

Environment: EU grants €2 million to overseas biodiversity projects

The European Commission is to give an additional €2 million to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in its Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories. Known as BEST, the Voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas will fund pilot projects in these areas, which are home to exceptional biodiversity, and host more endemic species than the whole of continental Europe combined. The financial support was originally suggested by the European Parliament.

The BEST scheme will step up the financial means to protect biodiversity and promote the sustainable use of ecosystem services in Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories, with a view to reconciling the environmental and development needs of these areas. The voluntary scheme aims to develop solutions that maintain healthy and resilient ecosystems and reduce the pressures on biodiversity. The financing will support the designation and management of protected areas and the restoration of degraded ecosystems, promoting natural solutions to fight climate change, including the restoration of mangroves and the protection of coral reefs.

The scheme will also encourage partnerships between local administrations, civil society, researchers, land-owners and the private sector. It should serve to reinforce cooperation on environment and climate change issues, in line with the objectives of the ongoing environmental session of the EU OCT Forum being held in Noumea, New Caledonia.

The European Commission plans to launch a call for proposals in May 2011 for projects that wish to apply for funding. The projects will showcase the scheme and will prepare the ground for a governance structure with a view to longer term support. The scheme will build on existing sites and networks and take on board previous projects.

EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories are located around the globe, and are home to exceptional biodiversity. Situated in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans at a range of latitudes, these entities are very rich in biodiversity and play host to more endemic species (species that are exclusive to a restricted geographical area) than are found on the whole of continental Europe.

Background: Biodiversity loss

The rapid depletion of biodiversity is a pressing issue in the EU and around the world. Species are being lost at an unprecedented rate as a result of human activities, with irreversible consequences for our future. The European Union is combating this and stepping up its contribution to avert global biodiversity loss. Promoting the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services at the international level will be one of the targets of the coming biodiversity strategy.