that a reduction in the size of nature conservation areas would restrict their field of activity. In addition, the second applicant, the "Verein Naturschutz der Insel Sylt", which owned another nature reserve about 650 metres from the proposed building area, asserted that the project constituted damage to its property. The court held that these associations lacked standing, on the following grounds:

1. The purpose of section 47 VwGO is to exclude citizen suits, that is, not only to deter frivolous suits but also to anticipate in a single proceeding a variety of possible subsequent actions for annulment. Accordingly, standing to sue is subject to the same test as under Section 42 VwGO, which require the claimant to have suffered damage to personal interests that are protected by law. The complainants in this case are unable to make such assertion since this test is only met if the law explicitly accords protection to such interests.
2. Nature conservation is not a right granted to individuals.

3. The complainants are not entitled to assert infringements of the rights of their members.
4. The possibility that the second complainant's property might be affected by the building site is not relevant in this case, since in protecting a neighbour's rights the court cannot take the situation of the whole environment into consideration.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENT TRENDS

Recently, several publications have appeared which have proposed legislative action to establish standing to sue of private interest groups,³⁰ in order to ensure that environment interests, in particular in the field of nature conservation, may be afforded some protection. On this question two different concepts have emerged.

According to the first, only certain organizations would be granted standing to sue on the ground of their "recognition" by the competent authorities.³¹ The second view is that there should be no restrictions at all on the category of plaintiffs, so that it would include individuals, action committees seeking to protect a specific area etc., as well as environment-protection organizations. On the other hand, standing would be subject to special admission by the court, which would have to consider summarily the merits of the case, the significance of the matter at issue, as well as the part the plaintiff has played in preceding administrative procedures.³²

The advocates of the citizen suit, especially action by interested groups, can rightly point out that though associations' lawsuits will be rejected under public law in any case, civil law, to be more exact the laws relating to competition, and anti-trust legislation recognizes lawsuits of this nature. According to section 13, paragraph 1, of the Law against Unfair Competition - UWG - dated 7 June 1909,³³ section 2, paragraph 1, of the Free Gifts Ordinance of 9 March 1932,³⁴ section 12, paragraph 1, of the Discount Sales Law of 25 November 1933³⁵ and section 35, paragraph 2, of the Law against Restraints on Competition - GWB - of 27 July 1957,³⁶ competitors of the enterprise which has suffered damage or is likely to do so, as well as associations for the promotion of trade or industrial interests, but in the case of section 35, paragraph 2, of the GWB, only such associations, can take direct action against the person or persons causing the damage for discontinuance of the practices involved. Section 13, paragraph 1a of the UWG, which was introduced in 1965, extends this right to consumer associations with regard to certain offences.

The general opinion is that all these provisions are based on the principle that the persons and organizations

with standing to sue under this legislation are not seeking to vindicate private interests, but are rather acting as "representatives of the public interest" in fair and free competition.³⁷ Of course this situation does not bear immediate comparison with that existing under environmental legislation, because there it involves the review of agency action, whereas under anti-trust legislation and the law against unfair competition, associations can institute direct proceedings against the person violating the law, either in addition to or in place of any action taken by the appropriate authorities which may not be adequately equipped for the purpose. The fundamental principle, however, is the same: the law does not entrust government agencies alone with the representation of the public interest, but opts for a mixed system of enforcing the law by allowing private citizens or groups to play a co-operative part with such agencies concerned in ensuring the proper functioning of the legal system. In this context it is to be pointed out that, as regards environmental legislation, it is not intended to challenge the right of public agencies to act in the public interest, especially where it is a question of exercising discretionary powers.

The call for the establishment of standing for associations does not imply that henceforth the courts should usurp the executive function in environmental matters and take political decisions for the enforcement and implementation of environmental legislation. On the contrary, its purpose is to institutionalize the citizen suit as a means of controlling the legality of action taken by the responsible agencies. Such safeguards appear necessary since it has been proved that without fundamental structural changes, agencies do not afford the necessary guarantees for the adequate enforcement and implementation of environmental legislation. However, the citizen suit should not by any means be understood exclusively as a means of correction or subsequent intervention. Its function is more than anything a preventive one in that a public agency, with the threat of a lawsuit over its head, is more likely to make greater allowance in its decision-making, in keeping with the intentions of the applicable law, for interests which have in the past received inadequate consideration in comparison with economic interests, in particular for the interest of every citizen in the preservation of his natural resources. The citizen suit will furthermore ensure that groups previously under-represented in administrative procedures will be allowed adequate participation. To this extent, though well-functioning political controls would certainly be preferable, it is also an aspect of the pragmatic development of pluralistic democracy.³⁸

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Section 42, para. 1. Verwaltungsgerichtsordnung (Rules of Procedure of Administrative Courts), dated 21 January 1960 - VwGO - : Bundesgesetzblatt - BGBI. - 1960 I, p. 17 with numerous amendments.
2. Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany) - GG - enacted on 23 May 1949 : BGBI. 1949, p. 1 with numerous amendments; see BGBI. III, 100-1.
3. Art. 93, para. 1 (4a) GG in conjunction with section 70 of the Bundesverfassungsgerichtsgesetz (Law on the Federal Constitutional Court), dated 12 March 1951 - BVerfGG - BGBI. 1951 I, p. 243 with amendments (BGBI. 1956 I, p. 662; 1959 I, p. 297; 1961 I, p. 1665; 1963 I, p. 589; 1964 I, p. 593).
4. Eyermann/Fröhler, Verwaltungsgerichtsordnung 5th ed. (1971), section 42, observation 85; Redeker/v. Oertzen, Verwaltungsgerichtsordnung, 4th ed. (1971) section 47, observation 13; Maunz/Siegloch/Schmidt-Bleibtreu/Klein, Bundesverfassungsgerichtsgesetz, 2nd issue (1967), section 90, observation 38.
5. Bettermann, Wesen und Streitgegenstand der verwaltungsgerichtlichen Anfechtungsklage, Deutsches Verwaltungsblatt - DVBl - 1953, p. 163 et seq.; Eyermann/Fröhler, loc. cit.; Ule, Verwaltungsprozeßrecht, 4th ed. (1966), sections 1 III, 33 II 1.
6. See Sellmann, Der Weg zur neuzeitlichen Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeit, in: Staatsbürger und Staatsgewalt vol. 1 (1963), p. 37 et seq.

Chapter 2

7. Decisions of the Bundesverwaltungsgericht (Federal Administrative Court) Entscheidungssammlung (Decisions) - BVerwGE - 27, pp. 29, 33; 28, pp. 131, 133 et seq.; 268, p. 273 et seq.; Friauf gives a comprehensive survey of more recent case law in Der Rechtsschutz des sogenannten Dritten in der verwaltungsgerichtlichen Rechtsprechung, Juristische Analysen - JurA - 1969, p. 3 et seq.; 1970, p. 652 et seq.; Eyermann/Fröhler, loc. cit., section 42, observation 96 et seq.
8. Eyermann/Fröhler, loc. cit., section 47, observation 28.

9. BVerwG, Juristenzeitung - JZ - 1964, p. 301; Oberverwaltungsgericht (Higher Administrative Court) - OVG - Münster, DVBl. 1967, pp. 546, 547; 1967, pp. 779-80; Eyermann/Fröhler, loc. cit., section 42, observation 91.
10. See Friauf, loc. cit.
11. BVerwGE 27, pp. 29, 33; also BVerwGE 28, pp. 268, 273 et seq.; 32, p. 173 et seq.
12. BVerwGE 32, p. 173 et seq.; BVerwG, DVBl. 1970, pp. 60, 61, 62 et seq., 65.
13. BVerwGE 35, p. 248 et seq.
14. BVerwG, DVBl. 1958, p. 391; OVG Münster, Neue Juristische Wochenschrift - NJW - 1958, p. 1555; OVG Lüneburg, NJW 1970, p. 773; Bundesverfassungsgericht (Federal Constitutional Court); Entscheidungssammlung (Decisions) - BVerGE - 1, pp. 97, 101; 10 pp. 134, 136; 13, pp. 1, 9; 16, p. 147; cf. (critical) Wolf, Die Klagebefugnis der Verbände (1971), p. 47 et seq.; Naumann, Klagebefugnis von Verbänden im Verwaltungsprozeß, Die öffentliche Verwaltung - DÖV - 1971, p. 378 et seq.
15. BVerwGE 28, p. 268 et seq.; BVerwG, DÖV 1969, p. 142 et seq.; DVBl. 1970, p. 65 et seq.; further examples in Friauf, JurA 1970, p. 672 et seq.
16. See examples quoted in footnote 9.
17. See Hoffmann-Becking, Zum Stand der Lehre vom Recht auf fehlerfreie Ermessenentscheidung, DVBl. 1970, p. 850 et seq.
18. Similarly, BVerwGE 11, p. 95; BVerwG, DVBl, 1969, p. 586.
19. See Eyermann/Fröhler, loc. cit., section 114, observation 6.

Chapter 3

20. On this and the following points: Reh binder/Burgbacher/Knieper, Bürgerklage im Umweltrecht, Beiträge zur Umweltgestaltung, series A, vol. 4 Erich Schmidt Verlag, Berlin.
21. BVerwGE 28, pp. 131, 132 et seq.; BVerwG, DVBl. 1970, p. 215 et seq.; DÖV 1969, p. 283 et seq.; Verwaltungsgerichtshof (Higher Administrative Court) - VGH -

- Munich, DVBl. 1967, p. 779.
22. BVerwG, DVBl. 1969 p. 586 et seq.; OVG Münster, DVBl. 1967, p. 546 et seq.
 23. BVerwGE 27, p. 176 et seq.; 35, p. 248 et seq.
 24. See decisions quoted in footnote 11; also BVerwG, DVBl. 1967, pp. 773-4.
 25. BGBI. 1960 I, p. 341 with amendments (BGBI. 1968 I, p. 503; 1970 I, p. 805).
 26. BVerwGE 28, pp. 268, 273 et seq.; 32, p. 173 et seq.; other examples in Friauf, JurA 1969, pp. 3, 17 et seq.; 1970, p. 652 et seq.
 27. DVBl. 1971 p. 843 et seq.
 28. NJW 1970, p. 773.
 29. VGH Mannheim, DVBl. 1967, p. 385: The residents of a housing area can take action against a building plan if it constitutes a hazard to the character and the living conditions of the area concerned.

Chapter 4

30. See Reh binder/Burgbacher/Knieper, loc. cit., Sections 1 and 6.
31. See in particular section 58 of a draft federal law on the preservation of the landscape and nature conservation prepared by a working group under the chairmanship of Erwin Stein, judge of the Federal Constitutional Court, and printed in "Verhandlungen deutscher Beauftragter für Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege", vol. 20 (1971).
32. See in particular Reh binder/Burgbacher/Knieper, loc. cit., section 6.
33. Reichsgesetzblatt - RGBI. - 1909, p. 499 with amendments (BGBI. III 43-1).
34. RGBI. 1932 I, p. 121.
35. RGBI. 1933 I, p. 1011.
36. BGBI. 1957 I, p. 1081, as amended on 3 January 1966 (BGBI. 1966 I, p. 73; BGBI. III 703-1).
37. Baumbach/Hefermehl, Wettbewerbs und Warenzeichenrecht,

vol. 1, 10th ed. (1971), section 13 UWG, observation 1; for the reasons of the government for the introduction of the 1965 bill, see Deutscher Bundestag document IV/2271, p. 3.

38. For details see Reh binder/Burgbacher/Knieper, loc. cit., section 5.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) is an independent international body, formed in 1948, which has its headquarters in Morges, Switzerland. It is a Union of sovereign states, government agencies and non-governmental organizations concerned with the initiation and promotion of scientifically-based action that will ensure perpetuation of the living world - man's natural environment - and the natural resources on which all living things depend, not only for their intrinsic cultural or scientific values but also for the long-term economic and social welfare of mankind.

This objective can be achieved through active conservation programmes for the wise use of natural resources based on scientific principles. IUCN believes that its aims can be achieved most effectively by international effort in co-operation with other international agencies, such as Unesco and FAO.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is an international charitable organization dedicated to saving the world's wildlife and wild places, carrying out the wide variety of programmes and actions that this entails. WWF was established in 1961 under Swiss law, with headquarters also in Morges.

Since 1961, IUCN has enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with its sister organization, the World Wildlife Fund, with which it works closely throughout the world on projects of mutual interest. IUCN and WWF now jointly operate the various projects originated by, or submitted to them.

The projects cover a very wide range from environmental policy and planning, environmental law, education, ecological studies and surveys, to the establishment and management of areas as national parks and reserves and emergency programmes for the safeguarding of animal and plant species threatened with extinction as well as support for certain key international conservation bodies.

WWF fund-raising and publicity activities are mainly carried out by National Appeals in a number of countries, and its international governing body is made up of prominent personalities in many fields.

