

Forum's Key Messages & Takeaways

Day 1

A sustainability strategy is becoming an essential foundation. Only 14 of 50 national federations in Europe currently have a sustainability strategy. Federations have an important role in helping clubs understand expectations, coordinate action and respond to emerging environmental, legal and societal pressures.

“Data mata relato”. As one contribution from Spain put it, “*data mata relato*”, meaning data kills the story. Robust evidence on water use, pesticide inputs, habitat condition and management outcomes is essential for demonstrating responsible practice, countering inaccurate narratives and making golf's contribution credible to policymakers, NGOs and communities.

Golf needs to move from isolated sites to connected landscapes. Courses should be viewed not only as individual facilities, but as habitat mosaics and potential stepping stones within wider ecological networks. Habitat quality, ecosystem function and connectivity are becoming more important than simply counting individual species.

Nature restoration offers a positive role for golf. Golf courses can support biodiversity by improving habitats, restoring wetlands and rough grassland, creating ecological corridors and working in partnership with neighbouring land managers and conservation organisations.

Water stewardship can strengthen golf's public value. Examples from England and Sweden demonstrated how courses can contribute to flood resilience, water retention, runoff filtration and more efficient water use. Golf can be an active partner in catchment scale water management, rather than being seen only as a water user.

Golf should demonstrate the wider ecosystem services provided by courses. Working with government agencies, municipalities and water authorities can help golf share how well managed courses contribute to cooling, carbon storage, water retention, flood resilience, biodiversity and ecological connectivity. This can help decision makers recognise the contribution courses make alongside other social, environmental and economic priorities, while building the understanding, trust and licence to operate that will be increasingly important for golf's future.

Integrated turf management requires realistic expectations. Climate adaptation will require the sector to challenge traditional perceptions of perfect playing conditions. Knowledge sharing between greenkeepers, improved disease management and acceptance of firmer, browner conditions will be increasingly important.

Playing conditions need to reflect climate realities. The R&A's decision to showcase top level golf on a brown course at The Open challenged traditional perceptions of what good conditions look like under climate stress.

Peer learning can accelerate progress. Initiatives such as Denmark's Tour de Fungus and citizen science projects demonstrate the value of practical exchange between clubs, greenkeepers, golfers and federations.

Sustainability is broader than environmental management. Golf's social and economic value, including wellbeing, participation, tourism and local economic contribution, can help federations engage decision makers with a broader account of golf's value.

Forum's Key Messages & Takeaways

Day 2

Golf is well placed to speak the language of wider public priorities. Nature restoration, water resilience, climate adaptation, health and community value provide strong points of connection with policymakers, NGOs and local communities.

Collaboration with policymakers can strengthen golf's contribution. The European Commission's emerging Green Sport agenda creates an opportunity for golf to engage constructively with policymakers and show how the sector can contribute to wider environmental and social objectives. Golf should be clear about its challenges while also presenting evidence of its contribution to nature, health, wellbeing and local communities.

Major events can create a lasting legacy for nature and education. The partnership between Bernardus Golf, IVN and Van Gogh National Park shows how golf events can support benefits beyond the competition. Linked to the Solheim Cup, the project will help three local primary schools create small food forests, combining nature, outdoor learning and community engagement. It is a strong example of how events can create lasting benefits for local people and places.

Golf courses can function as nature based solutions. Wetlands, ponds, buffers, rough grassland, tree cover and improved soil management can help deliver biodiversity, water retention, flood risk reduction, cooling and climate resilience alongside golf.

Nature does not stop at the course boundary. Golf courses are part of wider ecological and community landscapes, connected by water, wildlife, soils and people. The greatest benefits come when clubs look beyond their own boundaries and work with neighbouring landowners, local authorities, water managers and nature organisations to strengthen ecological connections and respond to shared challenges. This can help individual courses contribute to wider networks for nature and climate resilience.

Partnerships increase impact. Local conservation groups, authorities and communities should be involved from the beginning. They can bring ecological knowledge, local understanding, monitoring expertise and connections to wider restoration priorities.

Site specific action is more credible than generic claims. Each course has different landscapes, ecological pressures, water conditions and community needs. Plans should respond to local priorities rather than rely on one size fits all sustainability messages.

Golf courses can be platforms for nature education and wellbeing. Courses offer regular opportunities for people to experience nature and can help connect sport with biodiversity, restoration and environmental learning. This strengthens golf's relevance to wider public priorities and creates opportunities to work with nature organisations, educators and local communities.

Tell the story. Communication is most credible when it is grounded in measurable progress. Golf should be open about the challenges it faces while clearly demonstrating how clubs, federations and partners are responding through practical action. The Sustainable Golf Review, presented by John Kemp during the forum and due to be published by GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf and The R&A this year, will provide a valuable resource to support clear, evidence-based communication across the sector.

Athletes can help change the conversation. Professional players and other athletes have a trusted public voice and can make sustainability more visible and relatable. The forum demonstrated the value of athletes speaking openly and collectively about these issues. When athletes, sports bodies and partners communicate consistently, they can help close the gap between sport's ambition and public understanding.