

Can we talk

ECO-PLAYER?

Réserves de
BIOSPHERE



FRANCE



A charter of commitment for
mobilizing and promoting
eco-players
in the Biosphere Reserves

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WHY THIS FORMAT?

This interactive i-Blio leaflet is intended for Biosphere Reserve facilitators or for anyone who wishes to establish and reinforce a local network of eco-players. It is lively, interactive and is the fruit of the experience acquired by three pioneering Biosphere Reserves. It will allow for a fuller understanding of the benefits of a committed approach, the conditions, how it operates... The eco-players who wish to sponsor new candidates will also find help and examples.

Pleasant discovery!

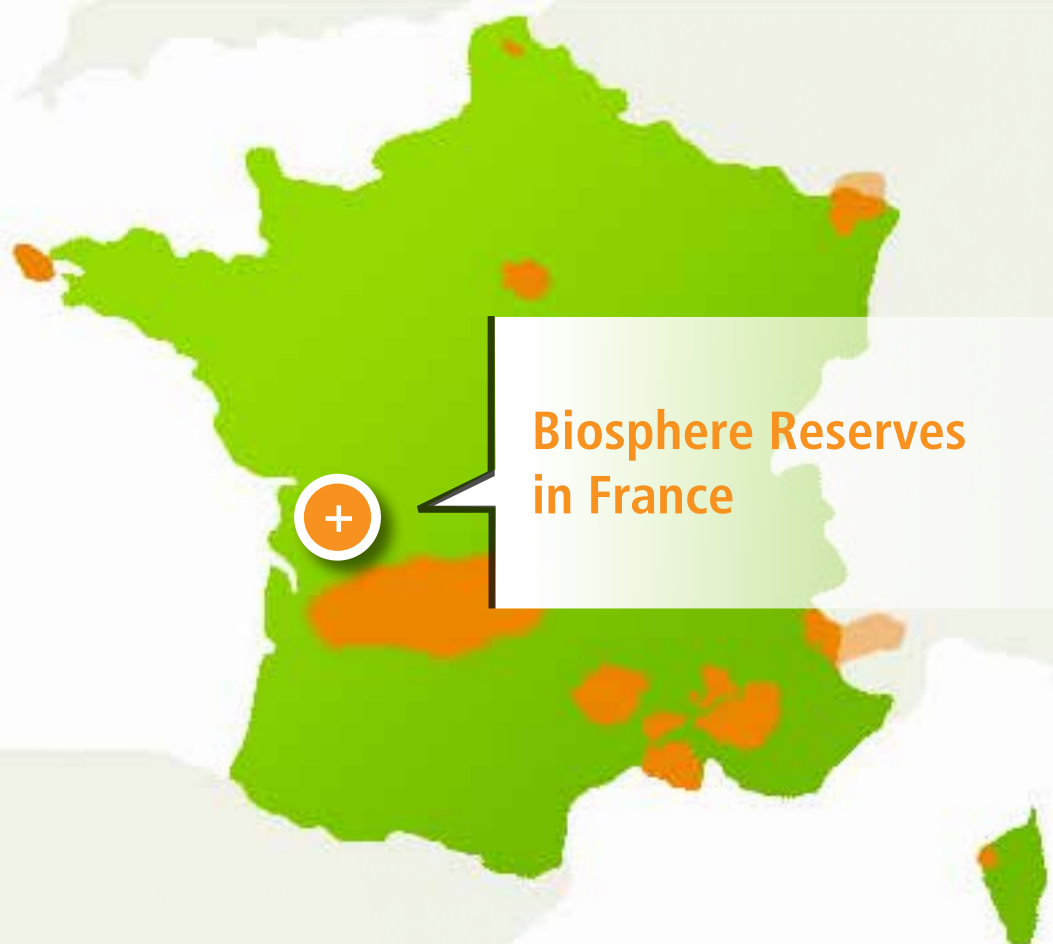
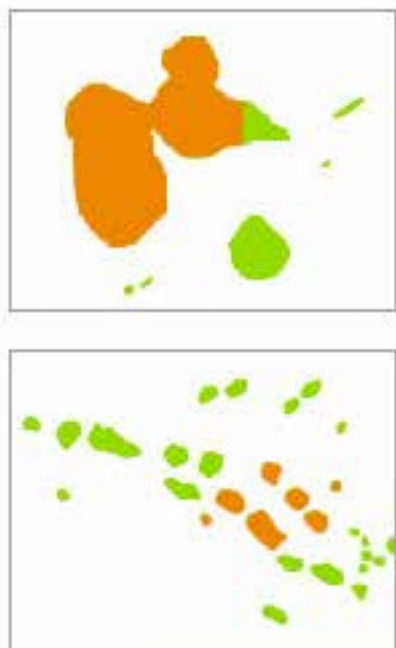


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MOBILIZING AND PROMOTING ECO-PLAYERS IN THE BIOSPHERE RESERVES

The Biosphere Reserves are learning sites recognized by UNESCO as part of the Man and Biosphere (MAB) programme to promote sustainable development based on the joint efforts of local communities and the scientific domain. The aim is to combine the conservation of natural and cultural diversity with the economic and social development of the population. These reserves allow for the testing and development of innovative approaches to sustainable development on a local level up to a worldwide scale. The sites are used to test or promote new practices of natural resource management and human activities, in the scope of an international cooperation network comprising 669 sites in 120 countries in 2016. France has 14 Biosphere Reserves. When a region is recognized by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve, the socio-economic stakeholders (businesses, shops...) often wish to benefit from the UNESCO aura and the “ecological” image conveyed by the Biosphere Reserve for their products, services or activities. These are often positive and advantageous in diverse sectors of activity (in particular, tourism, communication, agriculture). These businesses generally ask to use the UNESCO logo.

The French MAB committee developed a partnership approach aiming to provide the Biosphere Reserve with a tool to reply to the various players who wish to benefit from the positive UNESCO and Biosphere Reserve image. In this way, the Biosphere Reserve participates in local economic development. Conditions for the permission to use the UNESCO Biosphere Reserves image were set down in order to ward off any misuse of these images. This authorization to link the image of a business, an association or a community to that of the Biosphere Reserve requires commitments in favour of the conservation and sustainable development of biodiversity by the players involved.



[HTTP://MAB-FRANCE.ORG/EN/BIOSPHERES-RESERVES/](http://mab-france.org/en/biospheres-reserves/)

FOCUS

Arround the world in 2016:

669 Biosphere Reserves in 120 countries
including 16 transboundary sites.

France has 14 Biosphere Reserves.

WHAT IS THE CHARTER OF COMMITMENT?

The Biosphere Reserve charter of commitment is a text linked to the UNESCO designation. It is a document of principles adapted to the region in question, to which the eco-player commits formally. Signing the charter of commitment means becoming part of a progress strategy based on the specific issues of the territory in question.

The document comprises two parts:

- The first is inspired by the Seville Strategy and the Statutory framework of the global Biosphere Reserve network and presents the main functions. This part is the same for all the Biosphere Reserve charters in France. It must be clearly validated by the MAB France committee.
- The second part concerns the specific issues of the Biosphere Reserve under consideration.

This document will be completed by the definition of the commitments of each eco-player candidate.

BRAND AND COMMITMENT CHARTER: COMPLEMENT OR ALTERNATIVE?

Some of the Biosphere Reserves have opted to develop product or service branding: Rhœn, Entlebuch..., several of which are in France, under the aegis of the “Parc Naturel Régional” and “Parc national” brands. Branding mainly concerns two domains; agriculture (regional produce) and tourism (accommodation and restaurants, reception, services...). Regulations vary from one country to another, but the creation of a brand necessarily entails costs related to its establishment and control: for each element to be branded, exact specifications must be defined and then monitored by an independent body. A considerable amount of legal complexity is involved. In France, product and service brands are abundant and the visibility of a Biosphere Reserve brand is a key question. What added value does branding bring? How do consumers identify it? The various managers involved in the promotion of their brand often only have access to limited means. In France, the development of a “Biosphere Reserve” brand appeared to be too costly and complex.

The Biosphere Reserves thus opted for the creation of networks of eco-players signing a charter whereby they commit to measures in favour of their Biosphere Reserve, in environmental matters, with social, educational or learning aims. In the same way as a brand, the role of the charter of commitment is to participate in local development and to open up the different sectors of activities and relationships between the various stakeholders. They both serve the same purposes and represent two distinct means of collective actions. One or other of these approaches can be implemented on the same territory depending on the values, cultural references, aims, system of guarantee, targeted markets, and the drive to participate in a local management institution. These criteria vary from one individual to another, and each of them can coexist on a same territory. The charter of commitment is thus not an alternative to brands, but results in real complementarity and valuable synergies. An eco-player signing the Biosphere Reserve Charter can commercialize branded products, or also sign the European Charter of sustainable tourism. Commitment to the Biosphere Reserve is a more global, more integrated approach. In addition to commitments in his/her sector of activity, the signatory can contribute to the aims of the Biosphere Reserve by becoming an ambassador.

HOW TO BECOME AN ECO-PLAYER?

By signing the charter of commitment for each Biosphere Reserve. This implies sharing the principles of the document and committing to a progress strategy for the sustainable development of the Biosphere Reserve. Each signatory is called upon to define the commitments that correspond to his/her capacity for progress to be accomplished in a given time, in his/her activity.

WHO CAN BECOME AN ECO-PLAYER?

The eco-player can be an individual or a legal entity. The latter may be a business, an association, a school, a community..., in which case the director uses his/her name for the charter of commitment.

The intent of the individual or legal entity to commit formally and solemnly to a strategy of progress in favour of the sustainable development of the Biosphere Reserve is essential.

CAN ANYONE BECOME AN ECO-PLAYER, REGARDLESS OF HIS/HER ACTIVITY?

The aim of the commitment charter is to accelerate the mutation of our societies towards a more ecological world. All types of sectors are thus concerned, and not just agricultural or touristic activities, as is often the case with brands. This is a regional, rather than a sectorial approach. The eco-players of the Camargue Biosphere Reserve include a graphic artist (small business with one employee) and a port (3 employees - capacity 350 boats) committed to reducing the ecological impact of their activities. In Mont Ventoux, winemaking cooperatives, winemakers, a nougat maker and nature activity animators are eco-players.

MUST ECO-PLAYERS LIVE OR CARRY OUT THEIR ACTIVITIES IN THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE?

Eco-players do not necessarily have to carry out all their activities in the Biosphere Reserve. It is important that their engagements relate to the Biosphere Reserve and reflect the issues of the territory. The Biosphere Reserve is not an isolated area; it is linked to neighbouring zones by different dynamics. Signing the charter must trigger off a virtuous approach to the environment and it is all the more positive if it reaches beyond the Biosphere Reserve.

A company can be based outside the Biosphere Reserve, but can depend upon the reserve for its productions. For example, a company in Brest (just beside, but outside the Biosphere Reserve of the islands and the Iroise Sea), that sources algae from the Iroise Sea and transforms them into cosmetic products, can become an eco-player in this Biosphere Reserve if it commits to only transforming sustainably managed algae from the reserve. It could commit to limiting greenhouse gas emissions, recycling waste, and raising awareness of the marine environment... It can also incite its suppliers to become eco-players. In this way, the Biosphere Reserve would benefit from the commitment of the company. However, the benefits would have much more far-reaching effects as they are of value to the environment in general.

ARE THERE BASIC REQUIREMENTS?

Any consideration relating to players' involvement in a charter of commitment must be assessed in terms of flexibility or progress rather than in terms of signatories' previous record of virtuous actions (for example, through being involved in a pre-existing quality approach in the region). The company does not necessarily need to have environmental labels or equivalents in order to sign the Biosphere Reserve charter of commitment. The nature of its commitments, the setting up of a strategy of progress, the ability to attain these objectives and its involvement in the network of eco-players are much more important.

Therefore, it is not imperative to focus on the initial state of each stakeholder, but rather on the degree of progress, adapted to the structure, the activity...

However, the notion of a lowest limit to highlight environmentally exemplary stakeholders has been retained. In this way, Biosphere Reserves in Canada offer several levels of commitment, but this choice first requires a company audit.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN WORKING PRINCIPLES OF THE CHARTER OF COMMITMENT?

1 Open membership

This is a voluntary approach by the stakeholder. The latter commits to the durable development of a Biosphere Reserve, in relation to its values, activity and depending on its means.

2 The open definition of commitments

(within the scope of defined criteria) and for a fixed duration. It is generally for three years.

3 Double sponsoring

This encourages dialogue and the backing of the parties involved in a region and strengthens the network and the exchange of information between local stakeholders. It contributes to de-compartmentalizing. It has been suggested that one of the sponsors should be from the same branch of activity as the candidate and that the other should represent environmental issues.

If a biosphere reserve does not wish to avail of double sponsorship, it must file a request to the French MAB Committee and suggest an alternative approach.

For example, the Fontainebleau and Gâtinais Biosphere Reserve wished to collaborate with the Chamber of commerce and industry for its charter of engagement. The latter conducted an audit following a sustainable development approach with the candidates for the charter of commitment. In this situation, the regular meeting of the stakeholders takes on more importance.

4

The public declaration of commitments

During a general assembly of the eco-players. The commitments of each player are formally presented to the general assembly of eco-players.

5

The transparency of the commitments

It is compulsory to display the commitments in the structure (at the headquarters and in the different premises) and on a dedicated website in order to promote them and so that each stakeholder involved (clients, partners...) can become familiar with them and ensure that they are respected. The commitments must be transparent and visible to all.

6

Self-evaluation

At the end of the commitment cycle, each eco-player will present how it was able to respond to the commitments made.

7

Sanction

If an eco-player breaches its commitments, it is first of all withdrawn from the list of members, and, if it cannot respect them rapidly, it is then definitively excluded from the network of eco-players. This information is then posted on the Internet site.

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE COMMITMENTS?

The credibility of the commitments is based on their ability to address certain issues or resolve local environmental problems.

The commitments must be meaningful. It is preferable to base them on verified and verifiable technical and scientific data or on popular or profane knowledge that has, in the past, resulted in the efficient management of environmental problems. Weak commitments, considered to be too anecdotal by the leaders of environmental issues, run the risk of discrediting the collective approach of the charter of commitment, the other eco-players and the Biosphere Reserve. It is vital for the leader and all the eco-players to continuously avoid “green washing”. But the commitments must be realistic in relation to the abilities of the eco-player to implement them in the allotted time, especially when there was no initial commitment. It is important to strike a balance. The role of the leader, the two sponsors and the technical committee, as part of a dialogue with the candidate, is to assess whether or not the commitments are pertinent, reasonable and achievable.

HOW CAN THE COMMITMENTS BE MONITORED?

Monitoring the implementation of the commitments is a social control, made up of different elements.

One of these is the requirement for each eco-player to have double sponsorship, if possible, a “sectorial” sponsor and an “environmental” sponsor. This creates proximity between these stakeholders who have a moral responsibility towards all the signatories.

The commitments are made visible, displayed in the structure, and put on line on an Internet site. Each member, consumer and user of the structure can check that the commitments made by an eco-player are respected. Presenting them in the structure and on a dedicated on line site guarantees that they are fulfilled.

Who sanctions an insensitive eco-player, and in what way?

In case of non-compliance with the commitments, the technical committee examines whether real difficulties prevented the eco-player from making the anticipated progress. If the signatory deliberately neglected its commitments, it can be excluded by the president of the Biosphere Reserve or by the president of the MAB France committee.

The eco-player can be informed directly by a detailed letter.

WHAT ARE THE INTENTIONS OF THE PLAYER IN MAKING THESE COMMITMENTS?

The charter of commitment in favour of the Biosphere Reserve is neither a brand nor a label and does not propose any distinctive logo. The commercial use of the UNESCO logo is not authorized by the Organization.

The eco-player can indicate on its products, in its headquarters, on letterheads or other documents that it is a signatory of the “commitment charter of the Biosphere Reserve of ...” or “eco-player of the Biosphere Reserve of ...”, using the local terminology. These claims signify a close partnership with the Biosphere Reserve in question. The Biosphere Reserve logo (bearing the UNESCO temple) can thus be used.

The terms «Biosphere Reserve of» avail of legal protection by trademark registration with the INPI. This measure of protection favours agreements between the Biosphere Reserve in question and the potential users of the image. However, no-one can prevent a socio-economic stakeholder that has not signed the charter of commitment from stating that its activity is part of the “Biosphere Reserve of...”, if this is the case.

The role of the coordinator of the Biosphere Reserve in question, of the other signatories as well as the MAB France Committee, is to show that there is a clear difference between “produced in the Biosphere Reserve of...” (which is accessible to everyone) and “signatory of the charter of commitment of the Biosphere Reserve of...”. The latter claim signifies a close partnership with the Biosphere Reserve in question.

The other advantage of becoming an eco-player is becoming part of many new networks, on a local scale (between eco-players of the Biosphere Reserve), as well as on a national and worldwide level.

The network of eco-players facilitates the development of commercial relations, with businesses and other eco-players with diverse activities, with shared values. It can also be used for specific purposes.

WHAT DO THE COMMITMENTS RELATE TO?

Each candidate must offer to make progress in different domains of its activity, relating to the different actions of the Biosphere Reserve. It is essential that the commitments correspond to the “green” image of the Biosphere Reserve and relate to environmental aspects of conservation and biodiversity, of the reasoned use of resources (water, energy, space...), limiting greenhouse gas emissions and pollutants.

Others relate to the cultural and social areas of the company, and are linked to its sustainable development project. Some concern the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge, cooperation and networking between eco-players or between Biosphere Reserves.

Some biosphere reserves have chosen to set up a toolbox of archetypal commitments by sector of activity to inspire future eco-players. Some Biosphere Reserves demand a minimum number of commitments per category (environment, social well-being, knowledge, networking).

HOW DOES THE ECO-PLAYER DEFINE ITS COMMITMENTS?

It is preferable to organize support for eco-players for the definition of their commitments. This can take different complementary forms.

Each Biosphere Reserve has its own leader. It is up to the leader to formalize candidates' applications, to form sponsorship networks, to set up and steer technical committees and general assemblies of eco-players. The aim of this is to unite different branches, sectors of activity, approaches to environmental questions and to help them to work together. This phase is shorter and easier when multiple stakeholders participate and when sensitive and thorny issues are addressed.

As already stated, the approach anticipates double sponsorship, with one sponsor from the same branch as the eco-player candidate so that they are likely to interact on specific points. The second sponsor represents environmental issues, raises the awareness of the candidate and contributes to the credibility of commitments in this domain.

A blog is set up to encourage links between eco-players from the different Biosphere Reserves, to share experiences and reply to questions. Candidates can turn to the blog for ideas or to establish contact with eco-players with similar activities.



WHO DRAWS UP THE CHARTER OF COMMITMENT?

The Charter of a Biosphere Reserve is drawn up as part of a collective approach. It is subject to discussions within the framework of a technical committee, set up for this purpose. It is led by the coordinator of the Biosphere Reserve, and made up of founding members who aspire to become eco-players, representatives of economic branches (representatives of chambers of commerce and industry, agriculture, etc.), leaders of environmental, cultural and social (generally in the associative field), educational and scientific causes. It is important that the members of the technical committee represent diverse points of view in relation to the Biosphere Reserve. This collective, in association with the other authorities of the Biosphere Reserve, identifies the issues at stake in the territory where eco-players wish to conduct their actions.

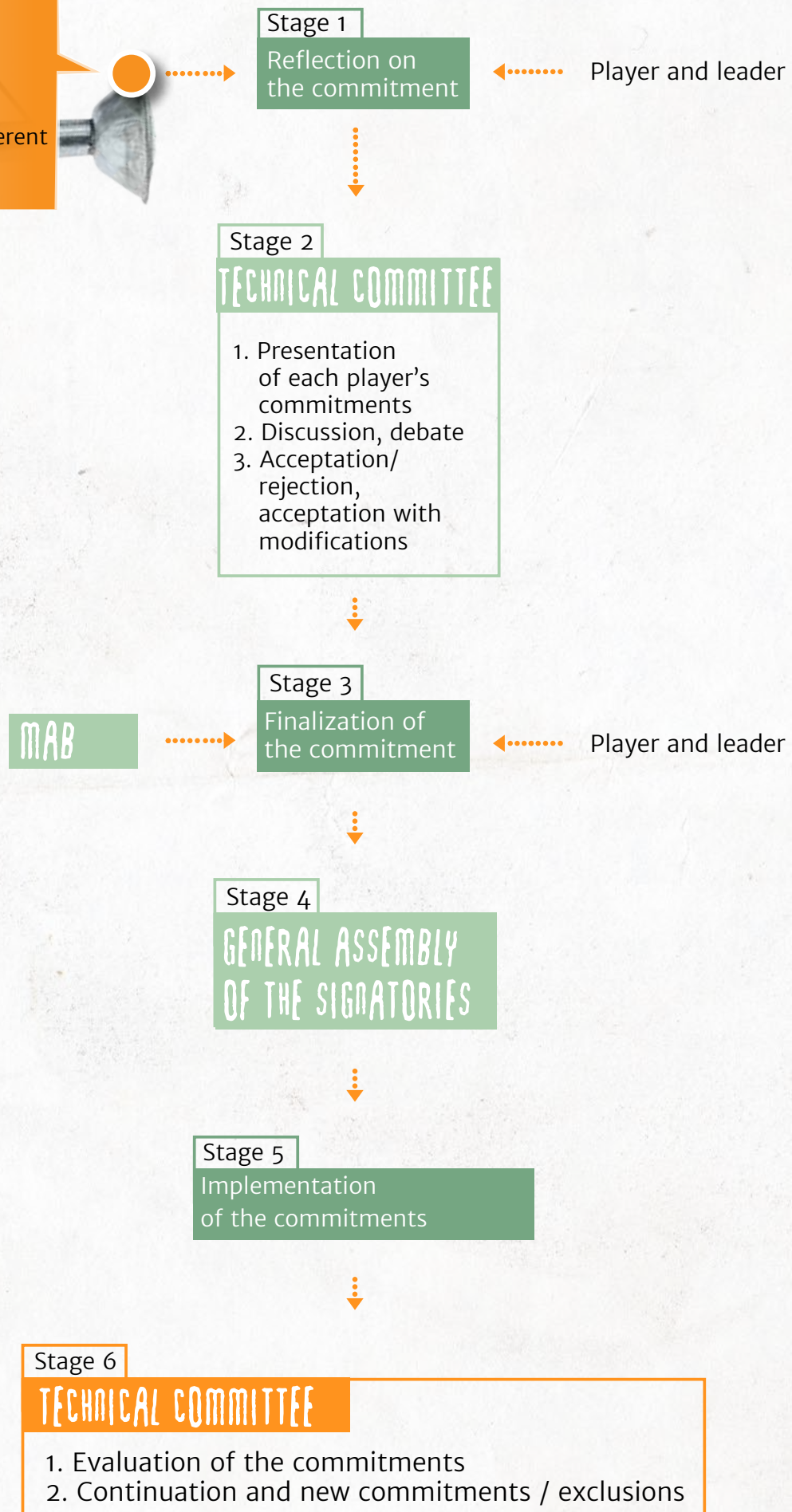
HOW CAN THE ISSUES OF THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE BE DEFINED?

A participative approach enables all the parties involved in the charter of commitment to define what the Biosphere Reserve represents. All the participants have to adopt a common vision of the Reserve so that it can be managed collectively.

What does the Biosphere Reserve represent? We generally observe that at the beginning of the process, it is not very well known. For some, it is a “UNESCO label”, for others a natural zone, for others a protected area integrating Man or a place for researchers... Exchanges are thus useful for building a shared vision of the “object” to valorize. These exchanges evoke the different facets of the Biosphere Reserve, including the least obvious aspects for the public (place of education and science...), reveal the close links between the conservation of resources, their development and their fundamental aspect for humanity, and help to grasp their organization in a worldwide cooperation network. This phase also enables those involved to discuss the attributes of the Biosphere Reserve in general and the specificities of the Biosphere Reserve in question.

Group work

Co-construction
Working on the different
issues



DISCOVERING AND UNDERSTANDING THE CHARTER OF COMMITMENT

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

After co-establishing the charter, the charter technical committee meets regularly, at least once or twice a year, to review new candidatures.

Due to its diversified composition, it represents different points of view and assesses the reliability of the different commitments. On one hand, it verifies that they will have a real impact and do not simply correspond to an “opportunistic green action”. The positive image of UNESCO and the Biosphere Reserve is a collective entity and is shared by the territorial players. This image must not be discredited through anecdotal commitments. The committee must ensure that the commitments made are realistic, achievable in the allotted time frame and verifiable. Over-ambitious actions and commitments with no real effects also run the risk of discrediting the global strategy of the Biosphere Reserve.

The technical committee also verifies that the commitments have been achieved at the end of the time frame. It monitors their progress and formulates sanctions where necessary. It works in association with the MAB France committee and calls on the latter when the commitments made by an eco-player have not been fulfilled.

The technical committee also takes on the role of identifying training needs, support, exchanges with eco-players or dealing with any other question relating to the local life of the commitment charter.

MAB

At the end of the process of adhesion and making commitments at a local level, the MAB committee decides whether or not to validate the candidatures. The MAB committee is responsible for:

- the consistency of company approaches, by validating the charters of commitment of the different Biosphere Reserves.
- the reliability of the eco-player networks of the different Biosphere Reserves.

If the technical committee is in doubt about certain commitments, the MAB committee can be called upon to arbitrate.

The MAB committee can also exclude an insensitive eco-player, in collaboration with the coordinator of the Biosphere Reserve. It can be more difficult to put pressure on remote local contexts.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SIGNATORIES

This is a place of exchange between eco-players. Partnerships and collaborations in a sector of activity or between sectors of activities begin here. The eco-player solemnly makes his/her commitments before the general assembly. The general assembly of the signatories takes place once a year.

If the commitments are not fulfilled, then the reasons for this are examined to assess whether real difficulties prevented the eco-player from making the anticipated progress. If the latter deliberately neglects its commitments, it can then be excluded by the president of the Biosphere Reserve or by the president of the MAB committee. A detailed letter directly informs each eco-player.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMITMENTS

Once the eco-players make these commitments, they have three years to implement them. They stay in contact with their sponsor and the coordinator of the Biosphere Reserve. Training of the eco-player can be organized if required, depending on individual needs. At times, it can be more beneficial to collaborate and work within the network.

Example of Cévennes composites, a company in the Camargue Biosphere Reserve which aimed to produce briquettes from reeds and branches. It could source reed waste (not used for thatch) from another eco-player.

MAB FRANCE:

- Is a member of the technical committee
- Validates the text of the charters of commitments after checking their coherence
- Ensures that the eco-players are sufficiently committed
- Co-signs the eco-players' charters of commitment

In order to do so, it receives the full applications at least 10 days before the technical committee

THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE:

- presides over the technical committee
- steers the collective involved in drawing up the charter of commitment
- accompanies the preparation of candidates' applications
- co-signs eco-players' charters of commitment
- displays the commitments of each eco-player on a site
- guides the network of eco-players (training, meetings, sponsorship, monitoring)
- promotes the network of eco-players

THE ECO-PLAYER:

- makes commitments, implements them and reports on progress
- publishes these commitments (in headquarters, premises, through various means of communication...)
- sponsors other eco-players
- promotes the charter of commitment and the Biosphere Reserve

Commitment charter: the principles

Procedure

- Progress strategy
- Collective approach
- Around specific land use challenge
- Co-construction of the charter by the different stakeholders

Signatories

- Socio-economic stakeholders of the Biosphere Reserve territory with a sense of belonging to the Biosphere Reserve
- Natural or legal person

Voluntary participation

- Free adhesion
- Free definition of the commitments (but as part of defined criteria) for a fix duration of time (two years for example)

Social control

- Double sponsorship or equivalent
- Public declaration of commitments (GM of the signatories)
- Display: web site
- Possible verification of the fulfilment of commitments
- Self-assessment (overview presented to the Technical Committee of the Charter)
- Sanction (withdrawal from the lists of members initially, and exclusion as a second step)

Authorities

- Technical Committee of the Charter: validates candidatures, monitors commitment and et formulates sanctions
- General meeting of signatories
- Role of the MAB Committee: validates the decisions Technical Committee of the Charter (of which it can be a member); final recourse in case of conflict

Legal notice

- Signatory of the Commitment charter of the Biosphere Reserve

Réserves de BIOSPHERE



FRANCE



[HTTP://MAB-FRANCE.ORG/EN/](http://mab-france.org/en/)