

Boxmeer Declaration

Hedges and hedgerow trees form the backbone of many European landscapes. For many decades, however, they have been declining in number as well as in quality. Consequences of this include a large loss of biodiversity, and cultural heritage and an increasing gap between people and the landscapes they live in.

Our March 2020 *Joining hands on hedges* meeting organised by Heg & Landschap in the *Maasheggen Biosphere Reserve* follows a series of international events that started in 2012 with the *Hedgerow Future's* conference in Stoke-on-Trent (UK). This conference was followed up in 2013 by the *Hands-on-hedges symposium* in Bommel (at which we informally started a *European Hedgerow Group* and shortly after created a website of the same name), and in 2018 by an event in Bailleul, France.

Hedgelayers met to lay hedges and demonstrate regional styles of hedge laying in 2011 in Boursay and in 2019 in Bressuire, both in France. Since

2006 international hedge layers from various countries demonstrate their skills and styles during the annual Dutch competition, referred to as *NK Maasheggenvlechten*.

Now it is March 7, for three days, 50 participants originating from Ireland, England, France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands shared their knowledge, experience and lessons, discussed them and attended field trips. The most important question we put to ourselves during this symposium was how best to promote hedgelaying in Europe and ensure that the craft is seen and recognized as an important skill in landscape management.

We reinforce our ambition that hedgelaying will be a vibrant and well known craft in as many European countries as possible. The participants expressed their shared ambition to continue working together and to this end formulated the following declaration, referred to as the *Boxmeer Declaration*.

The Boxmeer Declaration reads as follows:

The participants of the *Joining hands on hedges* event, held in Boxmeer, the Netherlands, 6-8 March 2020, agree to:

1. Establish a European Hedge Network

Work together to preserve and promote the practice of hedgelaying by establishing a *European Hedgelaying Network* that will bring together hedgelaying practitioners from throughout Europe to share the common aim of promoting hedgelaying as a vital part of the management and preservation of our hedged landscape.

Through our efforts we aim to reconnect people with their landscape and their hedges. We recognise the many services hedges provide to society such as conserving and enhancing biodiversity, environmental services such as erosion control and the sequestration of CO₂ and creating a healthy, healing environment. Hedgelaying not only is about the preservation and development of cultural heritage, it is a living craft that plays an important role in hedgerow management and in the promotion of hedges at large.

The objectives of the Network are:

- To share knowledge on hedge laying, its importance and its role in the hedgerow management cycle;
- To encourage the planting of hedges and to restore hedgerow networks as much as possible, everywhere;
- To promote hedge laying, good management of hedges and preserve hedged landscapes;
- To enhance the involvement of young people in hedge laying and hedgerow management.

Boxmeer, March 7 2020

Valentijn de Cock (Belgium):

Nigel Adams (United Kingdom):

Etienne Monclus (France):

Mark McDowell (Ireland):

2. Making change through the development of tangible results

The Network accepts the challenge of showing concrete results from our work to foster hedge laying, improvement of hedgerow management and planting of hedges. The participants from each country agree:

- To develop at least one demonstration project to meet this challenge;
- To present the results actively.

3. Enhancing influence to improve decision making

Influencing decisions to achieve better results for hedge laying, hedge planting and management will be pursued at

- Local, national and European levels;
- Farmer, non-governmental and government levels.

4. Achieving synergy and building momentum between countries

To foster enthusiasm and commitment, the network will endeavour to hold one international symposium each year:

- To create optimal conditions for sharing knowledge and ideas;
- To emphasize the necessity of planting hedges and restoring hedgerow networks everywhere;
- To enhance impact and influence at various decision making levels.
- To present and celebrate the success of hedge (laying) activities carried out in each country;
- To be held in any of the participating countries.

A plan of activities is attached as addendum to this declaration.

Each year we will review our progress and set long term objectives: to enhance the quality of hedged landscapes, and to involve more people in their conservation.

Ulrich Pieper (Germany):

Louis Dolmans (The Netherlands):

Karel van Soest (Maasheggen Biosphere Reserve):