



BEST Initiative – Past, present and future



Wednesday 7 June 2023, 16:15 – 18:00 CEST
Hybrid Event (Brussels, Belgium & Online)

Co-hosted by MEP Stéphane Bijoux & MEP Sara Cerdas

Co-chairs of the 'Islands and Overseas Entities WG' of the European Parliament Intergroup on 'Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'

Speakers:

MEP Stéphane Bijoux, Co-chair of the 'Islands and Overseas Entities WG' of the European Parliament Intergroup on 'Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'

MEP Sara Cerdas, Co-chair of the 'Islands and Overseas Entities WG' of the European Parliament Intergroup on 'Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'

Bettina Doeser, Head of Unit of ENV D.2. on 'Natural Capital & Ecosystem Health, European Commission

Chantal Marijnissen, Head of Unit of INTPA F.2 on 'Environment, Sustainable Natural Resources', European Commission

Cyrille Barnérias, European and International Relations Director, French Biodiversity Agency

Boris Erg, Director, IUCN European Regional Office

Christèle Allaud, Caribbean Regional Focal Point – BEST2.0+, LIFE4BEST, BESTRUP programmes

Michelle Perello, CEO, Consulta Europa, Macaronesia Regional Focal Point – LIFE4BEST programme

Estelle Crochelet, Indian Ocean Regional Focal Point – BEST2.0+, LIFE4BEST, BEST RUP programmes

Sérgio Teixeira, LIFE4BEST beneficiary, Madeira

Roxana Bucioaca, BESTLIFE2030, Senior Manager, IUCN

Welcome Remarks

MEP Mr. Stéphane Bijoux

“Local initiatives must be protected and encouraged, and must be put forward by institutions and associations. BEST needs to represent a real belt, bridging the three oceans, through collective ambition and intelligence. ”

MEP Mr. Stéphane Bijoux started off by praising this timely event in the midst of the EU Green Week, allowing visibility of the actions taken within the BEST initiative. **MEP Mr. Bijoux** affirmed the instrumental importance of outermost regions and overseas countries for Europe in **biodiversity preservation**, such as the **Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific oceans**, and their impact on Europe’s climate and future. He also discussed how COVID-19 shed light on **the relation between the environment and human health**. **MEP Mr. Bijoux** listed a few crucial figures that demonstrate **BEST initiative’s** successes: since 2010, 100 projects were supported by Europe, 400 priority biodiversity areas and corridors were identified, and 12 new species were discovered, portraying optimism. **MEP Mr. Bijoux** also paid tribute to his predecessor, **MEP Mr. Maurice Ponga**, who built and supported **BEST**, which itself represents the coronation of a method in preserving biodiversity and cooperation.

Panel discussion

Bettina Doeser, Head of Unit of ENV D.2. on ‘Natural Capital & Ecosystem Health, European Commission

“As EU we want to lead worldwide in the effort of halting biodiversity loss and achieve our commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework, an ambition to which the EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories have an essential contribution to make.”

Ms. Bettina Doeser started by stressing the strategic importance of the EU Overseas in achieving the EU’s wider **ambition as set out in the European Green Deal and related Strategies for 2030**, and the **BEST initiative’s** great potential to support related efforts. She pointed out that the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 makes an explicit reference to **protecting and restoring tropical and sub-tropical marine and terrestrial ecosystems in the EU**

outermost regions, and invites **Member States with Overseas Countries and Territories not governed by EU environment rules to consider promoting equal or equivalent rules** in these countries territories. **Ms. Bettina Doeser** also highlighted that **the Commission’s proposal for a Regulation on Nature Restoration** recalled that it is appropriate to take into account the specific situation of the Union’s outermost regions. She welcomed the kicking-off of the **LIFEBEST2030 project** which will continue to implement the BEST initiative’s trialled and tested approach over the coming years. **Ms. Bettina Doeser** recalled some of the aims of the BEST initiative and the LIFEBEST2030 project to highlight their relevance, including: **unlocking the potential in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of ecosystem services in the EU Overseas** by facilitating access to EU funds for actors through a flexible small-grant facility **and building capacity** to access and effectively manage related EU funds; **compiling and communicating related insights** derived from peer-to-peer knowledge exchange; and **quantifying the tangible contributions of the EU Overseas** towards achieving national, European and global goals for biodiversity and climate action.

Chantal Marijnissen, Head of Unit of INTPA F.2 on ‘Environment, Sustainable Natural Resources’, European Commission

“BEST is a great example of collectiveness in finding solutions, always evolving as a dynamic platform among member states, overseas regions and partner countries.”

Ms. Chantal Marijnissen acclaimed the promotion of **European environmental values and standards**, which have **incentivized** local actors to engage in environmental issues. **Ms. Marijnissen** recognized that the projects funded through **BEST** shed a light on the **link** between biodiversity conservation, sustainable land and sea management, and disaster-hood reduction. She explained how the initiative also brought out the ground-setting role of **local initiatives and organizations’**, and how the **EU’s Biodiversity Framework** underlined the role of **indigenous peoples’**. **Ms. Marijnissen** welcomed the readiness of **grassroots organizations** to protect biodiversity, and the incentivizing vocations within **small community based local organizations** recruiting young people. She mentioned the importance of **data** in targeting **country-specific action** and equipping better for future efforts.

Cyrille Barnérias, European and International Relations Director, French Biodiversity Agency

“The French Biodiversity Agency wants to ensure that BEST is fully integrated in biodiversity initiatives in the French outermost regions.”

Mr. Cyrille Barnérias highlighted the importance of overseas territories for the **French Biodiversity Agency**, which has a long-lasting relation with **BEST**, such as through the Conservation and integrated Management of Phanerogam Seagrass Meadows of the Glorieuses Marina Nature Park and their Functional Role for Marina Turtles (**COPRA**). **Mr. Barnérias** portrayed the agency’s effort, notably by helping municipalities discover their **surroundings** and initiate **biodiversity efforts**, through capacity-building work, and through legal monitoring work. He talked about the role of **BEST in** striking the right balance and rigorously managing **public money**, and suggests **better accessibility** to smaller organizations.

Boris Erg, Director, IUCN European Regional Office

“BEST helped IUCN in discovering its own capacity by using its leverage potential through granted-making and funding.”

Mr. Boris Erg congratulated the success of **nature conservation efforts** and looked forward to the upcoming **Climate COP**, and appreciated the **partnership** between **IUCN & BEST** and the **partners’** work in regions in dire need of biodiversity preservation efforts.

Success Stories

Christèle Allaud, Caribbean Regional Focal Point – BEST2.0+, LIFE4BEST, BEST RUP programmes

“Municipalities understood the interest of working with BEST, and the mayors understood the interest of working with schools and experts to carry out biodiversity action.”

Ms. Christèle Allaud decided to share from the Caribbean Regional Focal Point two overseas regional examples from the **Dutch overseas territories**; the first being the **Reef Renewal Foundation Bonaire (C-9) Larval Propagation for reef restoration** in 2021 and 2022, which

discovered new genetic strains of two different coral species, and the second example being the highly successful **Mangrove Maniacs (C-56)**, which improved **water circulation** and **community awareness** and **involvement**. As for the **French Caribbean**, the first project was the **Conservatoire Botanique de Martinique (C-141) SICOLIBA** funded under the 2019 call of LIFE4BEST, which successfully enriched the **geographical** database for plants and habitats. The second example was **Ville de Saint-François (C-100) Plant'Aksyon** in the 2020 call, which raised **awareness** of local plants and **reforested** the coastline.

Estelle Crochelet Indian Ocean Regional Focal Point – BEST2.0+, LIFE4BEST, BEST RUP programmes

“A lot of associations are present in the Indian Ocean territory with several successful BEST2.0+, LIFE4BEST, and BEST RUP programmes.”

Ms. Estelle Crochelet discussed 4 projects in the Indian Ocean, the first one being the successful **IO49 Chiropt’ilwa in 2021**, concerning the knowledge acquisition on the **bats** of the **Scattered Islands** and management recommendations, and the second one being the **IO40 MESORUN** funded under the 2019 LIFE4BEST call, which involved faunistic inventories of **Mesophotic** coral ecosystems of **Reunion Island**. The third project mentioned by **Ms. Crochelet** was the **IO71 UTOPIAN** from 2021 till 2022, and it focused on the identification of areas of **priority conservation issues** within the reef flats of **Reunion Island**. The last project discussed in the Indian Ocean was the **IO45 NARISOME MUHOKO** in 2021 & 2022, focused on co-constructing **sustainable management** of the **Dembéni** and **Bandrélé** mangroves in a participatory approach.

Michelle Perello, CEO, Consulta Europa, Macaronesia Regional Focal Point – LIFE4BEST programme

“Tangible results are important but so are awareness-raising results.”

Ms. Michelle Perello explained the focus of **Consulta Europa** on the Canary Islands, Azores and Madeira through the presentation of 3 projects funded by **LIFE4BEST**: the first one being the **Seabird Macaronesian Sound (SMS)** in 2020, the second one being the **ecosystem functions** and services analysis in the **Black Coral forests** in 2019, and the third project being

the **Conservation of Madeira's Threatened Endemic Butterflies**, presented by one of its beneficiaries **Mr. Sérgio Teixeira**.

Q&A

*A question was addressed to both **MEPs Ms. Cerdas & Mr. Bijoux** on their feedback from on-site visits in the overseas.*

MEP Ms. Sara Cerdas talked about how visits offer the ability to assess how the projects deliver results that target the European biodiversity conservation targets, and allow for the search for new promising areas to implement pilot projects.

MEP Mr. Stéphane Bijoux appreciated the strong commitment of people involved in all projects during his visits, and their willingness to work on the field cooperatively and find common solutions.

Announcement: BESTLIFE2030

Roxana Bucioaca, BESTLIFE2030, Senior Manager, IUCN

Ms. Bucioaca briefly introduced the promising new phase which inspires a bright future within the biodiversity preservation and ecosystems context, with **over 200 grants that will be awarded**. She explained how the project aims to strengthen **individual** and **institutional capacities**, and actions like **BEST** deliver **cooperation** efforts and opportunities. They expect to launch a first call for proposals in **October** this year.

Closing remarks by MEP Ms. Sara Cerdas

MEP Ms. Cerdas once again praised BEST initiative's successful role in biodiversity preservation during its 13 years, and encouraged not working in silence and sharing practices instead, in order to reach 2030 & 2050 biodiversity preservation goals. She was also looking forward to BESTLIFE2030 which introduces new practices and transformative projects, and furthermore empowers local communities.