

**Support for European Overseas Entities through the BEST scheme: the view from an Overseas Country and Territory – Montserrat presented by CHIEF MINISTER Reuben T Meade**

The European Overseas entities are host to more than 60% of the biodiversity of their EU member states. While the overseas territories value this wealth it does not have access to the resources to conserve and manage this vast resource. Most agencies which provide support tend to exclude the EU overseas territories, indicating that this function is for the governing state.

The EU overseas territories are indeed pleased that BEST is being introduced in order to provide this critical support. We are indeed very pleased that we are together creating such a facility in order to enhance our biodiversity wealth. If I may be permitted to use an extreme example – if the residents of an overseas territory are operating within a subsistence economy, the preservation of the biodiversity is not seen as important. What is important for those people is the ability to sustain their own livelihoods. Spear fishing on a reef and making souvenirs from coral is seen as a way of life without any consideration for its preservation. The basic need for food and shelter is pre-eminent. It is therefore essential that resources are made more readily available for sustainable development projects. In so doing, as the quality of life of the residents is improved, they will be more capable of recognizing the need for management and preservation of their biodiversity and understand the need for so doing. BEST should therefore be supported while we continue to work on the other aspects of funding for other sustainable development projects.

BEST seeks to promote conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the European Overseas Entities by:

- i. addressing the wider ecosystem challenge of climate change via the maintenance of healthy resilient ecosystems through the fostering of ecosystem-based approaches which often bring multiple benefits;
- ii. promoting capacity building, knowledge transfer and exchange of best practices;
- iii. strengthening existing nature conservation programmes and related efforts in and outside of conservation areas including island-wide environmental management; and
- iv. improving the knowledge base and filling the knowledge gaps.

The BEST scheme also promotes the sustainable management of marine and terrestrial resources within and outside of Protected Areas, for the protection of important species, habitats and ecosystem functions.

BEST, as a follow-up to the La Reunion conference, is a vehicle by which the European Overseas Entities will be able to realize the social and economic benefits from conservation and sustainable use of their exceptional biodiversity.

BEST is a "Voluntary scheme" with no legal obligation to join. However, the decision to join the scheme will entail an agreement that the beneficiary respects the agreed principles. We must however ensure that this is a simple process which does not require prerequisite qualification which could fall beyond the capacity of the territory to fulfill.

*BEST* contributes to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>1</sup> Programmes of Work on Island Biodiversity (CBD DEC VIII/1), on Protected Areas (CBD DEC VII/28) and to the implementation of local biodiversity action plans and National Environmental Management Strategies. In addition the scheme assists the UK Overseas Territories in implementing the biodiversity components of the Environmental Charters, Ramsar and World Heritage Convention. The dilemma here is that many of the overseas territories have not been able to satisfy the conditions for signing the convention. Capacity and resource gaps within the overseas territories invariably mitigate against signing on to these and other conventions.

*BEST* provides funding opportunities for:

- identification, designation and management of sites according to an agreed management plan;
- collection of baseline data in places where this information does not exist;
- capacity building for local managers and provision of research studentships;
- provision of additional human resources;
- maintenance and restoration of high value biodiversity areas and healthy ecosystems;
- promoting management and sustainable use (e.g. tourism) of areas, where appropriate;
- development and demonstration of best practice for the management and restoration of sites; such as tourism related activities – hiking, bird-watching and diving
- climate change adaptation and mitigation measures using ecosystem services (co-benefit measures will be given priority);
- monitoring activities including – inter alia – climate change impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems;
- monitoring and management of the impacts of invasive alien species;\*
- communication, networking and education activities;
- development and implementation of enabling legislation and policies;
- intensive recovery programmes for critically endangered species.

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<sup>1</sup> UK Overseas Territories which are not signatories to the CBD are encouraged to sign up.

In addition *BEST* provides financial support to prepare the proposals for designation for sites and to the management of sites. The major question here is, what are the conditions precedent for accessing such support? Will the process be sufficiently simple to allow access to such needed resources?

### **Relevance of BEST to Montserrat**

It would go a long way towards the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources in the EU Overseas Entities, which is expected to accrue social and economic benefits and enhance the quality of life for its residents.

Under a UK DFID sponsored project, Montserrat is in the process of developing a Climate Change Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment for the Little Bay Town Centre which is being designed to replace the capital which was lost to the volcano. Alongside this is the development of a National Climate Change Adaptation Policy.

Given the current economic climate, there is an insufficiency of financial resources to fully implement the National Climate Change Adaptation Policy. Given the level of resource allocation sectors such as education, health and infrastructural development are given priority for funding over biodiversity conservation and ecosystems management.

It is therefore our hope that BEST would give us an opportunity to address issues related to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services so that this sector does not, under current development levels, compete for resource allocation within local budgets.

Sound management of biological resources (such as coral reefs and forests) can lead to climate resilience of natural ecosystems and physical capital. Climate resilience is a critical issue for Montserrat and other EU overseas territories within the Caribbean. We are small island territories situated in the Hurricane Belt.

Our biodiversity is very important to us. However, it must be seen as part of the biodiversity of the EU of which we are a part, or are we? For example, prior to volcanic activity in Montserrat, tourism contributed 20-36% to the GDP. Then, as now, the Montserrat Tourist Board and the Government of Montserrat have embarked on a tourism development programme aimed at attracting eco, nature and villa tourists. Tourism is seen as one of the main economic drivers for the redevelopment of Montserrat. Therefore, the proper management, protection and sustainable utilization of biological resources are quite important for our social and economic well being.

In a Montserrat context, BEST has the ability to be instrumental in the implementation of the Conservation and Environmental Management Act

(CEMA), an act that is pending that will give legislative authority to effect the work of the Department of Environment.

CEMA is an act to provide for the administration, conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, natural resources and the natural heritage of Montserrat, the designation and management of protected areas, pollution control, the regulation of activities, the incorporation of international obligations with respect to the environment into national law, the establishment of an environmental fund and related matters.

We also have a contribution to make. Through our collaboration with international agencies and NGOs we have developed skills regarding biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and management of invasive species. We are therefore in a position to share these skills with other EU Overseas Entities. This point is being made because as overseas territories we have skills which should be made available to one another through a focal point.