



“90 minutes for discovering the EU Overseas: BEST innovative & key partners of the EU Biodiversity strategy”



29 September 2020, 10:30 - 12:00 CEST
Online event

Hosted by MEP Stéphane Bijoux & MEP Sara Cerdas

Co-Chairs of the ‘Islands and Overseas Entities’ Working Group of the EP Intergroup on ‘Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development’

Speakers:

- **MEP Stéphane Bijoux**
- **MEP Sara Cerdas**
- **Carole Martinez**, Senior BEST Programme Coordinator, Global Protected Areas Programme, IUCN
- **Stéphane Ciccione**, Director, Kelonia
- **Ruben Eiras**, Co-ordinator for Blue Economy, Forum Oceano
- **Helene Loiseau**, Policy Officer for European Affairs, French Biodiversity Office
- **Humberto Delgado Rosa**, Director-General for Natural Capital, DG ENV, European Commission
- **Carla Montesi**, Director-General for Planet and Prosperity, DG DEVCO, European Commission

Welcome Remarks

MEP Stéphane Bijoux

“The main advantage of the BEST initiative is its support and promotion of local actors.”

Welcoming all participants, MEP Mr. Stéphane Bijoux started his intervention by highlighting the importance of biodiversity as key to humanity’s survival and fight against climate change. Mr. Bijoux also pointed out that the **EU Biodiversity Strategy underlines** the European and international **importance of the biodiversity of the Outermost Regions (ORs) and the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs)**. Furthermore, Mr. Bijoux highlighted the **importance of collaboration among stakeholders**, including member states, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the IUCN and **most importantly the citizens and civil society organizations**, that adopt initiatives at a local level. Mr. Bijoux concluded his opening remarks by pointing out, that the main advantage of the BEST initiative is its **support and promotion of local actors**.

Panel Discussion

Testimony from one BEST grantee in Pacific (Short video warm up)

“The BEST programme is a big plus for our organization.”

This short video presented the organization ‘**Vaiku’a Te Manu O Ua Huka**’ from the archipelago ‘Ua Huka’ in French Polynesia. This organization is protecting the biodiversity of the area and which notably attempt to safeguard an endemic bird species. ‘Vaiku’a Te Manu O Ua Huka’ has received the support from the BEST programme which helped the organization to strengthen its actions in the archipelago.

Carole Martinez, Senior BEST Programme Coordinator, Global Protected Programme, IUCN

“The BEST initiative was designed as a customized scheme, in order to let the local stakeholders define their project according to their needs, and to let room for the intelligence from the field.”

Ms. Martinez commenced her intervention via a brief presentation of the **BEST initiative**, which targets 7 overseas regions of global importance. Then, Ms. Martinez explained that the BEST programme was arranged around a flexible scheme with a **wide scope of goals attempting to promote conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the overseas European territories**. For instance,

the tailored financing of local initiative and organizations is one of BEST's central function. According to Ms. Martinez, **the main objectives of the BEST initiative are really to facilitate the access to EU funds for actors in the EU Outermost Regions (ORs) and EU Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTS)** so as to **unlock biodiversity-friendly and conservation initiatives**, but also to concretely increase the capacity and visibility of those often overlooked key stakeholders. Then, Ms. Martinez displayed BEST results in terms of environmental knowledge gains which allowed to identify 400 new key biodiversity areas and 3,5 millions km² of ecological corridors. The **participatory process** which engaged more than 900 stakeholders and 300 organizations was also underlined. Nevertheless, Ms. Martinez claimed that there is a necessity to critically **increase the BEST funding** in order to continue **supporting the ever-growing number of local projects**. After having presented different examples of BEST-funded projects covering varied overseas regions and very diverse issues, Ms. Martinez also revealed **the social and educational impact of the BEST initiative** notably regarding jobs' creation, citizens' involvement and awareness raising. Finally, Ms. Martinez emphasized the **significant environmental results of this programme** in terms of conservation measures and furthermore stressed the fact that small grants and local stakeholders' involvement can really make a great difference in this issue.

Video-message intervention from Stéphane Ciccione, Director, Kelonia

"The BEST programme has a great leverage and catalyst effect."

First of all, Mr. Ciccione claimed that the overseas territories are key players and partners in the success of the European Union new Biodiversity Strategy. Based in La Réunion and in Mayotte, Mr. Ciccione explained that those territories are critical biodiversity hotspots. For instance, 5 of the 7 species of marine turtles are present there. Two BEST-funded projects were then presented by Mr. Ciccione. The first one is called '**BEST Coca Loca**' and focused on the particular loggerhead turtles' behaviour in the Indian Ocean. This programme notably enabled the acquisition of very **important scientific data and knowledge for the conservation of this species**. The second project is called '**BEST Copra**' and aimed at developing a sustainable management of the specific species of seagrass within the Glorious Marine Natural Park. Those seagrasses represent an important habitat for sea turtles and are predominant for the biodiversity of the area, as well as providing natural carbon sinks. The actions of Coca-Loca and Copra started thanks to the BEST initiative and they continue and develop with new and wider partnerships and cooperation, but also with other fundings (FEDER & LIFE). According to Mr. Ciccione, **BEST has a great catalyst and leverage effect**. Finally, Mr. Ciccione concluded that the BEST initiative is a perfectly well-adapted mechanism to start programs within the framework of regional cooperation which bring **real supports to local NGOs and enables EU Overseas stakeholders to grow and act as regional and international players**. Concluding his intervention, Mr. Ciccione also stressed the complementarity of the BEST initiative with the other EU mechanisms like FEDER and LIFE.

Ruben Eiras, Co-ordinator for Blue Economy, Forum Oceano

“Let’s make the ‘European dream’ happen, focusing more on building a ‘better future for the collective, not just the individual’, in contrast with the American Dream.”

To begin with, Mr. Eiras displayed several insights about the so-called ‘**Europe’s Blue Dream**’ within the EU Green Deal. The idea is to build the **world’s most prosperous sustainable ocean economy**, creating jobs, wealth and restoring ocean’s health and biodiversity abundance. Mr. Eiras detailed this statement by explaining that the **EU Blue Economy is experiencing a constant growth (15% in 10 years)**, currently employs 5 million people and that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) foresees that Blue Economy will represent 10% of world’s GDP in 2030. Nevertheless, Mr. Eiras also underlined the fact that the **Blue Economy must be based on a new business model integrating natural ecosystems’ protection and human well-being within the equation**. This new business model must also be arranged **around low-carbon performance, circular economy processes, and should aim at ESG (Environmental-Social-Governance) returns rather than only financial returns**. However, Mr. Eiras stressed the fact that the Blue Economy could also secure significant financial returns for the investors. Mr. Eiras explained how the **EU taxonomy**, provided by the European Investment Bank (EIB), **could help financing the Blue Economy** by using performance threshold for economic activities such as climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation or transition to a circular economy. To illustrate that, Mr. Eiras provided the example of **sustainable aquaculture** and ocean farming which experience an **economic growth completely decoupled from greenhouse gas production**. Moreover, Mr. Eiras developed the idea for the **EIB to release ‘Blue Bonds’**, in the same idea that ‘Green Bonds’, in order to **finance the Blue Economy**. Finally, Mr. Eiras concluded by emphasizing the role of overseas EU territory in this transition to a strong EU Blue Economy.

Hélène Loiseau, Policy officer for European Affairs, French Biodiversity Office

“FBA strives to both adapt nation-wide policy to the specific context of the ORs and the OCTs and to deploy targeted policies for overseas territories.”

During her intervention Ms. Hélène Loiseau offered an insight of the overseas’ policy of the French Biodiversity Agency (FBA). **FBA’s main missions include preventing damages to water and environment, managing protected areas, implementing national and European public policies, developing knowledge and supporting local stakeholders**. Furthermore, Ms. Loiseau highlighted that the FBA strives to both **adapt nation-wide policy to the specific context of the ORs and the OCTs** and to **deploy targeted policies for overseas territories**. Ms. Loiseau also mentioned that FBA participated in BEST as a partner and in LIFE4BEST as a financier. Moreover, Ms. Loiseau underlined that FBA won a LIFE call for proposals for preparatory projects, in which there was a specific thematic for networking between OCTs and highlighted that **French OCTs are willing to be integrated into the upcoming LIFE program**. Ms. Loiseau concluded her

intervention by pointing out that FBA is very much looking forward to the upcoming proposals within the LIFE program.

Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director-General for Natural Capital, DG ENV, European Commission

“The BEST initiative has showcased that investing in nature- and ecosystem-based approaches is often a cost-effective way to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.”

Mr. Humberto Delgado Rosa began his intervention by mentioning that **the BEST initiative has contributed to raising awareness** about the ecological importance of the OCTs and the ORs and it has showcased that **investing in nature- and ecosystem-based approaches is often a cost-effective way to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss**, which are two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, Mr. Delgado Rosa underlined that the **EU Biodiversity Strategy is the most ambitious biodiversity strategy the world has ever seen and mentioned the Strategy’s main elements**: protecting and restoring nature, enabling transformative change and providing leadership for an ambitious global Biodiversity Framework after 2020. As recognized by the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the **OCTs and the ORs host biodiversity of global importance** and therefore entail a significant contribution in all the aforementioned elements. Moreover, Mr. Delgado Rosa highlighted that the wide geographical spread of the OCTs and the ORs provides an opportunity to extend regional cooperation with a European “flavour” in seven globally important regions. For that reason, the **European Commission will prepare to implement the small grant schemes for biodiversity** in the OCTs and the ORs within the LIFE program, which however need to be **coupled with programs on national and regional level and public support**. Mr. Delgado Rosa concluded his intervention by pointing out that according to the EU Biodiversity Strategy, as regards the ORs, focus is needed on the protection and restoration of the tropical and subtropical marine and terrestrial ecosystems, while as regards the OCTs, they are recognized as hot spots of biodiversity.

Carla Montesi, Director-General for Planet and Prosperity, DG DEVCO, European Commission

“The BEST program places emphasis on the role that empowered local authorities are called to play and the need for improvement of governance at local, national and regional level.”

Ms. Carla Montesi began her intervention by highlighting the importance of the role of the European Parliament in keeping biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change, which are the biggest threats for humanity, high in the political agenda. In that line, the EU Biodiversity Strategy is a main element of the European Green Deal. Moreover, Ms. Montesi underlined that **the BEST initiative is a key example of a successful scheme on environmental action**, that highlights the importance of the link between biodiversity, climate change, sustainable land use, sea management and disaster risk reduction. BEST also places emphasis on the **role that empowered local authorities are called to play** and the need

for improvement of governance at local, national and regional level. Furthermore, Ms. Montesi mentioned that the **upcoming LIFE program will offer more flexibility regarding inter-regional cooperation** among Member States, the OCTs, the ORs and European partners. This is why dedicated funds are needed, but at the same time an **effective and systematic mainstreaming of the environmental consideration in all cooperation programs** is essential.

Discussion with the audience, moderated by MEP Sara Cerdas

In the context of the Q&As session, Mr. Delgado Rosa informed the audience that the EU Biodiversity Strategy addresses the issue of illegal wildlife trade, while the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Wildlife Action Plan are relevant tools in the arsenal of the European Commission, that will be reinforced. Mr. Delgado Rosa also mentioned the importance of the Invasive Alien Species Regulation, since some exotic species fall within its scope. Finally, Mr. Delgado Rosa explained that the EU Biodiversity Strategy addresses the issue of imported deforestation, which is also linked to the issue at hand.

The second question on the possibility to include the LIFE4BEST program in the Natura 2000 Award, was answered by Ms. Martinez, who highlighted that the coordinators of the program definitely deserve such an acknowledgement.

Closing remarks

MEP Sara Cerdas

“The European Commission will create a comprehensive governance framework to guide the implementation of biodiversity commitments agreed at national, European and international level.”

Within her concluding remarks, MEP Ms. Sara Cerdas stressed that the recent pandemic highlighted the importance of achieving a **good symbiosis with our environment** and stressed that **restoring the economy must be in line with this goal**. Ms. Cerdas also reiterated the importance of the OCTs and ORs, highlighting their contribution in EU’s international recognition and fulfillment of EU’s environmental objectives. Additionally, Ms. Cerdas mentioned that **the European Commission will create a – currently lacking - comprehensive governance framework** to guide the implementation of biodiversity commitments agreed at national, European and international level. Last but not least, Ms. Cerdas reiterated the **significance of strong partnerships at local, regional, national and European level**, in order to materialize the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy.