

Conference of the European Parliament Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development

“ISLANDS AND OVERSEAS ENTITIES’ CONTRIBUTION TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE”

IUCN opening statement

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Read by Dominique Benzaken, IUCN EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories Programme Coordinator, on behalf of Cyriaque Sendashonga, Global Director, Policy, Programme and Capacity Development Group

Honorable members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen

I thank Mr. Ponga for the opportunity to speak on this important issue of Islands and Overseas Entities' contribution to biodiversity conservation and the fight against climate change.

(1) Europe Overseas as a European asset in a regional and global context

The European Union (EU) includes **34 overseas territories**: 9 Outermost Regions and 25 Overseas Countries and Territories (thereafter Europe Overseas). They cover an area of 4.4 million km², equivalent in size to continental Europe, and have a combined Exclusive Economic Zone of over 15 million km², the largest in the world. They are found in:

biodiversity hotspots (the Caribbean Islands, Madagascar and the Indian Ocean Islands, the Mediterranean Basin, New Caledonia, Polynesia-Micronesia),
major wilderness areas (Guyana shield), and
key regions for **polar ecosystems** and fish stocks (Greenland, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), French Southern and Antarctic Territories, South Georgia).

Europe overseas has more **endemic animal and plant species** than are found on the whole of continental Europe. New Caledonia alone has about as many endemic species as the entire European continent, and French Guiana includes an area of Amazon rainforest the size of Portugal. Europe overseas also hosts more than 20% of the world's coral reefs and lagoons.

The biodiversity of these entities is highly vulnerable to human impacts such as habitat destruction, alien invasive species, over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution, and increasingly the impacts of climate change. They share these threats with **small island developing states** and countries of their regions.

Europe overseas are also diverse in terms of their socio-economic circumstances. Most of them islands, they share common **vulnerabilities linked to their insularity and/or remoteness**, being characterized by **small economies with dependence** on few commodities (agriculture, Fisheries, tourism), food and energy imports and in many cases limited capacity to effectively manage their unique heritage.

importance or relevance to islands and Europe overseas as regard fighting climate change, biodiversity loss and ensuring sustainable development.

These are some reasons why IUCN **calls for increased action to protect the natural heritage of Europe overseas**. The connection between local communities, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the impacts of climate change must be recognized to help these regions flourish. They need to effectively participate in global, European, national and regional biodiversity policies and programmes.

(2) Recent EU policy and programme initiatives and Europe overseas

The conference on the “**EU and its Overseas Entities: Strategies to Counter Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss**,” convened by IUCN, which took place in La Reunion in 2008 under the French Presidency, created a **political momentum** at the EU and international stage for the recognition of islands and overseas entities’ assets and specificities.

IUCN is encouraged by a number of important EU policy initiatives that have acknowledged Europe overseas contribution since 2008.

Following the **EU 2008 Communiqué on “Outermost regions: An Advantage for Europe”**, the launch of *Europe 2020*, there is recognition of the place of ORs in Europe’s future policies and programmes. The potentialities of ORs, including their environmental assets as wealth opportunities and benefits to the European Union, as well as the specific challenges they face, are informing the review of EU regional policies post-2013.

A **Memorandum of Understanding** between the governments of France, Spain, Portugal and the Presidents of ORs of Canary Islands, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Madeira, Martinique and Reunion (May2010) for a renewed vision of the European Strategy for ORs.

The **Council of the European Union have just adopted a number of conclusions on integrated maritime policy (IMP)**, and I quote the Council who:(Can)a9a9a9a9a9a9a28o3(o)52sERAT.0001 9.d

