

Recommendation No. 6

The Committee considers that one of the fundamental building blocks of an effective National Biodiversity Strategy will be a National Inventory of Canada's Biological Diversity, and we recommend that the development of such an inventory be facilitated by the Government of Canada. The Committee further recommends that the Government of Canada support the creation of an international data bank of the world's species.

The importance of developing an inventory of species, in Canada as well as internationally, was the subject of agreement among witnesses, who also cautioned the Committee that attempts to develop inventories should not impede steps that should be taken in the meantime to preserve biodiversity. The Committee was reminded by John Herity of Environment Canada that: "We should bear in mind that there are actions that can be taken without complete knowledge of our inventory."³⁷ Nevertheless, the Committee is of the view that the development of an inventory of Canadian species is a worthwhile and important initiative.

In Canada alone, 230 animal and plant species, as well as valuable natural spaces, including old growth forests and wetlands, are known to be at risk. The most comprehensive census of living organisms to date in Canada can be found in the *Canada Country Study on Biodiversity*. The taxonomic census undertaken during the preparation of the study documented that a total of just over 70,000 species of microorganisms (not including viruses), plants and animals have been described or reported to occur in Canada (out to the 200-mile offshore limit, within Canada's Arctic sector and down to the sea floor). It is estimated that an equal number of species in Canada remain undescribed. The expertise needed to identify, interpret and assess Canadian biodiversity is at risk of being lost. The basic sciences of identification and taxonomy are the very foundations upon which our knowledge of biodiversity and its economic and social implications are built. Basic natural science courses and research groups are not being re-staffed after retirements at universities and institutions. Without training in the form of courses and programs there will not be specialists to carry on this work.

Recommendation No. 7

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada ensure sufficient support of institutional research into the classification and study of the species of flora and fauna that make up the diversity of life.

B. The Economic Value of Biodiversity

1. Economic Instruments

Biodiversity is ultimately lost or conserved at the local level. Government policies, however, create incentives that facilitate or constrain local action. Governments regularly intervene in markets to increase agricultural production, spur industrial growth, provide a safety net for the poor, protect the environment, and support other public goods that the market place allocates poorly. Unfortunately, many industrial, transportation, natural resource and urban development policies fail to value environmental resources correctly and may even hasten resource depletion and biodiversity loss.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 18.