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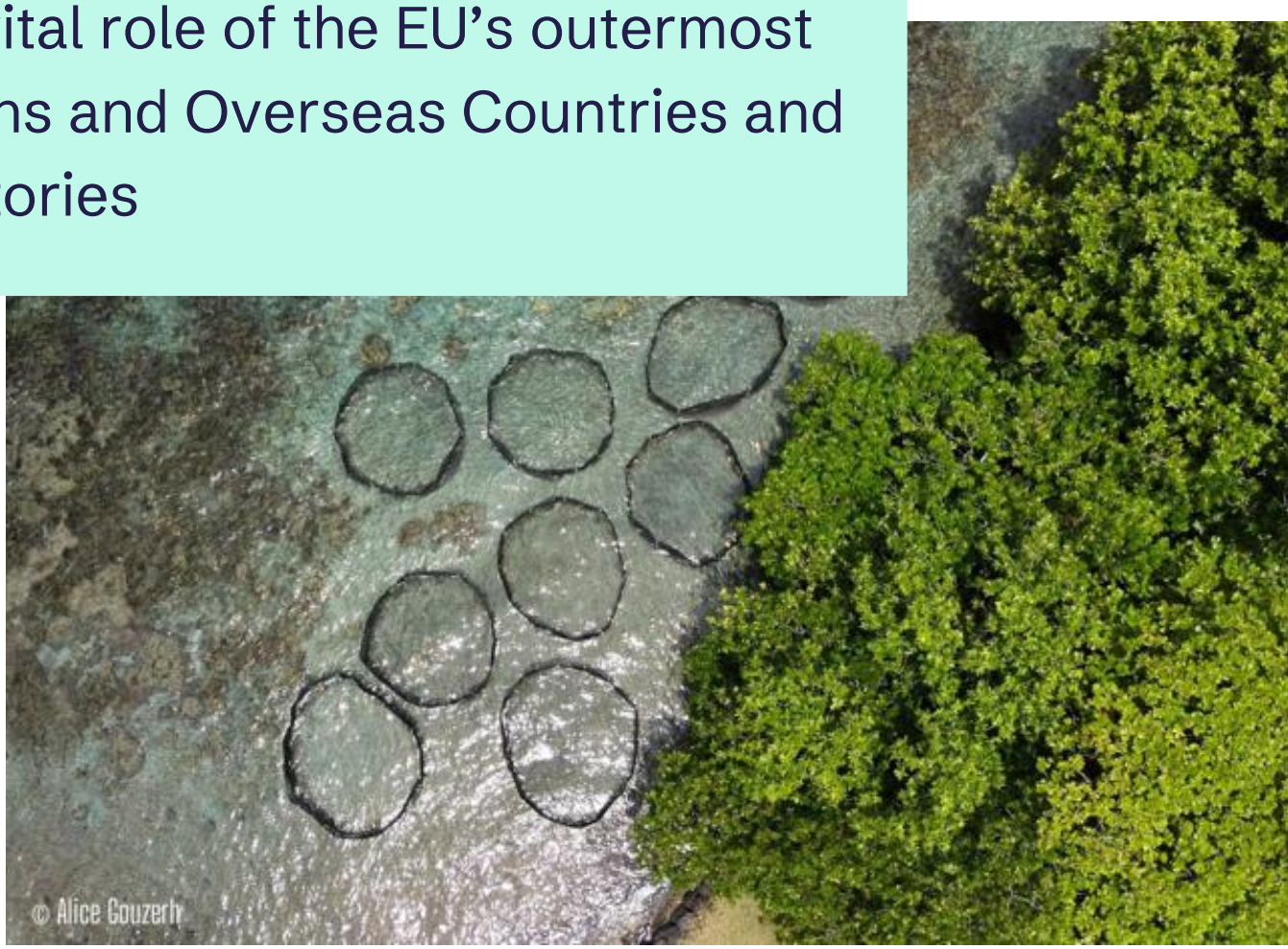
BEST Life 2030

Achieving the EU Biodiversity Strategy:

The vital role of the EU's outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories



Co-organised by:

People Planet Prosperity

MEP Group on Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainable Development

IUCN

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"Achieving the EU Biodiversity Strategy: The vital role of the EU's outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories"

1. Event Summary

With the **2030 deadline for the EU Biodiversity Strategy approaching,** this event focused on the critical role of the **EU's outermost regions (ORs)** and **Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs)** in achieving **biodiversity and climate goals** through the **BESTLIFE2030 Programme.**

Hosting over **80% of the EU's biodiversity**, these regions are key to success due to their unique ecosystems, high levels of endemism, and close human-nature relationships. They offer critical opportunities for ecosystem restoration, invasive species eradication, species conservation, and the sustainable use of natural resources. **ORs and OCTs are essential for meeting both the EU's environmental objectives and global targets, such as those set out in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).**

Since 2011, the **BEST Initiative** has supported **153 projects across 9 ORs and 25 OCTs. In its current form, BESTLIFE2030** aims for over **200 projects by 2030** with a total budget of **nearly €25 million**. These projects address key biodiversity priorities including ecosystem restoration, species protection, invasive species management, and climate adaptation.

The event, which brought together **Members of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Commission, NGOs, and current project grantees**, highlighted some of the work that is being done on the ground as a means to illustrate how **the ORs and OCTs can contribute to advancing the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** through local-level action.

It included a showcasing of regional projects to illustrate local-level biodiversity action across diverse EU OCTs and outermost regions:

- **French Caribbean:** *"Restoration of the floral biodiversity of the Perle-Rifflet coastline in the commune of Deshaies, in a context of eroding coastline"*
- **Dutch Caribbean:** *"Optimise the production of the juvenile Queen Conch at the Curaçao Queen Conch Hatchery"*
- **Pacific:** *"Ma'oCycling – Behavioral monitoring of sharks following the gradual cessation of fish by-product discharge from offshore fishing in French Polynesia"*
- **Macaronesia:** *"Conservation strategies for sharks and rays in the Canary Islands: A scientific approach and stakeholder review"*.

The event celebrated the return of the endangered Polynesian storm-petrel to Kamaka Island, less than two years after rat eradication and restoration efforts supported by previous BEST funding.

The event featured the launch of the **policy brief on "BESTLIFE2030 contributions to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030".** At the strategy's midway point, the brief building on existing analyses, points out how progress is not on track to meet the targets and that significant data gaps persist. It emphasises the importance of the 57 ongoing BESTLIFE2030 projects and their combined environmental and socio-economic impacts. The brief offers three key recommendations: close monitoring gaps using the best available science-based tools, enhance biodiversity financing (including Programmes like BESTLIFE2030), and empower local communities to ensure effective on-the-ground implementation.

Another key highlight was the BESTLIFE2030 interactive map, a newly developed tool that visualises biodiversity projects across ORs and OCTs. The map integrates project data to highlight conservation efforts, helps identify geographic and thematic gaps, improve coordination, and increase the visibility of EU biodiversity investments. Featuring interactive points with project details and layered geographic data, it aims to support local actors, policymakers, and the public in tracking EU biodiversity investments and impacts.

With a full room of participants in person and an online audience connecting from the EU Overseas this wide-reaching participation reflected the strong global interest and commitment to the vital role of the EU's outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories in achieving biodiversity and climate goals by 2030. **Thank you all for attending!**

2.Speakers Presentations

2.1 MEP André Rodrigues *(S&D, Portugal)*

MEP André Rodrigues highlighted the importance of **bringing together voices from the many projects supported by the BESTLIFE2030 Programme** at such a **pivotal moment,** with less than five years left to achieve the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** ambitious goals.

Calling for **stronger political commitment and deeper collaboration** across institutions, Member States, sectors, and geographies, MEP Rodrigues warned that the **shifting political and geopolitical landscape risks reversing environmental progress**, making the defence of existing commitments as important as their implementation.

MEP Rodrigues emphasised the **central role of the EU's outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories**, which hold **over 80% of Europe's biodiversity**. Far from being peripheral actors, these regions—spanning from the Caribbean and the Pacific to the Indian Ocean and Macaronesia—contain ecosystems that are among the richest and most fragile in the world. **They are on the frontline of the global fight against climate change**, hosting endemic species and vital marine habitats.

Speaking about his home, the **Azores**, MEP Rodrigues described the region as a **microcosm of both opportunity and responsibility**. With marine sanctuaries for whales, sharks, and seabirds, the Azores also face significant threats from **invasive species, habitat degradation, and the growing pressure of tourism**. While expanding marine protected areas and implementing LIFE Programmes, Rodrigues stressed the need for **constant vigilance to safeguard this fragile biodiversity**.

MEP Rodrigues, after mentioning the projects to be presented at the event, **concluded** by affirming that **these projects are not just local efforts, but European successes.** They show what is possible **when we invest in nature and in the people who protect it**—the true value of the **BESTLIFE2030 Programme**.

2.2 Ms. Anne Burrill, *Head of Unit LIFE Environment (Nature and Circular Economy) at the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)*

Ms. Anne Burrill presented an overview of the EU's commitment to biodiversity through the **BESTLIFE2030 Programme**, emphasising its strategic importance and evolution. She explained that the Initiative, **originally funded through external and regional EU instruments**, is now **fully integrated under the LIFE Programme**—the EU's dedicated financial instrument for environment and climate policy since 1992.

Ms. Burrill went on to stressing that, **LIFE has financed over 6,000 impactful, often locally grounded projects** that not only address key environmental challenges but also contribute to **community well-being and broader socio-economic goals**. She highlighted that LIFE supports **solutions that can be upscaled and replicated**, increasing their policy relevance and long-term value.

While biodiversity in the outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories had long been supported through mainstream LIFE activities, **the global importance of this biodiversity and the need for additional financing were recognised**. Ms. Burrill explained that, in response, the **BEST Programme was originally launched with small grants**, specifically designed to **involve grassroots actors** who may not have had the capacity to access traditional LIFE funding. **Over time, the value of these regions and actors became increasingly evident**, reinforcing the importance of targeted support.

As a result, Ms. Burrill noted, **the BEST Initiative was formally integrated into the LIFE Programme**—a move supported by the **European Parliament**. She said this integration aimed to **strengthen policy alignment and increase impact**, by reinforcing EU biodiversity objectives under the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**, the **Birds and Habitats Directives**, and the **Nature Restoration Regulation**, while also **increasing available funding**.

Under the current BESTLIFE2030 framework, **€32 million has been allocated**, with **individual grants of up to €100,000**. Ms. Burrill emphasized that **special attention is being given to biodiversity in outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories**, with a strong focus on **measurable outcomes**, **long-term sustainability**, and **policy relevance**.

She also highlighted the **growing interest in the Programme**, as demonstrated by the increasing number of **concept notes submitted** and **broad geographical participation**, including from as far as **Greenland**. This, she said, reflected the Programme's **growing relevance and added value** in supporting biodiversity across Europe's most unique and vulnerable regions.

2.3 Mr. Boris Erg, *Director of the European Regional Office, IUCN*

Mr. Boris Erg reflected on the **evolution of the BESTLIFE2030 Programme**, emphasising its **strategic role in achieving both global and regional biodiversity goals**. He presented the Programme as a **flagship example of IUCN's commitment to empowering local communities** and supporting them in reaching **jointly agreed biodiversity targets by 2030**. He highlighted **IUCN's efforts to build the capacity needed to administer such grants**, ensuring that support reaches those best placed to deliver conservation results on the ground.

Mr. Erg **stressed the urgency of the current moment**, noting that **"the clock is ticking"**, with **fewer than five years remaining** to achieve the ambitious objectives of both the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** and the **EU Biodiversity Strategy**. In this context, he underlined the **significant contributions of the BEST Initiative** to conservation in the **outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories**, describing its role as **central to advancing international biodiversity targets**.

He recalled that the **BEST Initiative originated in 2008**, following a **call for support from Réunion Island**, with the aim of **closing the biodiversity funding gap for the EU Overseas**. He noted its recognition by key international platforms such as the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP**, the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA), and through **Resolution 6.108 adopted at the 2016 IUCN Congress**. He linked this legacy to the **upcoming IUCN Congress in Abu Dhabi**, scheduled for October, where related decisions will be addressed.

Mr. Erg described the **BESTLIFE2030 Programme as a model of inclusive and collaborative partnership**, bringing together **local communities, civil society, academia, research institutions, and conservation networks** to deliver measurable biodiversity outcomes. Since 2011, he noted, **153 grants have been awarded across 9 outermost regions and 25 Overseas Countries and Territories**, contributing both to **local biodiversity efforts** and to **broader conservation goals**.

Looking ahead, Mr. Erg stated that the aim is to **support around 200 projects by 2030**, with a **total investment of €25 million**. He expressed **sincere gratitude to the European Union and the European Commission** for their support, which has enabled IUCN to carry out this work effectively. Concluding his remarks, Mr. Erg reaffirmed **IUCN's long-term commitment**, stating, **"We are here to stay,"** and reiterated **IUCN's full support for BESTLIFE2030** and for its partners' efforts to meet their conservation and sustainable development objectives.

2.4 Mr. Tommaso Demozzi, *Biodiversity Policy Officer of IUCN EU Representative Office*

Mr. Tommaso Demozzi **presented the policy brief on "BESTLIFE2030's contributions to the EU Biodiversity Strategy"**, emphasising the **symbolic significance of returning to Brussels**, where the BEST Initiative originated, to reflect on its evolution and future direction.

The **policy brief**, now available on the **BESTLIFE2030 website**, marks the **midway point of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**, which serves as the **guiding framework for biodiversity action in the EU**. Structured in **five chapters**, the brief

offers a **concise yet comprehensive analysis** of how BESTLIFE2030 contributes to these objectives.

The **first chapter introduces the context**, while the **second outlines the evolving policy landscape**, including the **adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** and the EU's pivotal role in securing it at **COP15 in Montreal**. It also identifies the **Nature Restoration Regulation as a key milestone for nature conservation**, including for its **explicit recognition of the role of outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories**.

In the **third chapter**, it addresses the **progress made on implementing the EU Biodiversity Strategy**. Mr. Demozzi acknowledged past monitoring challenges but recognised the European Commission and stakeholder's efforts in developing tools to track the Strategy's 104 actions. Although **data gaps remain, dashboards are being developed**, aligned with global monitoring systems from the **Global Biodiversity Framework**.

He noted that while the overall picture isn't fully optimistic, significant progress has been made. Building on the recently launched JRC evaluation, **29 selected sub-targets, 10 are on track, 3 are stagnant, 2 are regressing**, and **14 lack sufficient data**—a gap that ongoing efforts aim to close. He emphasised that IUCN and Initiatives like BEST can contribute meaningfully here. The analysis also drew on findings from the **midterm review of the 8th Environment Action Programme** and civil society reports.

The **fourth chapter** focuses on the **foreseen impacts of the 57 ongoing BESTLIFE2030 projects**, which are active across all relevant regions. The contributions relate primarily to **protected areas** (both in coverage and management quality), **invasive alien species control**, and **ecosystem restoration**. While the brief centres on **environmental impacts**, Mr. Demozzi emphasised the **holistic nature** of the projects, which also strive for **social and socio-economic benefits**.

To illustrate the **breadth and relevance** of the Programme, the brief includes **one featured project per region**, providing **geographic representation** and showcasing **on-the-ground results**.

The **final chapter sets out three key recommendations**:

1. **Close the monitoring gap** by leveraging existing tools like the IUCN Red List, Green List, and project-level data to inform EU and global progress tracking.
2. **Strengthen biodiversity financing**, with emphasis on grant schemes such as BESTLIFE2030. Mr. Demozzi referenced the EU's commitments to allocate 7.5% of its budget to biodiversity in 2024, rising to 10% by 2026–2027, stressing the

importance of protecting and expanding these investments in the next budget cycle.

3. **Empower local communities** to ensure that EU and global policies translate into concrete grassroots action, where real biodiversity outcomes are delivered.

Mr. Demozzi concluded by reaffirming the **value of BESTLIFE2030** as both a **strategic policy tool and a practical mechanism** for biodiversity conservation aligned with EU and global priorities.

*Find the policy brief **here***

2.5 Ms. Rona Dacourt, *representing the French Caribbean, presenting the project "Restoration of the floral biodiversity of the Perle-Rifflet coastline in the commune of Deshaies, in a context of eroding coastline"*

Ms. Rona Dacourt **presented the project on the restoration of coastal plant biodiversity in the La Perle-Rifflet area**, situated in the **commune of Deshaies, Guadeloupe,** home to **4,300 residents** and facing the Caribbean Sea. This coastal site, historically a fishing village and now reliant on tourism, has been severely impacted by **coastal erosion**, having lost **nearly 60 meters of shoreline between 1950 and 2022**.

She explained that the spread of **invasive alien species**, such as **coconut palms and almond trees**, had further degraded the ecosystem by **outcompeting native coastal vegetation**. These species, while dominant, have **ineffective root systems for sand stabilisation**, exacerbating erosion.

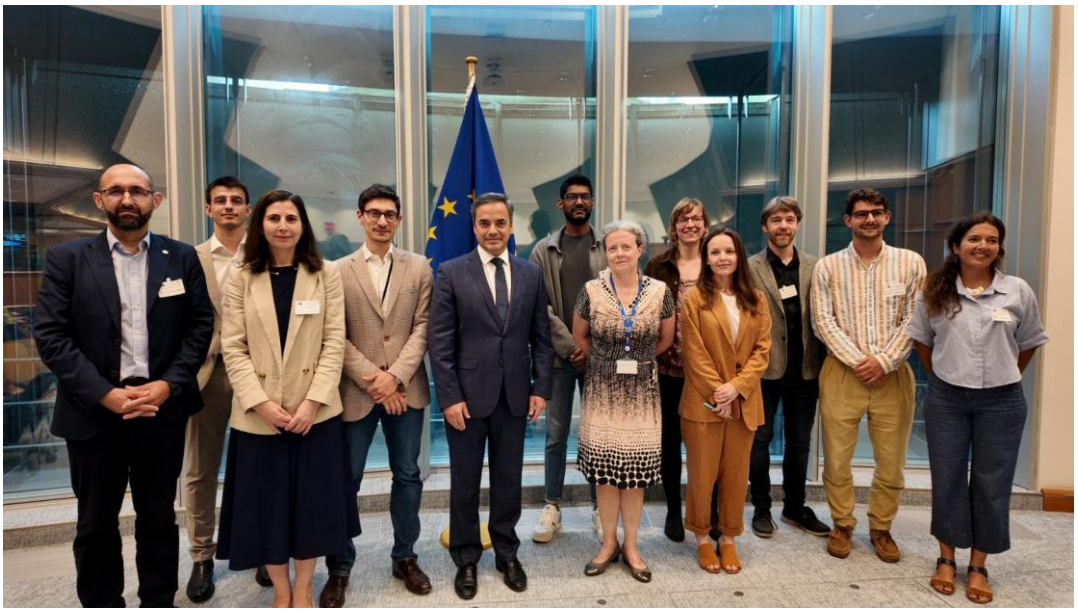
To counter these issues, the project applied **Nature-based Solutions**, developed in collaboration with the **Guadeloupe National Park**. Actions included the **removal of invasive coconut palms,** and the **installation of seven revegetation enclosures** planted with **native coastal plant species**. The goal was to **restore and stabilise 2,750 square meters of degraded coastline**.

Ms. Dacourt emphasised the **collaborative approach**, involving the **Guadeloupe National Park**, the **Botanical Conservatory of the Guadeloupe Islands**, local environmental associations, and **botanical specialists from ODF**. Together, they established a **nursery** to grow and monitor native plants collected from the area, which were later **replanted within the enclosures**.

Local capacity building was a key component: **agents were trained in ecological restoration and botany**, and **local schools participated** through awareness and planting activities, ensuring **community engagement** and long-term support.

As concrete outcomes, the project led to the **removal of 80 coconut palms**, the **replanting of 600 native plants**, and the **preservation of 9 native coastal plant species**. Ms. Dacourt concluded by highlighting that this project **demonstrates how Nature-based Solutions can effectively safeguard biodiversity while also supporting climate change adaptation** in vulnerable coastal territories.

Find the presentation here



2.6 Mr. Michiel Van Nierop, *representing the Dutch Caribbean, presenting the project "Optimise the production of the juvenile Queen Conch at the Curaçao Queen Conch Hatchery"*

Mr. Michiel Van Nierop **presented a project focused on optimising the production of the juvenile Queen Conch at the Curaçao Queen Conch Hatchery**, addressing the alarming decline of this **iconic but threatened Caribbean species**. Once abundant in shallow regional waters, the **Queen Conch has suffered from decades of overfishing** and is now **listed as threatened by the IUCN** and recognised under the **U.S. Endangered Species Act (NOAA)**, **CITES**, and the **SPAW Protocol**. He noted that the species is currently under **re-evaluation by the IUCN**, underscoring its precarious status.

Mr. Van Nierop explained that the project is part of a **regional restoration network led by Professor Megan Davis (Florida Atlantic University)**, which aims to establish **Queen Conch hatcheries across the Caribbean**. Curaçao plays a leading role in this initiative, with a **large-scale hatchery already in operation**. The team collects eggs from adult Queen Conchs, raises them in a controlled environment, and **releases them into the wild as juveniles**. He proudly reported that **over 60**

million eggs have been outplanted in Curaçao's waters—made possible by collecting hundreds of egg masses from the small, protected adult conch population living in the Sea Aquarium's dolphin pools.

However, he noted that **juvenile outplanting remains risky**, as small conchs are vulnerable to predators such as **octopuses and stingrays**. In contrast, **egg mass outplanting has shown more promising early results**, with recent sightings of juvenile aggregations (around 15 cm)—a **rare and encouraging sign**. Unfortunately, these gains were threatened by **illegal fishing**, though **social pressure from other fishers helped deter poaching**, highlighting the importance of community involvement.

Mr. Van Nierop emphasised the urgent need for **stronger enforcement of fishing regulations**, including **penalties for poaching undersized conchs**, and **expanded outreach to fishing communities**. He also advocated for **green education in local schools** to build long-term awareness. Moving forward, the team plans to **scale up egg mass outplanting**, which appears to be a **more effective and sustainable approach** to restoring the species.

He concluded by underlining the **importance of regional collaboration**, noting that Queen Conch population dynamics **transcend national boundaries**. Protecting this species, he argued, is vital for **marine ecosystem health**, the **future of sustainable fisheries**, and the **food security of Caribbean communities**.

Find the presentation here

2.7 Mr. Erwin Jayson Amavassee, *Programme Officer of the IUCN EU Representative Office*

Mr. Erwin Jayson Amavassee introduced the **BESTLIFE2030 interactive map**, an innovative tool designed to **visually integrate biodiversity actions across Overseas Territories and Countries**. This map highlights commitments, collaborations, and conservation efforts happening in biodiversity hotspots, particularly in remote and fragmented regions often underrepresented in global data. By consolidating fragmented projects into a coherent visual, the **map helps identify overlaps between sites, geographic and thematic gaps, and ensures strategic coherence across regions ranging from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean.**

The map displays **each biodiversity project as a point, with interactive features allowing users to access detailed metadata** such as project titles, thematic scopes, locations, and funding information. Users can navigate through the map, filter by project layers, and overlay additional information layers such as global

protected areas, key biodiversity areas, Natura 2000 sites, administrative boundaries, and exclusive economic zones. **The tool is aimed at local actors, decision-makers, EU institutions, and the public to increase transparency and awareness of EU biodiversity investments and impacts**.

As **an evolving platform, the map will soon incorporate project results, monitoring indicators, and dynamic filters for more refined data exploration**, including habitat types and ecosystem categories. Planned features also include a heat map to highlight funding hotspots or areas that are underfunded. **Ultimately, the goal is to make biodiversity action visible, meaningful, and accessible for funders, implementers, and communities dependent on these ecosystems.**

Mr. Amavassee emphasised that **biodiversity efforts** often occur in hard-to-reach and overlooked areas, making them **difficult to track and explain in policy contexts. This map and the collaborative work behind it aim to tell a grounded, visible, and human-centred story of EU biodiversity action—literally putting it on the map.**

Find the BESTLIFE2030 interactive map here

2.8 Ms. Margaux Ysebaert, *Communications Officer of IUCN EU Representative Office*

Ms. Margaux Ysebaert emphasised the importance of **making local biodiversity action visible and accessible to local actors, decision-makers, EU institutions, donors, and citizens**. The map's layered data—including protected areas, key biodiversity areas, Natura 2000 sites, World Heritage sites, Ramsar sites, and IUCN Green List sites—helps enhance **ecological connectivity by identifying where projects are active or could start and linking fragmented efforts into a cohesive network**.

Ms. Ysebaert, then demonstrated how to **access funded projects** through the map, highlighting a project in Curaçao that optimises juvenile queen conch production at the Curaçao conch hatchery. She showed **how users can view project details such as organisation, country, region, programme, thematic scope, grant code, duration, partners, and budget** via the interactive map interface. She concluded by **encouraging new applicants to join the BESTLIFE2030 Programme** to **increase the number and diversity of projects featured on the map**.

2.9 Ms. Clémentine Séguigne, *representing the Pacific, presenting the project "Ma'oCycling – Behavioral monitoring of sharks following the gradual cessation of fish by-product discharge from offshore fishing in French Polynesia"*

Ms. Clémentine Séguigne presented the project on the **behavioural monitoring of sharks** following the **progressive reduction of fish by-product discharges** from offshore fishing activities in **French Polynesia**. With **over three tonnes of fish waste discharged nearly daily** off the coast of Tahiti, the area has attracted a **rich biodiversity**, including **five bird species**, **four fish species**, and **four shark species**, notably **tiger sharks** and **silky sharks**—the latter listed as Endangered by IUCN. As part of a **circular economy approach**, these discharges are now being **recovered and repurposed**, notably for **use as agricultural fertilisers**, with a view toward their **total cessation**.

A key goal of the project is to determine whether these sharks have **developed a dependency** on the discharges. To this end, the team is implementing **acoustic telemetry**, whereby **transmitters are surgically implanted** in sharks, and **transmitters installed at key coastal sites** (such as surf spots, beaches, and spearfishing areas). When a **tagged shark passes within 500 meters**, its presence is automatically recorded, allowing researchers to detect any **changes in shark behaviour** in response to the reduction in discharges.

Ms. Séguigne explained how the project relies on **non-lethal, traditional fishing techniques**. Sharks are caught and **placed on their backs** to induce **tonic immobility**, facilitating safe surgery. **Transmitters are implanted** and the animals are **sutured at sea**, enabling them to remain in their **natural environment**. For **tiger**

sharks, full healing has been observed **within two weeks**. So far, **25 sharks**—of both sexes and varying sizes—have been **tagged and catalogued**, contributing to better knowledge of shark populations in Polynesian waters. Before release, the **base of the hook is cut** so it can be shed naturally, and any existing hooks are removed to ensure the shark's **good health**.

Another major focus of the project highlighted by Ms. Séguigne, is the **potential human risk**, both preventing sharks from **approaching coastal areas** and addressing the issue of **public perception**, which remains one of the greatest **challenges to shark conservation**. The project emphasises the importance of **science-based communication** and **awareness-raising among sea users**, particularly in response to **cognitive biases** that negatively shape views of sharks, notably through **131 social surveys,** that have been conducted to assess public views on the discharges. The results are **under analysis**, and **workshops with sea users** are in preparation to better understand their **concerns, knowledge gaps, and misconceptions**.

As **data from the transmitters becomes available**, the project—having already **tagged 25 of the planned 30 sharks**—will continue, with a strong commitment to the **respect and protection of threatened species**.

Find the presentation here

2.10 Ms. Maria Teresa Asensio Elvira, *representing Macaronesia, presenting the project "Conservation strategies for sharks and rays in the Canary Islands: A scientific approach and stakeholder review"*

Ms. Maria Teresa Asensio Elvira presented the **conservation project for sharks and rays in the Canary Islands**, led by the **NGO Latitud-Azul** in collaboration with the **University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.**

Spanning **all eight islands** of the archipelago, the project addresses the **urgent need to protect local elasmobranch species**—many of which, such as the **critically endangered angel shark**, face significant threats from **tourism-driven practices** and the **absence of legal protection. Despite alarming population declines**, she emphasised that **most species are not yet listed** in regional or national conservation catalogues, which makes **regulatory enforcement extremely difficult**.

She outlined that the project is **structured around five key strategies**. First, a **comprehensive scientific study** was conducted to collect **biological, ecological, and behavioural data**, identify **critical habitats**, and evaluate pressures such as **overfishing, habitat degradation**, and **pollution**. This work led to the **creation of**

threat and abundance maps to inform conservation priorities.

Second, she explained that the team had **forged a partnership with the global "Important Shark and Ray Areas" (ISRA) initiative**, aiming to **raise the international conservation profile** of the Canary Islands' elasmobranchs.

Third, **a stakeholder review was undertaken**, engaging **scientists, government officials, local communities, fishers, and NGOs** to **gather perspectives**, identify **knowledge gaps**, and **build collaborative frameworks** for conservation.

Fourth, Ms. Asensio Elvira noted that the project had **launched extensive awareness and education campaigns**, which included the creation of a short film, as well as **outreach programmes and participatory workshops** designed to foster **coexistence between humans and marine fauna**.

Fifth, she reported that the project was working to **develop science-based protection measures**, including proposals to list vulnerable species in official conservation catalogues, and the drafting of a strategy that blends scientific data with stakeholder input.

As a result of these efforts, **a consolidated document on elasmobranchs in the Canary Islands has been compiled**, a **preliminary proposal for Areas of Interest** was submitted to **ISRA**, and **extensive public engagement initiatives** reached both the **fishing and diving sectors**, as well as the **wider public**. The project culminated in a **multi-stakeholder conservation proposal**, with the aim of securing **formal protection for sharks and rays** in the **Canary Islands** and potentially influencing **national conservation policies**.

Find the presentation here

2.11 MEP Catarina Vieira *(Greens/EFA, Netherlands)*

MEP Catarina Vieira, born and raised in an outermost region, called the **BEST Initiative inspiring** and noted how much she learned during the event. MEP Vieira acknowledged the well-known **threats facing climate and biodiversity programmes**, including the **challenges in securing private financing** and the **growing gap between political goals and actual implementation.** She stressed the urgent need to focus **political will, resources, and funding on concrete actions** to protect biodiversity amid the climate and biodiversity crises.

MEP Vieira appreciated the clarity of the presentations and was impressed by projects like the one in the Canary Islands, which reminded her of home, the Azores. She emphasised the **importance of integrating social and economic components into environmental programmes** to ensure **sustainability through local**

community support and engagement.

Looking ahead, she called for a **strong fight against negative narratives**, highlighting the importance of **demonstrating how biodiversity protection is feasible and implementable**. She praised the tools and maps presented as excellent ways to make conservation efforts concrete and understandable.

With the upcoming **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), she urged everyone to seize all available opportunities to support biodiversity**. While celebrating the progress made, MEP Vieira warned that **many initiatives remain under threat and called for unity and cooperation across political groups**—not just the Greens—to effectively **protect biodiversity and push for laws like the Nature Restoration Law**. She concluded by inviting everyone to collaborate and spread the message widely to achieve lasting impact.

2.12 Ms. Roxana Bucioaca, *Portfolio Manager of the Protected and Conserved Areas team, IUCN*

Ms. Roxana Bucioaca invited participants to "zoom out" from the individual success stories shared during the event to focus on the broader vision. By **2030**, the aim is to have **200 stories** that not only continue the legacy of the BEST Initiative but also contribute meaningfully to the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.**

She emphasised that **BESTLIFE2030** presents a real opportunity to connect local progress with **national and international biodiversity targets**, particularly **target 3**, which seeks to protect **30% of the planet by 2030**. However, she stressed that the target goes far beyond percentages—it also requires **effective management, inclusive governance, respect for rights, sustainable use, and ecological connectivity**.

Ms. Bucioaca highlighted that BESTLIFE2030 acts as a **bridge between grassroots action and policy-level reporting**, offering tangible evidence of how local conservation efforts support global commitments. She affirmed that IUCN would continue contributing through its **knowledge products, tools, networks, and policy engagement**, to ensure the Programme's success and help amplify positive, often overlooked stories.

She reminded the audience that while biodiversity is under serious threat and climate and biodiversity loss are among the greatest challenges of the coming decade, **there is still much to be proud of**. Projects like BESTLIFE2030 offer **hope and practical solutions**, not just for **Overseas Countries and Territories** or the **EU**, but with **global significance**.

Ms. Bucioaca concluded by recognising that indeed these projects are European achievements: **European achievements with global impact.**

2.13 Ms. Cristina Romero, *Programme Manager of the BESTLIFE2030 Programme for IUCN EU Representative Office*

Ms. Cristina Romero took a moment to **highlight a powerful success story** from a previous BEST Programme project "Restoration of Kamaka Island, a refuge for biodiversity in the Gambier Islands", in French Polynesia. Once overrun by invasive rats and devoid of seabird life, the 0.5 km² private, uninhabited island is now showing **signs of ecological revival**, starting with rat eradication via drone technology.

Thanks to the collaboration between local and international collaboration, and to the support of **BEST 2.0+,** the island was declared **rat-free by 2023,** and habitat conditions were restored, using **solar-powered sound systems and artificial burrows** to encourage the return of seabirds.

By mid-2024, the endangered **Polynesian storm-petrel** was observed nesting for the first time in over a century, alongside **five other seabird species** now breeding on the island.

Ms. Romero emphasised that BESTLIFE2030 **enables real change**, turning ambitious conservation ideas into **tangible benefits** for both **nature and local communities**. The Kamaka story, she said, illustrates how BEST is rooted not in theory but in **practice, trust, and local empowerment**.

She underlined the importance of **local actors and communities**, who are not just implementers but **leaders and guardians** of their ecosystems. For them, biodiversity is not an abstract goal, it is deeply linked to **livelihoods, identity, and culture**. The LIFE Programme supports them by **strengthening civil society, building autonomy, reinforcing resilience**, and fostering collaborative, **locally driven solutions.**

Ms. Romero made a **strong call to continue and expand the LIFE Programme**, which has been critical to the success and model of BEST. She reiterated that the BESTLIFE2030 Programme's approach—providing **inclusive, direct support** where it matters most—is a **proven model for impactful biodiversity conservation**.

Closing the event, Ms. Romero warmly thanked the many individuals and partners who contribute to the Programme's success.

Find the presentation here

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3. Materials from the event

BESTLIFE2030 interactive map:

BESTLIFE 2030 interactive project map

Policy brief on the contributions of the project to the EU Biodiversity Strategy:

BESTLIFE2030 contributions to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Policy brief

The example of Kamaka Island:

An example of real-life change: Restauration de l'îlot de Kamaka, refuge pour la biodiversité des Gambier

Presentations of the grantees' projects:

Réaliser la stratégie de l'UE en matière de biodiversité : Le rôle clé des régions ultrapériphériques et des pays et territoires d'outre-mer de l'UE *Presented by Ms. Rona Dacourt*

Achieving the EU Biodiversity Strategy: The vital role of the EU's outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories – Protecting the Queen Conch *Presented by Mr. Michiel Van Nierop*

Conservation strategies for sharks and rays in the Canary Islands: A scientific approach and stakeholder review *Presented by Ms. Maria Teresa Asensio Elvira*

Ma'o Cycling | Suivi comportemental des requins suite à l'arrêt progressif des rejets de sous-produits de poissons issus de la pêche hauturière en Polynésie Française *Presented by Ms. Clémentine Séguigne*

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