



Brussels in Brief is a regular feature of the IUCN Pan-European Newsletter produced by the **Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP)**. It provides a platform to explain the substance of environmental policy, as well as to highlight up-coming EU agenda items relevant to Europe and beyond. Each edition of **Brussels in Brief** considers topics that relate to the overall thematic focus of the current Newsletter issue.

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Brussels in Brief

Conserving biodiversity in the EU overseas entities

In addition to mainland Europe, the UK and Ireland, the EU includes a number of territories situated in or across the world's oceans. Although geographically distant, these territories, also referred to as the EU overseas entities, are close in terms of their relationship with the Union.

The seven EU **outermost regions** (ORs) consist of Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique and Réunion (France), the Canaries (Spain), and the Azores and Madeira (Portugal). The ORs are treated like EU Member States, thus they fall under Community law and their inhabitants are European citizens. The **overseas countries and territories** (OCTs) are 21 entities that have a special relationship with one of the EU Member States due to their joint colonial history.¹ This relationship means, for example, that the EU has close economic relations with these areas; however Community law does not apply in OCTs.

The great majority of the EU overseas entities are islands, with the exception of French Guiana. Island ecosystems cover only 5% of the global land area, however they are known to host around one-third of the world's threatened species. Consequently, islands are one of the main current focal points for biodiversity conservation. The EU overseas entities are also unique in terms of their biodiversity and five of the 34 biodiversity hotspots are actually located on these islands. The integrity of island ecosystems, including the EU overseas entities, is however seriously threatened. For example, the impacts of climate change (e.g., sea-level rise) and the introduction of invasive alien species (IAS) pose a high risk to islands and their biodiversity. In addition, overexploitation of natural resources, such as unsustainable mining practices in French Guiana, is known to negatively affect biodiversity in both ORs and OCTs.

The ORs and OCTs form an exceptional, and highly threatened, biodiversity network distributed across the globe. The EU has recognised the importance of these areas and it has also acknowledged its own key role in supporting the conservation of these unique ecosystems.

This issue of *Brussels in Brief* outlines the main international and EU policy framework for conservation of biodiversity in the EU overseas entities. The Newsletter also briefly discusses the future challenges for improving conservation of biodiversity in the EU ORs and OCTs.

¹ UK: Anguilla, Bermuda, British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Montserrat, Pitcairn Islands, Saint Helena, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and Turks and Caicos Islands; France: French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, Mayotte, St Pierre and Miquelon, and French Southern and Antarctic Territories; the Netherlands: Aruba & Dutch Antilles; and Denmark: Greenland.

Main international biodiversity policy framework for ORs and OCTs

There are a number of international policies that set the current worldwide objectives for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity on islands. These policies outline specific actions and measures to be taken at global, regional and national level to protect island ecosystems. Given that the EU overseas entities are mainly island, these policies also provide the main guidelines for protection of biodiversity in these regions. They also set the main framework for regional cooperation between the EU ORs and OCTs and other island States.

Conservation of biodiversity on islands

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) forms the main international framework for conservation and sustainable use of island biodiversity. In 2006 the CBD established a programme of work focused specifically on conserving biodiversity on islands (CBD Decision VII/31). The overall objective of this programme is to reduce the rate of island biodiversity loss while also contributing to the sustainable development of islands. The programme of work sets out almost 50 island-specific priority actions aimed at reaching this goal. These actions include, for example, protecting traditional biodiversity knowledge and practices, ensuring equitable sharing of biodiversity resources, and maintaining island ecosystems' ability to continue providing goods and services that support human well-being.

At the eighth meeting of the CBD Conference of Parties (COP 8) in Brazil in 2006, a new international initiative focused specifically to support the conservation of island ecosystems was established. This Global Island Partnership (GLISPA) aims to assist islands in managing their natural resources in a sustainable manner. In particular, it focuses on increasing cooperation and transfer of knowledge between islands. GLISPA is also supported by the CBD and it is considered an important contributor to accelerating the implementation of the Convention's biodiversity goals.

In the context of sustainable development, the UN Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) was held in Barbados in 1994. The conference discussed the economic and ecological vulnerabilities of island States and adopted a programme of action to promote their sustainable development, i.e., the Barbados Programme of Action. This Programme of Action considers conservation of biodiversity as one of the main priorities in securing the future social and economic development in island States (see Box 1).

The Barbados Programme of Action was reviewed in an international meeting held in Mauritius in 2005. The meeting further reaffirmed the commitment to conserve island and marine biodiversity in SIDS. In addition, a number of new or updated actions to support the sustainable use and protection of biodiversity resources in these island states were adopted².

Box 1. Barbados Programme of Action and biodiversity

The Barbados Programme of Action calls for a number of actions supporting sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity in SIDS. These include:

- Development of strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;
- Increasing public education on biodiversity;
- Establishment of gene banks for *in-situ* re-introductions;
- Increasing biodiversity research and inventories, e.g., on value of biodiversity;
- Improving the protection of intellectual property rights related to biodiversity;
- Improving involvement of NGOs, women and indigenous and local community groups in biodiversity conservation;
- Increasing regional action to protect biologically significant sites;
- Increasing regional exchange of biodiversity information;
- Protection of SIDS from IAS introduction;
- Improving access to financial and technical resources for the conservation and management of biodiversity.

Source: <http://www.sidsnet.org/>

Biodiversity and climate change

As regards international policies for biodiversity and climate change, the CBD has a specific cross-cutting programme that aims to address threats posed by climate change on biodiversity conservation. Currently the Convention is developing guidance to integrate relevant climate change impacts and response activities into the different programmes of work of the Convention, including the programme of work on island biodiversity.

² Mauritius Declaration & report: http://www.sidsnet.org/docshare/other/20050622163242_English.pdf

In general, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) sets the overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenge posed by climate change. It has been widely acknowledged that there is a need to improve the integration of biodiversity into climate change discussions. This is particularly relevant in the context of islands that are significantly threatened by the impacts of climate change. However, no separate process exists within the UNFCCC to address these issues.

CBD programme of work on islands:

<http://www.cbd.int/island/programme.shtml>

CBD programme of work on climate change:

<http://www.cbd.int/climate/programme.shtml>

Global Island Partnership: <http://www.cbd.int/island/glispa.shtml>

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Network:

<http://www.sidsnet.org/>

EU policy framework for ORs and OCTs

The legal relationship between the EU and its overseas entities

According to Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty, the EU ORs constitute an integral part of the European Union. As a consequence, the Community law, including for example the EU Common Agricultural and Fisheries policies (CAP & CFP) and the Community rules on internal and external trade, is fully applicable to the ORs. However, derogations to the Community law may apply to take account of the specific features of these regions, including their geographic location and socio-economic situation. These derogations can be used to adopt specific measures aimed at securing cohesion and sustainable development in these remote areas, for example through state aid or support to some economic sectors.

Overseas Territories are not considered part of the EU, but are associated to the EU through their link with some specific EU Member States. Consequently, the cooperation between the EU and OCTs, including support to biodiversity conservation, takes place within the broader Community framework for EU development cooperation and external assistance.

The current legal framework governing EU-OCT association is set out in the EU Treaty (Articles 182–188). According to the Treaty, the basic aim of the EU-OCT cooperation is to promote the economic and social development of the OCTs and to establish close economic relations between them and the Community. In addition, Council Decision 2001/822/EC, i.e., the Overseas Association Decision (OAD), outlines the detailed framework for EU and OCT cooperation.

EU legal framework for OCTs:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/geographical/regionscountries/regionscountriesoctsleg_en.cfm

Overseas entities and EU biodiversity policy

The ORs are an integral part of the EU, thus in principle EU biodiversity policy is directly applicable in these regions. This means, for example, that the EU Birds and Habitats Directives (e.g., the Natura 2000 Network) and the goals set out in the EU Biodiversity Action Plan (COM/2006/216) provide a framework for biodiversity conservation in the ORs.

The Spanish and Portuguese ORs form a specific biogeographic region covered by the Natura 2000 Network. This Macaronesian region consists of three archipelagos: the Canary Islands, the Azores and Madeira. Despite representing only 0.3% of the EU territory, the Macaronesian region hosts no less than 19% of the habitat types and 28% of the plants protected under the Habitats Directive. The list of Natura 2000 sites for the Macaronesian region was adopted in 2002. In addition, in February 2008 three new sites in the Canary Islands were added to the list. The Macaronesian region now consists of more than 200 areas to be protected under Community law.

Exceptionally, the four French ORs (i.e., Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique and Réunion) are not included in the Natura 2000 Network. This is based on the decision taken by France on the implementation of the Habitats Directive within its territory. Consequently, the current Community framework for biodiversity conservation does not fully apply to the French ORs.

As regards the OCTs, the EU Biodiversity Action Plan adopted in 2006 sets out two specific actions aimed at promoting the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in these regions (Objective 7 of the EU Action Plan, see Box 2). In addition, the Commission Communication accompanying the Action Plan emphasises that effective action in supporting the conservation of OCTs' unique biodiversity is vital to the EU's credibility in the international biodiversity policy arena.

An additional commitment to support the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in OCTs was made in September 2006 in a high-level EU conference aiming at improving the integration of biodiversity into EU development cooperation activities (the Paris Conference on Biodiversity in European Development Cooperation). The Conference was organized by IUCN in partnership with the European Commission. As an outcome of the conference a statement for policy and decision makers was adopted, urging them to increase support to

biodiversity within the context of EU development cooperation and external assistance (i.e., the Message from Paris). This call also highlighted the need to promote biodiversity issues in the context of cooperation with the OCTs.

As regards financial support for biodiversity conservation, ORs are eligible to receive funding within the overall EU financing framework established to support conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity within the Community. During the current funding period (2007–2013), a number of Community funds, including the EU funds for rural and regional development,³ provide possibilities to support the protection of biodiversity. In addition, the ORs are also entitled to receive funding from the LIFE+ fund that specifically supports environmental and nature conservation projects within the EU. As for the OCTs, funding for biodiversity conservation can be provided as a part of the general EU framework for development cooperation and financial assistance to these countries (see also the section on sustainable development below).

Box 2. OCTs in the EU Biodiversity Action Plan

The EU Biodiversity Action Plan includes the following actions that are specifically aimed at promoting conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Member States (MS) EU overseas countries and territories:

Action 7.1.6. Enhance economic and development assistance funds available for biodiversity-related actions in the MS Overseas Countries and Territories with an aim to ensure that biodiversity is addressed through specific programmes and projects or through integration in other sectors covered by economic development assistance.

Action 7.2.5. Ensure that projects financed by EU economic and development assistance do not cause significant negative impacts on biodiversity in the MS Overseas Countries and Territories.

EU Biodiversity Action Plan (COM/2006//216)

Natura 2000 & the Macaronesian biogeographic region:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/sites_hab/biogeog_regions/index_en.htm

Message from Paris:

<http://www.countdown2010.net/paris2006/MessageEN.pdf>

³ E.g., the European Structural Funds (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF)), the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Fisheries Fund (EFF).

EU policies supporting sustainable development in ORs and OCTs

The EU has specific policies in place to enhance sustainable development in its overseas entities. The aim of these policies is to help the ORs and OCTs to become more competitive in terms of economic growth while subsequently supporting their social and environmental sustainability.

The ORs are part of the EU policy supporting cohesion and sustainable regional development within the Community. The goal of this policy is to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU. This involves promoting the competitiveness of regional economies, in particular in areas lagging behind in socio-economic development. This also includes geographically remote areas such as the ORs. Environmental sustainability, including conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity resources, plays an integral role within this policy framework.

The implementation of the EU policy on cohesion and regional development is supported by a number of Community funds, namely the EU Structural funds (i.e., the ERDF and the ESF) and the Cohesion Fund. Among other things, these funds also provide possibilities for financing initiatives and projects aimed at implementing the EU Biodiversity Action Plan, including the Natura 2000 Network.

Promoting sustainable development in the OCTs takes place within the EU policy framework for development cooperation. The Joint Declaration on the European Union Development Policy (COM(2005)311), adopted in 2006, sets out the common objectives, values and principles for the current EU development policy. It identifies environment and sustainable management of natural resources, including biodiversity, as one of the primary areas the Community should focus on in its development cooperation activities. In addition, the Overseas Association Decision lists conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity as one of the specific areas of cooperation between the EU and OCTs (OAD Article 15).

The European Development Fund (EDF) is the main instrument for supporting sustainable development in the OCTs. The EDF does not come under the general Community budget but is funded by the Member States and covered by its own financial rules. The current EDF funding period covers years 2008–2013 and provides an overall budget of EUR 22,682 million. Of this, EUR 286 million is earmarked for cooperation with the OCTs.

The EDF funding also provides possibilities to support sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity in the OCTs. However, the priorities for EU financial support are largely decided by individual OCTs. Thus, the actual level and types of funding in support of biodiversity largely depend on decisions taken at the OCT level. Some examples of biodiversity conservation initiatives supported by EDF in the OCTs are given in Box 3.

Box 3. Examples of biodiversity initiatives supported by EDF in OCTs

Capacity building to control IAS in the UK OCTs

A regional project aiming at increasing regional capacity to reduce the impacts of IAS on the South Atlantic UK Overseas Territories. The project is coordinated by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and all the South Atlantic Territory governments and two NGOs are partners in the project.

Source: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

NET-BIOME

A collaboration project aiming at improving networking and cooperation between research activities focused on management of tropical and subtropical biodiversity.

Source: ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/coordination/docs/net-biome_en.pdf

Plant Protection in the Pacific (PPP)

The PPP project supports the plant protection and quarantine departments of eight Pacific ACP states and three OCTs (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Pitcairn and Wallis and Futuna). The programme provides technical advice, training and information services aimed at preventing plant pest outbreaks.

Source: http://www.spc.int/pps/pps_projects.htm#EU

EU policy supporting cohesion and regional development:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm

EU development policy:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/policiesgen_en.cfm

External effects of EU sectoral policies

Some internal EU policies, i.e., policies mainly aimed at steering developments within the Union, can also have direct or indirect effects in areas outside the EU. Such

Community policies include, for example, the EU energy and climate policies and the Community provisions for fisheries and trade in agricultural products. These policies can have implications on the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity in the EU overseas entities.

In December 2005, following growing concerns over rising oil prices, energy security and climate change, the EU adopted an Action Plan designed to increase the use of biomass and biofuels as alternative energy resources in the EU (COM/2005/628). This commitment was taken further in 2007 when the EU leaders committed to raising the share of biofuels in transport to 10% by 2020. As a result, a proposal for a Directive on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources was adopted in 2008 (COM/2008/30).

It has been acknowledged that the EU goals on renewable energy cannot be reached by only increasing biofuel production within the Union itself. Thus, the EU is also aiming to promote the imports of biofuels to the Community from ORs, OCTs and other developing countries with biofuel potential (according to the 2006 EU Strategy for Biofuels, COM/2006/34). In particular, a switch towards biofuel production is seen as a means to continue supporting the economic growth in a number of OCTs that have been negatively affected by the EU sugar reform (i.e., declined exports of sugar to the EU).

In this context several concerns have been raised over the possible negative effects of biofuel production on biodiversity. For example, increased support to biofuels might result in increasing the number of monocultures or growing biofuels in environmentally vulnerable areas. Additionally, promoting the cultivation of biofuel crops is forecast to increase the risk of IAS introductions. To address these concerns the EU is committed to trying to ensure the sustainability of biofuel cultivation in the EU and other countries, including ORs and OCTs (COM/2006/34).

Agriculture and trade in agricultural products form integral parts of the EU sectoral policies. These policies can also have implications on conserving biodiversity in the Union's overseas entities. Agriculture, including traditional extensive farming, is one of the most important economic activities in both ORs and OCTs. Intensive farming can have severe adverse effects on biodiversity whereas extensive practices can help to maintain biodiversity in agricultural ecosystems. The EU policies on agriculture and trade can have direct or indirect impacts on the production choices and land-use practices, both within the EU and elsewhere. In general, the Community policies have been known to support intensive production patterns leading to negative effects on biodiversity.

As regards fisheries, the world's oceans are suffering from a severe depletion of fish stocks due to overfishing. This problem is also prominent in many ORs and OCTs (e.g., the UK and French OCTs, St Pierre & Miquelon, and Montserrat). At the EU level, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) governs the extraction of and trade in fisheries resources in the EU. The CFP also regulates EU fishing activities outside the EU, including in OCT waters.

The CFP was reviewed in 2002 with the aim of improving the integration of environmental and biodiversity concerns into EU fisheries activities. As a consequence, the CFP's main goal is to manage fisheries for both stock conservation and environmental purposes (according to the CFP Basic Regulation 2371/2002). These goals also apply to EU fishing fleets operating outside the Community's territorial waters, including the OCTs. However, there are still several concerns regarding the effectiveness of the CFP's environmental provisions, e.g., their implementation in securing sustainable extraction of fish stocks and preventing negative impacts of fishing activities on marine ecosystems.

Future issues and challenges

Improving and effectively implementing the frameworks for biodiversity conservation

There are significant differences between the existing frameworks for biodiversity conservation in the EU overseas entities. In general, the Spanish and Portuguese ORs are the most comprehensively covered as the protection of their threatened habitats and species is supported by the implementation of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, including the Natura 2000 Network. These Directives provide for a legal biodiversity protection regime to be established. However, as in all EU Member States, the final success of this regime now depends on its effective implementation, including securing adequate financial resources to manage the established Natura 2000 sites.

In principle, EU biodiversity policy and legislation also applies to the French ORs. However, due to special derogation measures these regions are not included in the Natura 2000 Network. Thus, the existing framework for conserving biodiversity in French ORs can be considered weaker than in the rest of the EU. To improve the situation, possibilities to expand the Natura 2000 Network, or a special regional adaptation of the network, to Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique and Réunion could be considered.

No specific framework exists to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the EU OCTs but Community support mainly takes place in the context of development cooperation with these areas. It is generally acknowledged that this very broad framework fails to provide an adequate level of protection to the OCTs' biodiversity. Thus, similarly to the French ORs an establishment of a more specific Community framework to protect the unique ecosystems and species hosted by the OCTs could be considered.

As regards the other goals of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, preventing and mitigating the negative effects of IAS on biodiversity has been identified as one of the main current key areas for Community action. Sufficient evidence exists to conclude that IAS are one of the most significant drivers for biodiversity loss in several areas, particularly in island ecosystems. The EU therefore needs to continue helping to raise the capacity of ORs, OCTs and other island countries and territories to minimize the spread and negative impact of IAS.

The Commission is currently developing an EU strategy for IAS that is due to be published by early 2010 at the latest. It would be of high importance that this strategy provides a comprehensive framework for addressing IAS also in the EU ORs and OCTs.

Finally, improving the coherence and synergies between the different EU internal and external policies is needed to create a sound framework for biodiversity conservation in the ORs and OCTs. In this context, improving the integration of biodiversity concerns into relevant EU sectoral policies, such as policies for energy, agriculture, trade, fisheries and development cooperation, is required (see also section below). For example, it should be ensured that these policies do not provide any perverse incentives that can undermine biodiversity conservation efforts, e.g., incentives promoting unsustainable extraction of natural resources. In addition, more effective implementation of the existing biodiversity provisions of EU sectoral policies, such as the CFP, is needed.

Strengthening linkages between climate change and biodiversity policies

The fight against climate change can present new opportunities for sustainable development in the ORs and OCTs. For example, production and export of biofuels can help ORs and OCTs to improve their own energy balance while also strengthening their economic competitiveness. However, without appropriate precautions, the rapidly growing biofuel sector could have significant negative effects on biodiversity in these regions.

Thus, it is crucial to ensure that the new EU policies on energy and climate change, including the new EU biofuels targets, do not result in negative effects on biodiversity in its overseas entities. The EU has acknowledged the potential threats that promoting biofuel production can pose to the environment and biodiversity, and efforts are being made to address these risks. For example, the EU is currently considering the possibilities to develop sustainability mechanisms and criteria for biofuel production.

However, the current EU policies on energy and climate change fall short in addressing the possible negative impacts of biofuel production on biodiversity. For example, risks associated with the cultivation of potentially invasive alien species as biofuel crops are seldom considered. Consequently, more attention needs to be given to integrating biodiversity aspects into the EU policies on biofuels in a more comprehensive manner.

The EU overseas entities are amongst the most vulnerable territories in the world to climate change. Thus, effective policies and actions are needed to secure the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change in these regions.

The EU can play a key role in supporting the development of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in its overseas entities. In particular, there is a need to further support the development of climate change adaptation strategies for both ORs and OCTs. In this context, the interlinkages between climate change and biodiversity should be fully considered. Conservation of natural ecosystems and their ecosystem services can help the ORs and OCTs to adapt to climate change. For example, ecosystems' capacity to regulate water flows and balance can assist in securing the provisioning of fresh water under changing climatic conditions.

Finally, it has been widely acknowledged that there is also a need to improve the integration of biodiversity into the climate change discussions at the international level. However, until today no specific process exists within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to address the issues. Thus, it is hoped that the EU would consider taking an active role in promoting a more integrated approach to biodiversity and climate change on the international arena, including highlighting the specific threats faced by the ORs, OCTs and other island States in this context.

Increasing financial support for biodiversity conservation within OCTs and ORs

The EU framework for financial support provides a number of possibilities to support biodiversity conservation in its overseas entities. Biodiversity projects in the ORs can benefit from a range of funds available to support nature protection and sustainable use of natural resources within the Community in 2007–2013. For example, conservation of biodiversity, including the management of the Natura 2000 Network, can be financed through the EU funding instruments for regional and rural development. Additionally, the dedicated Community fund for environment, LIFE+, continues to support the implementation of the EU nature Directives and the Biodiversity Action Plan.

However, with the exception of LIFE+, the programming of these available funds gives Member States a lot of freedom to target the financial support to best suit their national and regional specificities. Consequently, the actual level and types of funding in support of biodiversity in individual ORs depend on decisions taken at national and regional level. Thus, it would be important to ensure and monitor that biodiversity-related objectives are also included in the regional EU funding programmes for the ORs.

The EDF also provides possibilities to support sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity in the OCTs. However, it is generally acknowledged that within this very general funding framework, initiatives seeking to support biodiversity conservation generally lose out to projects supporting economic growth and development. Consequently, the actual EU funding for biodiversity in OCTs is still very limited. To improve this situation, the possibility of establishing earmarked funds to support conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the OCTs could be considered. In this context, setting up a specific EU funding instrument or extending the scope of current instruments, like LIFE+, could be explored.

The difficulties in mainstreaming biodiversity into the EU development cooperation and external assistance, e.g., the support to the OCTs, are known to be one of the main barriers in achieving the EU goals on conserving biodiversity. Thus, there is a clear need to find solutions on how the EU financing framework can better support the conservation of biodiversity in the OCTs.

Improving regional cooperation

The EU overseas entities are all facing similar threats to their biodiversity and ecosystems. Thus, improving regional cooperation between and among ORs and OCTs could play an important role in facilitating the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in these regions. In addition, establishing cooperation with the broader group of neighbouring States, including the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), could further support these endeavours.

Examples of regional cooperation aiming to support the sustainable development of island States and territories, including the OCTs, already exist. For instance, the Pacific Islands Forum assists cooperation between the Pacific islands. The Forum, established in 1971, also includes a number of EU OCTs as members (New Caledonia and French Polynesia) or observers (Wallis and Futuna) to the initiative. In 2005, the Pacific Islands Forum adopted a strategic plan (i.e., the Pacific Plan) to strengthen regional cooperation and integration between the islands.⁴ Endorsing sustainable development, including conservation of biodiversity, plays an important role in the future vision for the area.

The EU could play a key role in facilitating the establishment of regional cooperation between its overseas entities and also between these entities and their neighbouring States. This cooperation could, in particular, focus on supporting the exchange of knowledge and best practices related to addressing threats to biodiversity and ecosystems. In addition, possibilities for joint actions between the ORs, OCTs and their neighbours to prevent and mitigate these threats should be further promoted.

In this context, a conference addressing the current environmental challenges in the EU overseas entities will take place in Reunion, 7–11 July 2008.⁵ The conference, organized by IUCN, is one of the official high-level events taking place under the EU French Presidency during June–December 2008. The objective of this event is to initiate a political process that will lead to improving the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the EU overseas entities. In addition, the conference aims to catalyse further cooperation between the overseas entities and the neighbouring ACP countries and SIDS.

Most of the biodiversity within the EU is hosted by its overseas regions, thus safeguarding the unique species and ecosystems in the ORs and OCTs plays a key role in reaching the EU goal of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. Furthermore, protection of the natural environment and sustainable use of biodiversity resources is essential to secure the sustainable development of ORs and OCTs in the future. This creates a clear case for the EU to step up its efforts to support biodiversity conservation in its most remote regions.

⁴ Pacific Islands Forum: <http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/about-us/the-pacific-plan/>

⁵ The IUCN and French Presidency Conference on European Union and its Overseas Entities: <http://www.reunion2008.eu>