



**THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS OVERSEAS ENTITIES: STRATEGIES TO  
COUNTER CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS, REUNION ISLAND,  
7-11 JULY 2008**

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## JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE INFORMATION PAPER

### THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS OVERSEAS ENTITIES: STRATEGIES TO COUNTER CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS, REUNION ISLAND, 7-11 JULY 2008

Paper by Tara Pelembe, Deanna Donovan and Wyn Jones

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 JNCC staff recently participated in a conference entitled *The European Union and its Overseas Entities: strategies to counter climate change and biodiversity loss* (<http://www.reunion2008.eu>). This was hosted on Reunion Island in July, under the auspices of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. JNCC was an official supporter of the event and a member of the Steering Committee.

#### 2. Overview of the conference

2.1 The objectives of the conference were to:

- i. reinforce awareness amongst the European institutions, the EU Member States, the relevant regional and global institutions and the media about the unique natural heritage of the EU's overseas entities, the threats that this heritage faces and the opportunities it can present;
- ii. enhance the effectiveness of action and co-operation between the EU, the Member States and the Outermost Regions (ORs) and the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) in terms of adaptation to climate change, a model energy policy as well as the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity;
- iii. enhance regional co-operation between the ORs, the OCTs as well as their neighbours, and strengthen the voice of the ORs and OCTs on the international environmental scene in concert with the European Union and Small Island Developing States.

2.2 The programme included plenary sessions on the environmental challenges of the European Overseas Entities; climate change and biodiversity; adaptation and mitigation; sustainable energy; and links between ORs, OCTs and European policy. There was also a series of workshops that explored topics such as economic valuation; invasive species; the role of civil society; how to integrate the marine environmental challenges in the ORs and OCTs into EU policy; challenges and opportunities for regional co-operation; and sustainable financing.

### **3. Participation**

- 3.1 Some 700 participants included representatives from Overseas Countries and Territories, Outermost Regions, relevant European Member States, the European Commission, the European Parliament, scientific institutions and non-governmental organisations.
- 3.2 As the conference was held under the auspices of the French EU Presidency, there was significant French Government presence, with officials from their foreign, internal and ecology ministries. At different points there were also two French Ministers present: Jean-Louis Borloo (the Minister of Environment, Energy, Sustainable Development and Spatial Planning) and Yves Jego (State Secretary for Overseas Entities, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Overseas and Territorial Collectivities).
- 3.3 Nine of the UK Overseas Territories were represented, and made valuable contributions to the conference.
- 3.4 There was one representative from UK government (Eric Blencowe, Defra), two from JNCC (Tara Pelembe and Deanna Donovan), one from the Countryside Council for Wales, and one from Kew. Academic institutions (Cambridge, East Anglia, Salford, Warwick, Plymouth) and non-governmental organisations (RSPB, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, Durrell, Chagos Conservation Trust) were also represented.
- 3.5 The Dutch and Spanish government delegations were relatively small, and there was no government representation from Denmark or Portugal.
- 3.6 The closing panel for the meeting was impressive, given the location of the event. Apart from the President of the Regional Council of Reunion (effectively the Reunion government), the French Polynesian Environment Minister attended and spoke, as did the President of the Canary Islands (by video), a French Minister, the European Commission Ambassador to the Seychelles, Mauritius and Reunion, the Director-General of IUCN, and the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

### **4. JNCC's role in the conference**

- 4.1 Tara Pelembe gave a presentation at the opening plenary session, highlighting the wealth of biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories. She emphasised that the conference provided an opportunity to develop collaborative partnerships at a regional and international level to address the complex issue of climate change and biodiversity loss.
- 4.2 Tara also launched a series of JNCC materials outlining the basic science of climate change ([www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4362](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4362)). One of these products, a DVD screened at a plenary session on the final day of the conference, generated very positive feedback.

- 4.3 Deanna Donovan and Tara co-facilitated (with the French Development Agency) a workshop session entitled 'Economic valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services: what role in development strategies? Past experiences and future perspectives'. The workshop featured presentations of environmental economic valuation case studies from the Montserrat, Bermuda and Cayman governments. Deanna outlined the JNCC's environmental economics project, explaining how an environmental economics toolkit on valuing the environment in small islands has been developed ([www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4136](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4136)).

## 5. Outcomes from the conference

- 5.2 The outcomes of the workshops and the plenary sessions were incorporated into a 'Message from Reunion' (<http://www.reunion2008.eu/>) which highlighted that the links between people, biodiversity and climate need to be recognised when considering issues of biodiversity loss and climate change.
- 5.3 The 'Message from Reunion' states that there is an urgent need for EU Member States, the European Commission, the OCTs and the ORs to undertake various actions, including:
- i. establishing a voluntary scheme for the protection of species and habitats, inspired by the Natura 2000 approach and adapted to the local situation;
  - ii. recognising the importance of species-level conservation outside of protected areas;
  - iii. strengthening involvement in regional co-operation;
  - iv. making stronger reference to OCTs and ORs in the EU White Paper on Climate Change Adaptation;
  - v. encouraging participation in international initiatives, such as the Global Islands Partnership (GLISPA);
  - vi. recognising that energy is at the heart of development policy as well as climate change;
  - vii. recognising that marine and coastal areas of the OCTs and ORs deserve to be part of a long-term, geo-strategic vision.
- 5.4 The 'Message from Reunion' also notes that: 'There is a need for earmarked additional funding for biodiversity conservation. Currently the available funds for environmental protection are not sufficiently allocated to biodiversity.'
- 5.5 The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union has issued a statement supporting the conference outcomes.

**6. Next steps**

- 6.1 This event successfully provided a platform for discussion and an opportunity for collaboration and networking across a wide range of stakeholders. The 'Message from Reunion' is encouraging, but it is clear that substantial political commitment will have to be developed before significant action can be undertaken.
- 6.2 JNCC staff will assess the recommendations contained in the 'Message from Reunion' and identify priority actions for JNCC, to be incorporated within the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies work programme.