

#### **REPORT**

### "ISLANDS AND OVERSEAS ENTITIES' CONTRIBUTION TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE"

Chaired by **MEP Maurice Ponga,** Co-Chair of the "Islands and Overseas Entities" Group of the EP Intergroup "Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development".

# **Tuesday 20 December 2011 European Parliament, Brussels**

"Six European Union Member States, namely the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Denmark, have a total of 34 Overseas Entities hosting an important diversity of landscapes, ecosystems and species." The European Overseas Entities include almost 80% of Europe's known living species and have the highest rates of endemism. The contribution of their biological assets is critical in ensuring the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP10 decisions, in particular the Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing.

Islands and Overseas Entities are the key for successful climate change adaptation strategies and biodiversity policies of the EU. All participants therefore agreed that their specificities urgently need to be integrated in global, EU, national and regional biodiversity and climate change policies and programmes.













#### **Opening session**

#### Opening statement by Struan Stevenson, MEP

The 34 EU Overseas Entities are of crucial importance to Europe given that they host some of the most important landscapes, ecosystems and species on Earth. Mr. Stevenson held that human actions can seriously affect ecosystem and biodiversity and that inappropriate interventions can generate vicious circles of damages. Moreover, he gave some examples that concern directly the delicate ecosystems of islands and overseas entities, showing how the increase of sea temperatures is having effects on fishing stocks, on corals and subsequently on coastal erosion.

Finally, he pointed out to the necessity of extending the EU's LIFE+ Regulation to islands and overseas entities in order to protect their environment, ecosystem and biodiversity.

Opening statement by Dominique Benzaken, EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories Programme Coordinator on behalf of Cyriaque Sendashonga, Global Director, Policy, Programme and Capacity Development Group, IUCN

The EU includes 34 overseas territories that cover an area of 4.4 million km<sup>2</sup> and posses a combined Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of over 15 million km<sup>2</sup>, the largest in the world. These regions are located in several biodiversity hotspots, some major wilderness areas and key regions for polar ecosystems and fish stocks. Europe overseas have more endemic animal and plant species than the entire European continent and host more than 20% of the world's coral reefs and lagoons<sup>1</sup>.

Islands and overseas territories' ecosystems are highly vulnerable to human impacts such as habitat destruction, pollution, alien invasive species, and overexploitation of natural resources and increasingly the impacts of climate change.

Overseas territories are diverse in terms of their socio-economic circumstances. Most of them islands, they share common vulnerabilities linked to their insularity and/or remoteness, being characterized by small economies with dependence on few commodities (agriculture, fisheries, tourism), food and energy imports and in many cases limited capacity to effectively manage their unique heritage.

The limited visibility of Europe's overseas territories at the EU and international level combined with their status vis a vis the European Union often impacts on capacity and resources dedicated to the protection of islands ecosystems. "Efforts to bridge that gap needs to consider innovative governance arrangements and the establishment of financial mechanisms to facilitate a more strategic approach at the European and regional level," said Dominique Benzaken.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> To read more, please go to www.iucn.org/euoverseas







The strategic location of overseas entities and unique assets offer opportunities for the EU and EU Member States to become leaders in biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, green economy, renewable energy and marine conservation in regional and international fora and thus meets its international commitments.

However, EU policies and programmes to date have not reflected the unique contribution of EU overseas to the EU international commitments. Though some positive developments should be recognized, including recent policies and initiatives such as the Biodiversity Strategy 2020, the review of Regional policy which have recognized the role of EU overseas.

Yet, much remains to be done, especially regarding funding to truly reflect the contribution of Europe overseas. In fact, access to funding remains problematic for many overseas territories and it is regrettable that LIFE+, the main financial mechanism for the implementation of EU Biodiversity Strategy does not include OCTs yet.

The Preparatory Action on BEST (Voluntary Scheme on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Territories of the European Overseas), initiated by the European Parliament, provide a unique opportunity to explore the development of long term initiative which could guide future investment for climate change and biodiversity in Europe overseas.

The recently announced results of the 2011 BEST Open Call for Proposals demonstrate the great demand for such an initiative. It will be however critical to ensure that the BEST preparatory action leads to long term governance arrangements and financial mechanisms within the EU policy and programme landscape to realise its full potential.

Roundtable I: Islands and Overseas Entities' specificities and assets in the fight against climate change and biodiversity conservation

Moderator: MEP Maurice Ponga

Ronan Uhel, European Environment Agency: "European Overseas Entities and Islands: A unique asset for the EU"

The 2008 report prepared after the meeting in la Réunion contains some important elements concerning islands and overseas entities. It contains part of the knowledge Europe possesses about this natural capital and some of the challenges it has to face in managing those natural assets<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Read the full report on Climate Change and Biodiversity in the European Union Overseas Entities (IUCN, 2008) at <a href="http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/2010-064.pdf">http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/2010-064.pdf</a>







Mr. Uhel asked: are we equipped to monitor and face the challenges concerning the environmental management of those entities? The starting point is to recognize that most of the impacts we have to face come from activities and processes that we have been monitoring and analysing for some time. There are many activities already impacting the ecosystem in those territories, such as fisheries, maritime transports, over-exploitation of resources, tourism, aquaculture and agriculture. Moreover, there are other emerging activities related to renewable energies, exploitation of genetic resources and biotechnology that are going to have impacts on those ecosystems in the next future. There are furthermore some more general processes like the increase of sea temperatures and the acidification of oceans that are provoking severe impacts on those delicate territories.

The question thus is: what can be the cumulative effect of these activities?

These emerging activities represent both an opportunity of development and a threat for overseas entities. In January 2011, the Marine Board of the European Science Foundation presented an interesting report on marine resources. According to this report, the products from the marine resources have an immense economic value, around 3 billion Euros each year. Furthermore, these products can help in creating new forms of energy, cutting GHG emissions, creating new industrial materials and processes but also new drugs and health treatments. The only missing element in the report concerns sustainability criteria.

On the global level, some of the biggest threats for the overseas territories come from climate change and the acidification of the oceans. Acidification has some major impacts on fish and other organisms that are an important part of the daily diet of millions of people around the world and an important source of income. This evidence is important knowing that marine overseas entities cover a very large area and that their EEZ represent an area 5 times bigger than the EU.

Those are global phenomenon with very clear local impacts not only on the ecosystem but also on the socio-ecological one. When it comes to biodiversity and food we note an important knowledge gap; we have to speed up in terms of knowledge in order to be capable of taking better decisions.

As stated during the OCTA's Ministerial Conference, we need a long-term approach to address climate change and related environmental issues. The lack of provision, the fragility of ecosystems and their potential have to be mapped in order to establish a comprehensive approach to the issue.

Target 2 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy puts a big emphasis on green infrastructures that can be read as the importance of natural resources conservation mixed with development and economic growth. In many overseas territories there is a traditional knowledge that is still there and we should rely on that in the establishment of projects at the local level. The main question remains assets management.

The draft revised decision by the Commission to the Council, expected by mid-2012, is going to tackle the question of how to use the EU OCT Development Fund. Mr. Uhel expressed the need to convince finance Ministers and planning agencies that they have a stake in the implementation of the sustainable management of natural capital. We should promote the inclusion of natural capital into the







national income accounts in order to show the link between natural capital, long-term growth and sustainable development, he argued

This framework is already present in the World Bank's Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (WAVES). WAVES is both a conceptual and methodological framework for sustainable development which includes manufactured, natural, human and social capitals. It is a comprehensive Wealth Approach to sustainable development where wealth includes all assets.

Thomas Binet, Research Associate, Centre for the Economics and Management of Aquatic Resources (CEMARE), University of Portsmouth: "Capitalizing islands and overseas entities' specificities and assets: An economic perspective"

Overseas territories possess a high value natural capital that is now under major threat because of climate change and biodiversity loss. Moreover, acidification of the oceans, costal erosion and fragmentation of the habitats pose new challenges to the management of natural capital.

How can these threats be better addressed? Environmental economy can help reconnecting ecosystem management to national and European economy, argued Mr. Binet.

The economic valuation of ecosystems concerns the evaluation of their value to the population's well-being. It was first applied in 1926 and gained visibility during the '90s thanks to the publication of many evaluation reports. Many evaluations have been carried in the overseas territories with a special focus on the coral reefs. This strategy relies on several economic valuation tools:

- 1. Economics of degradation: to evaluate the costs of degradation provoked by human activities and compare private benefits and social costs of destructive practices.
- 2. Economics of welfare: to assess the contribution of ecosystems to human well-being and to local economy through the use of Total Economic Value.
- 3. Economics of protection and management: to assess the economic opportunity created by protection and management from a social perspective and evaluate the benefits of biodiversity conservation.
- 4. Economics of restoration and compensation: to recognize the contribution of ecosystems to human well-being and local economy.

Mr. Binet held that economic valuation should be developed in overseas territories for three main reasons. Firstly, it helps to prioritize as it identifies the major contribution of ecosystem services on the total economic value. Secondly, the evaluation of cost-benefits helps in driving policy-making; it is crucial to compare the costs of biodiversity management with the benefits that derive from it. Thirdly, valuation can increase efficiency through a cost-effectiveness analysis.





In conclusion, some further studies on the costs of policy inaction and specific economic evaluation on important issues such as invasive species, coral bleaching, ocean acidification or deforestation can helps us to prioritize and guide the next political steps.

Mathieu Fichter, Programme Assistant, Unit for thematic coordination and innovation, DG REGIO, European Commission: "Synergies between the socio economic development of European Overseas Entities and the preservation of nature: the role of the cohesion policy"

Mr. Ficher started his presentation by introducing the EU Cohesion Policy 2007-2013. It is composed by three funds: a European Regional development Fund, a Cohesion Fund and a European Social Fund. For the period 2007-2013, about 105 billion Euros have been dedicated to environment, 30% of the total available funds. Moreover, about 3.9 billion Euros of direct investments have been employed for biodiversity and nature protection and 19 billion Euros of indirect investments have been employed for collateral activities such as the rehabilitation of industrial sites and contaminated land, natural risk prevention and waste water treatment.

In January 2011, a communication on 'Regional Policy contributing to sustainable growth in Europe 2020'<sup>3</sup> has been released carrying two key messages to stakeholders and actors: to invest more and to invest better. The first message, invest more, concerns three areas: the low-carbon economy, ecosystem services and eco-innovation. The second message, invest better, concerns durability and sustainability criteria and resource efficiency. The key point, argued Mr. Ficher, is to invest in green infrastructures for ecosystem-based adaptation and to increase investments in ecosystem services. Moreover, a focus should be put on climate resilience meaning that any kind of investment should be checked against climate impacts.

Subsequently, Mr. Ficher provided some practical examples starting with the 'Guyafor' project in French Guyana. This network of forest devices is aimed at supporting scientific research on the impact of climate change, provide appraisal of the amount of carbon stored in Guyana's forests and to help understand better the long term dynamics and the ecological organisation of biodiversity.

The second example concerns the geographic information system in the Caribbean, CARIBSAT. This project was launched in 2009 through a partnership between public bodies, universities and research organisations. The aim of the device is to monitor the environment through the analysis of satellite images, ground environment data and hydro-meteorological reports. The goal is the preservation of

http://ec.europa.eu/regional policy/information/pdf/brochures/rfec/2011 sustainable growth en.p df





<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> To read the Communication:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/sustainable/swd sec2011 9 2.pdf

To read the full report:



biodiversity at land and sea, the management of natural risks and the assessment of climate change impacts.

The third project, put in place in the Azores, follows the same path. The objective is to fill the information gap on biodiversity in order to better guide the policy-making process. The ERDF co-financed the development of a unique IT based information system on biodiversity which supports research on biodiversity and conservation management.

The Centre for research on Biodiversity and Environment established in the Canary Islands as a last example is aimed at improving knowledge and management of natural areas. Thanks to this centre one data bank for biodiversity has been established.

The New Cohesion Policy is the instrument that will be used in the next future. The Mission is to reduce disparities between European regions and to improve the economic, social and territorial cohesion. The goals of the Cohesion policy are to invest in growth and jobs, in order to find a new synergy for biodiversity and environment protection, and to contribute to the Union Strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

There are 11 thematic objectives in the proposal, 3 of them focusing on sustainable growth:

- promote the shift towards a low-carbon economy supporting renewable energy;
- promote climate change adaptation and risk prevention;
- protect the environment and promote resource efficiency.

Biodiversity and nature are included in this framework mostly through the last two thematic objectives and investment priorities. In particular, the protection of biodiversity and soil, the promotion of green infrastructures and ecosystem services, including NATURA 2000 are clearly highlighted in the Commission proposal.

The new concept of Regional Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) is a crucial point of the Commission strategy. It is aimed to include environment, energy, and climate change into the innovation strategy and to promote R&I in renewable resources, energy efficiency, water efficiency, waste, adaptation to climate change, nature preservation and biodiversity.

To conclude, there is still some available funding to invest in biodiversity through the Cohesion Policy 2007-2013, which provides a clear support to biodiversity and green infrastructures.

#### **Debate**

Mr. Ladislav Miko, DG SANCO, expressed his relief after seeing the political will aimed at including the protection of islands and overseas territories in several EU programs. On the other side, he feels that Europe has failed in expressing the urgency of this kind of action. He shared his impression that it will







be soon too late to act. According to him, politicians do not really feel this urgency; it is not enough to show conclusions and scientific evidence about what we know on biodiversity and ecosystems.

Mr. Panayotis Coroyannakis, ISLE-PACT Project Manager, represents a network of islands and overseas territories. He disagreed with Mr. Miko who said that there is a lack of political interest on the issue. The existence of the Pact of Islands is evidence of the contrary. In particular, the fact that the Pact has already been signed by 62 parties indicates a rather strong political interest. This Pact is not directly related to biodiversity but it is aimed at developing a sustainable energy action plan for those territories. Mr. Coroyannakis extended the invitation to the overseas regions to join the pact that through this pact could benefice from some EU funding sources.

Roundtable II: Improving the integration of Islands and Overseas Entities' specificities and assets into the European and International policies.

Moderator: Hugo Laxton, Head of the UK Nature and Landscape Office

Video message from Ahmed Djolaf, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): "European Islands and Overseas Entities and the implementation of International Conventions: The example of the Convention of Biological Diversity"

Some historical decisions have been adopted during the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Nagoya in October 2010. The aim of the conference was to support the international community and the States in facing loss of biodiversity.

The Nagoya meeting achieved three main objectives: to adopt a new ten years Strategic Plan to direct international efforts in saving biodiversity; to establish a strategy to mobilize resources in order to increase public support for the protection of biodiversity; and a new international protocol on the access to the assets deriving from the use of the genetic resources of the planet.

The 34 regions and overseas entities represent an incredible European asset with their diversity of landscape, ecosystem and species and they are crucial actors in the establishment of this new Strategy. Moreover, those territories play a key role in several European industrial sectors such as fisheries, agriculture and forestry. Several overseas entities are suppliers of biological resources for the EU and they contribute to various industrial sectors such as cosmetic, pharmaceutical, horticulture and agriculture.

Despite their role, overseas territories have often been neglected by the EU, together with the concept of biodiversity and the importance of its protection. The establishment of a public opinion that is aware of the importance of biodiversity is compelling as well as the necessity to act for its protection.







The Secretariat of the CBD will present a working program on insular biodiversity in order to point out to the global importance of European overseas biodiversity and to promote a sustainable use of biological resources. The program concerns also other important topics such as climate change, marine and costal biodiversity, protected areas and farm biodiversity.

This is an important time and the EU needs to act fast in order to avoid the loss of European and global biodiversity. Some steps have already been made with the establishment of the BEST program (voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas Entities) and with the declaration of the 2011-2020 United Nations Decade for Biodiversity.

Robert Flies, Advisor to the Director, Directorate in charge of Nature, Biodiversity & Land Use, DG Environment, European Commission: "European Islands and Overseas Entities in European Biodiversity policy"

Biodiversity in overseas territories is part of the Commission's work since 2006. The 2008 message from the Reunion Island has represented an important step in broadening the issue and in insisting on the urgency for measures to be taken on biodiversity at the political level.

Moreover, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2020<sup>4</sup> refers directly to the BEST initiative, which in 2011 had a big success. On 42 received proposals, 41 were considered eligible and at the end of the evaluation process 8 projects were proposed for funding, 15 were put on the reserve list and 19 were rejected.

The 8 shortlisted projects cover a wide geographical area (Pacific, Guyana, Caribbean and the Indian Ocean). Five are "on the ground" projects, 2 concern awareness raising and networking and one is aimed at establishing a policy tool.

"In the future we would like to work with the European Parliament towards a durable BEST scheme in order to promote a sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services through ecosystem-based approaches to climate change, adaptation and mitigation."

BEST activities could be a very useful bottom-up contribution to development policies. Looking at the projects that have already been selected, some conclusions can be drawn; notably the fact that climate change adaptation, ecosystem-based approaches and biodiversity are linked and should be addressed at the local level, relying on the best practice and the know-how available.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> To read the Strategy: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/docs/factsheets/Biod%20Strategy%20FS.pdf







Frédéric Cadet, Vice-President of the Regional Council of La Reunion, Net-Biome: "Net-Biome as an effective tool for enhancing overseas region and territories assets integration into European and International policies"

Overseas regions host a high level of biodiversity that is now threatened by climate change, human activities and natural hazards. Biodiversity is fundamental for ORs and OCTs' economic, social and cultural development. Nevertheless, current research on biodiversity is fragmented and poorly integrated into the European research network.

In this respect, we consider crucial to develop an action plan on the basis of a shared research programme, said Mr. Cadet. Net-Biome's work is aimed at creating a network of knowledge for tropical and sub-tropical biodiversity researchers and stakeholders, in support of sustainable development. This is the first large biodiversity partnership initiated by ORs and OCTs.

The first asset of Net-Biome is to unite overseas entities despite their cultural differences and geographical position. This is possible through:

- the recognition of European responsibilities towards ORs and OCTs population;
- the existence of a common will to face the effects of global change on biodiversity; and
- awareness on ORs and OCTs' assets.

Net-Biome's objectives can be summarize in a few words: coordinate the efforts from ORs and OCTs; mobilise bottom-up expertise on local research; design and implement common research strategies to support sustainable development; open the network to Europe, promoting international cooperation; and promote the visibility of those territories and their challenges.

The first Net-Biome research joint call concerns three main research topics: the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, the improvement of Land Management and Integrated Coastal Zone Management and the promotion of scientific knowledge on biodiversity. The common feature is the promotion of interdisciplinary research with a focus on human and social science.

First results show that Net-Biome is working with 10 funding partners with a 20% rate of success: 7 projects out of 35 received funding and there are 52 research teams involved.

Concerning the selected projects, they concern a widespread geographical area and they are focused on research about forest fragmentation, biological invasion, understanding biodiversity and conservation, seaweed proliferation and sustainable use of resources.

Net-Biome's mid and long term mission is focused on developing high-level quality management of research; address the limits of the efficient use of ORs and OCTs' assets; facilitate the integration of ORs and OCTs' research plans in European initiatives; improve the research network on biodiversity; establish a long-term and coherent programme for biodiversity research; and support the implementation of the message of the Reunion Island.

Mr. Cadet concluded with some proposals for the future:







- promote adequate research funding and new tools especially directed towards ORs and OCTs;
- establish a funding mechanism and a legal framework in order to enhance cooperation between ORs, OCTs and their neighbouring countries;
- establish a governance framework gathering all stakeholders at local and international level;
- promote the representation of ORs and OCTs stakeholders in the relevant European and International fora;
- use Net-Biome as ORs and OCTs common voice at the global level.

# Jaques Trouvilliez, French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, Transport and Housing: "European Islands and Overseas Entities: The perspective of Member States' in International fora"

The International Year of Biodiversity raised awareness at the domestic level among citizens, institutions and industries about the importance of protecting biodiversity and benefiting from all the values given to the human societies. The European overseas entities count 34 territories that host an exceptional biodiversity value.

Diversity does not only concern biology at the local level but also at the institutional, organizational and socio-economic level. In fact, between the different islands and overseas territories there are large differences in terms of population, economy and development.

During the Nagoya Conference in 2010, France supported the adoption of a strategic plan for the conservation of global biodiversity and the adoption of a protocol on "Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization."

After several years of negotiations, the APA/ABS protocol <sup>6</sup> has been adopted. This dispositive underlines the value of both biodiversity and traditional know-how. The implementation of this protocol could support the sustainable development of local economies in the overseas territories.

The European States enjoy a special status concerning the supply of genetic resources from those territories. The value of these resources should be another reason to protect biodiversity, this value being compared with other interests or projects eroding biodiversity.

The focus of work done on ecosystem services (MEA, 2003) is to establish an integrated approach that links local development and biodiversity protection. This kind of work needs to be developed in order to ensure the establishment of a greener economy.

The National Strategy for Biodiversity 2004-2010 was associated to an overseas action plan that allowed the identification of two main issues: the need for more coherence between the actors in order to ensure better governance and the importance of territorial collectivities that have to be involved in order to guarantee both biodiversity conservation and their economic development.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> http://www.cnr<u>s.fr/inee/communication/actus/docs/Fiche\_APA.pdf</u>





<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> More info: <u>http://www.cbd.int/iyb/doc/prints/factsheets/iyb-cbd-factsheet-abs-en.pdf</u>

The new National Strategy for Biodiversity 2011-2020<sup>7</sup> (France) is based on the strategic plan adopted in Nagoya. The aim is to elaborate regional and local strategies, respecting the competences of overseas collectivities, in accordance with all the other actors. This dynamic of co-elaboration is based on the idea of mainstreaming biodiversity to all public policies. At the same time, France launched one initiative for the overseas biodiversity (IFREBIOM) in order to make overseas entities and their problems more visible.

To conclude, Mr. Trouvilliez remarked some lack of knowledge concerning the topic of overseas biodiversity and ecosystems. For this reason, the French scientific community and the French Government strongly support the establishment of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. This expert group, like the one on climate change, seeks to make previsions and to study the threats to the ecosystems on the best available international expertise. The EU is participating to this process through the BEST dispositive. Furthermore, negotiations are taking place to include the overseas territories in the Life+, the principal financial instrument of the EU.

#### **Conclusions by the Chair**

MEP Maurice Ponga underlined the urgency to act to protect biodiversity in the European overseas territories. He also highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing and of cooperation between the different actors in order to ensure that the very rich biodiversity of the overseas territories is understood at the EU and International level.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> http://www.diversitas-international.org/resources/news/FrenchNationalBiodiversityStrategy.pdf





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