**Pilot project**

Tabled by: Carlos ZORRINHO; Younous OMARJEE; Ricardo SERRÃO SANTOS; Sofia RIBEIRO; Liliana RODRIGUES; Paul BRANNEN; Gabriel MATO; Maurice PONGA; Cláudia MONTEIRO DE AGUIAR

**Mapping and assessing the state of ecosystems and their services in ORs and OCTs: establishing links and pooling resources**

Action 5 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy urges Member States to map and assess the state of ecosystems and their services in their national territory. A Working Group on MAES (Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services) was established in 2012, but a look at the MAES Digital Atlas clearly shows that the ongoing efforts are mainly focused on continental Europe, with some mapping already produced for Macaronesia. This is in contrast with the biodiversity richness of Outermost Regions (ORs) and in Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), which host, for instance, more endemic species than the entire European continent. The overseas entities of Europe should therefore, in their own right and given the international commitments of the EU, be central to the MAES initiative. There are several reasons why this is not happening, including insufficiency of land cover/land use datasets, the logistic difficulties of working in small dispersed areas, the linguistic and political barriers, or the scarceness of local human capacities.

The ecosystem profiles developed by BEST for all the ORs and OCTs confirm the big gaps in biodiversity knowledge which are a major obstacle for the production of a satisfactory mapping and assessment of ecosystems. Clearly, there is a need for the development of methodologies adapted to the realities of the European overseas entities. These should make extensive use of local knowledge, harnessed through the collaborative tools which NetBiome-CSA defended and the network it has created.

This pilot project is intended to involve policy makers, researchers and the civil society in the development of methodologies for mapping and assessing the state of ecosystems and their services in ORs and OCTs. A coordinated and synergistic approach is advocated to turn the geographical, political and knowledge base fragmentation of these entities into assets, pooling resources and building robust participatory tools. The project will start by assessing the state of the art of the MAES exercise within the participating overseas entities, and by inventorying and motivating the human and material capacities present in each of them. It can build on the inventory of species and habitats and the MAES experience planned under the Pilot Project 'Inventories of Species and Habitats French Outermost Regions' adopted under the 2016 budget (07 02 77 34). It will then choose as case studies a specific region and a particular contribution on which to focus the work of a dedicated team of local experts, policy makers and civil society members, pooled from across the OR and OCTs.

In addition to producing a tangible contribution for the MAES exercise, this project aims to demonstrate the possibility and the added value of a bottom-up approach, involving and capacitating local actors. If successful, this project will allow testing and implementing the MAES methodology in different regions of the world, providing methodologies and good practice guidelines and contributing to a worldwide EU leadership in this area.