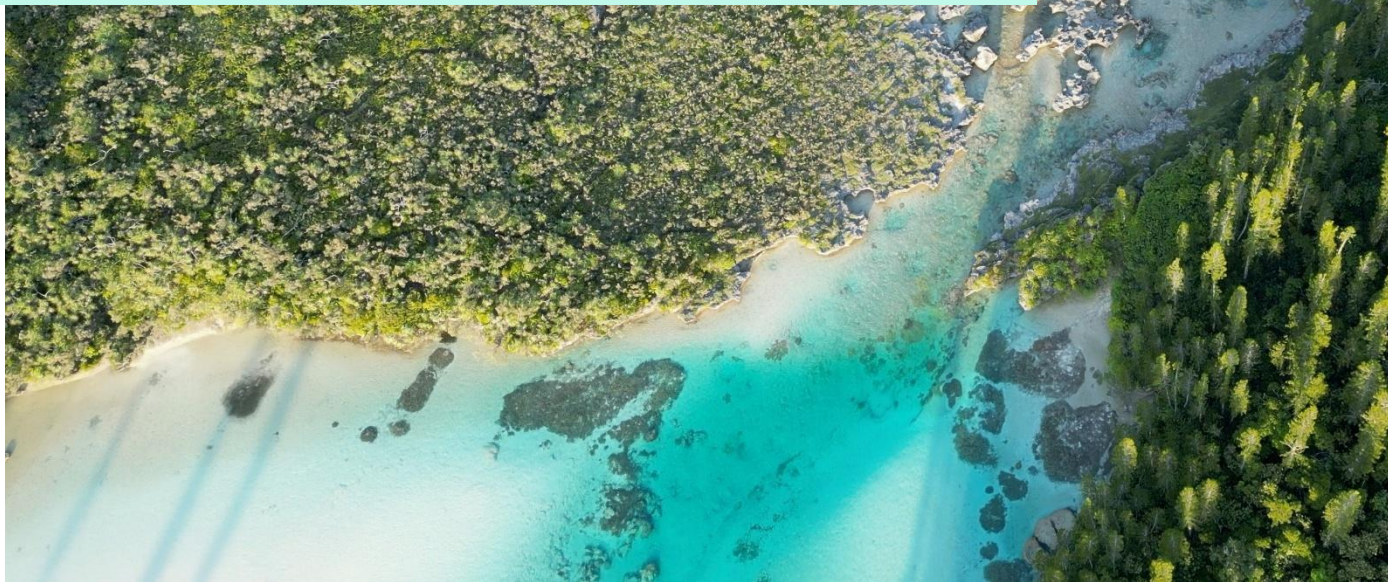


# BEST Life 2030

## EU overseas regions as global biodiversity champions

Initiative overview

EU Overseas Biodiversity (2026)



### Coordinator



### Regional hubs



### Donors



Co-funded by the European Union

### Associated partners



## 1. Strategic context

EU outermost regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) steward some of the world's most significant marine and coastal ecosystems, including vast Exclusive Economic Zones. As predominantly island and ocean-facing territories, they sit at the frontline where biodiversity loss and climate impacts intersect most visibly with direct consequences for local communities.

These territories host exceptional biodiversity of global importance, yet they are also among the most vulnerable ecosystems to climate change, habitat degradation and invasive species. Protecting these ecosystems is therefore not only a local or regional priority, but a matter of global environmental stability.

This positioning makes them not peripheral beneficiaries of EU environmental policy, but operational partners for Europe's global biodiversity and climate commitments.

The year 2026 represents a critical policy window. Discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034 are underway, while all three Rio Conventions COP will take place, while preparations for the first COP of the BBNJ Agreement are forging ahead. At the same time, **the renewed EU strategic partnership with the outermost regions reinforces their role as integral parts of the Union with unique biodiversity assets and global outreach. In parallel, the EU Decision of Association with the OCTs, including Greenland, strengthens the OCT-EU strategic partnership.** Although OCTs are not part of the EU territory, they are key geostrategic partners and important ocean actors for both their Member States and the EU.

In this context, sustained investment in overseas regions is increasingly a strategic necessity for the local level and the EU rather than a niche environmental concern. This builds on existing EU instruments such as the LIFE Programme, which have demonstrated the Union's commitment to biodiversity financing, while also highlighting the need for more tailored and accessible mechanisms for overseas regions.

## 2. Legacy and evolution of BEST

The BEST initiative emerged from sustained political and technical efforts led by island and overseas territories, most notably formalised through the ***Message from Réunion Island (2008)***, which recognised the exceptional biodiversity value and vulnerability of outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories and called for tailored funding mechanisms and capacity-building adapted to their specific constraints. This momentum was later reaffirmed through subsequent overseas political messages, including the ***Message from Guadeloupe (2014)***, consolidating the call for dedicated and accessible

support to biodiversity action in EU overseas entities.

Over time, BEST evolved as a direct policy response to these calls into a recognised EU-supported mechanism facilitating access to funding, strengthening local capacities and enabling locally led conservation, restoration and sustainable management initiatives across EU outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories. In doing so, **it operationalised the original vision expressed by island stakeholders:** that effective biodiversity action in overseas territories requires flexible, bottom-up and region-adapted financing approaches.

Building on this political and operational foundation, BESTLIFE2030 continues and scales this legacy. It consolidates years of field experience, trusted regional networks and proven delivery models, positioning region-led action as scalable contributions to EU and global biodiversity and climate commitments. It integrates digital innovation and evidence-based conservation into locally led initiatives, strengthening decision-making, transparency and long-term sustainability while remaining culturally appropriate, gender-responsive, cost-effective and accessible in island contexts.

### 3. Overarching message

EU overseas regions, as predominantly island and ocean-facing territories, **are not peripheral actors but strategic stewards of globally significant biodiversity and climate resilience systems**, making sustained investment a matter of European and international environmental credibility. Achieving the EU's biodiversity-related objectives will not be possible without these territories, which provide good practices and expertise that enable replication and scalability.

### 4. Why this initiative now?

This initiative responds to a **strategic policy window in which the EU is defining future funding priorities and shaping the MFF 2028-2034 framework**, while overseas regions are already delivering measurable biodiversity outcomes. In this context, the initiative seeks not only to showcase results, but also to inform EU policy and funding decision-making by demonstrating the strategic relevance, cost-effectiveness and scalability of region-led biodiversity action in overseas entities, i.e.:

- i. showcase their demonstrated impact and strategic contribution to EU and global biodiversity commitments;
- ii. position proven region-led delivery models such as BESTLIFE2030 as credible, scalable and cost-effective solutions;

- iii. mobilise sustained political and financial support in line with the MFF 2028-2034 cycle, and
- iv. support the transition from project-based funding towards longer-term and sustainable financing pathways for overseas biodiversity.

The OCTA Ministerial Conference with OCTs (Aruba, 11th April 2026) provides a key high-level political moment within the 2026 policy calendar, while a dedicated Brussels-based policy and investment event in July 2026, to be organised within the framework of this initiative, will serve as the central EU-level engagement milestone.

Together, these moments create **a structured engagement trajectory that links regional leadership and on-the-ground delivery with EU policy discussions** and long-term funding considerations, ensuring that the contribution of EU overseas regions to global biodiversity objectives is consistently positioned across regional, European and international fora.

## 5. Core institutional goal

**Secure sustained and adequate funding for biodiversity action in EU overseas regions within the MFF 2028-2034 framework**, building on proven region-led delivery mechanisms such as BESTLIFE2030 to ensure long-term impact, scalability and cost-effective implementation in globally significant biodiversity territories.

## 6. Objectives

### Policy

**Reinforce the case for sustained and predictable EU biodiversity funding for overseas regions within the MFF 2028-2034**, recognising their strategic role in delivering EU and global biodiversity commitments. Position EU overseas regions as island-based solution systems contributing directly to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, 30x30 targets, ocean and climate resilience priorities.

### Fundraising

**Position proven region-led delivery models, including BESTLIFE2030**, as credible, cost-effective and scalable investment pathways, building on the experience of EU programmes such as the LIFE Programme while addressing gaps in accessibility and regional adaptation.

**Visibility**

**Amplify the political voice, regional leadership** and demonstrated impact of EU overseas regions as strategic biodiversity stewards delivering measurable results for Europe and global commitments.

**Sustainability**

**Support the transition from project-based funding to longer-term financing pathways** by enabling regional actors to identify strategic partnerships, diversified funding sources and post-BESTLIFE funding opportunities.

## 7. Structure: Four pillar engagement logic

### 7.1. Pillar 1: Island leadership and political legitimacy

**Anchor moment: (OCTA Ministerial Conference in Aruba on 11th of April 2026)**

1. **Narrative focus:** OCTs are long-term partners for the European Union and are essential to Europe's biodiversity and achievement of the EU's biodiversity related objectives
2. **Purpose:** Reinforce high-level political recognition among OCT authorities of their role as strategic biodiversity partners of the European Union and mobilise collective leadership in support of sustained EU investment in overseas biodiversity.
3. **Role of BESTLIFE2030:** featured as an enabler of the region-led action on biodiversity conservation link between EU policy and on the ground action.

This pillar emphasises that overseas regions (more specifically OCTs) are strategic actors managing globally significant biodiversity and marine ecosystems. It highlights their leadership in biodiversity conservation, their role as solution providers, and the fact that tangible results are already being delivered despite structural challenges.

**Primary audience:**

- OCT Ministers and Regional Authorities

**Secondary audience:**

- European Commission

- Member States
- Regional stakeholders

**Strategic goal:** Endorse a joint political declaration recognising EU OCTs as biodiversity and climate solution leaders, with wording that can be reflected in the next MFF.

**Expected outcome:** A formal political mandate, under the umbrella of OCTA, an associated partner of BESTLIFE2030, that can be leveraged in subsequent Brussels policy and funding discussions.

## 7.2. Pillar 2: Translating island leadership into EU policy and investment

### ***Anchor moment: Brussels policy and investment event (1<sup>st</sup> of July 2026)***

- 1. Narrative focus:** If the EU wants sustained results that advance its biodiversity priorities, sustained funding must follow to ensure long term sustainability.
- 2. Purpose:** Translate political recognition into concrete policy traction, funding interest, and strategic alliances.
- 3. Role of BESTLIFE2030:** featured as a proven, cost-effective and credible delivery model for sustained biodiversity action in overseas regions that Europe can scale. A model that can be replicated in different contexts and regions.

This pillar positions investment in overseas regions as a cost-effective pathway to deliver biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, and EU global commitments simultaneously. In complement to established instruments such as the LIFE Programme, it underlines the strategic importance of islands for achieving EU and global biodiversity targets, and the fundability and scalability of the BESTLIFE2030 model. This funding catalyst event will include a political panel, donor roundtable, grantee showcase and investment pitch segment.

#### **Primary audience:**

- European Parliament (key committees: BUDG, ENVI, DEVE)
- EU Member States (Permanent Representations / Council)
- European Commission (key DGs: ENV, INTPA, REGIO, MARE)

#### **Secondary audience:**

- Committee of the Regions from OCTs

- Institutional donors and philanthropic foundations
- NGOs and policy networks with advocacy influence

**Strategic asks:**

- To the European Commission: recognise bottom-up funding mechanisms like BESTLIFE2030 as credible and cost-effective models for biodiversity delivery in complex overseas contexts and similar contexts.
- To the European Parliament and Member States: support a dedicated Overseas biodiversity funding mechanism within the new MFF.
- To other donors: consider region-led biodiversity action as an investment-ready and scalable solution.

**Expected outcome:** Strengthened policy alignment, increased funding traction, and alliance-building around long-term investment in overseas biodiversity.

### 7.3. Pillar 3: Global recognition of island biodiversity leadership

**Anchor moment: CBD COP, Yerevan (October 2026)**

1. **Narrative focus:** Position islands as global solution leaders by aligning EU overseas action with the Island Biodiversity Coalition (IBC) and emphasising the contribution of island territories to achieving the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).
2. **Purpose:** Elevate the initiative from an EU and regional initiative to a global, multilateral effort by connecting EU overseas regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) to the global island agenda under the CBD. With IUCN acting as a science–policy and convening bridge, the initiative will highlight island-led action as an effective pathway for supporting countries in delivering GBF goals and targets.
3. **Role of BESTLIFE2030** and the Island Biodiversity Coalition (IBC), spearheaded by the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA): BESTLIFE2030 will be represented at CBD COP17 through IUCN and the Island Biodiversity Coalition (IBC). The Programme will be presented as a practical example of locally led biodiversity action in EU overseas territories, demonstrating how on-the-ground initiatives support implementation of the GBF, and how the initiatives empower local actors by providing financial and scientific support, enhancing ownership and legitimacy.

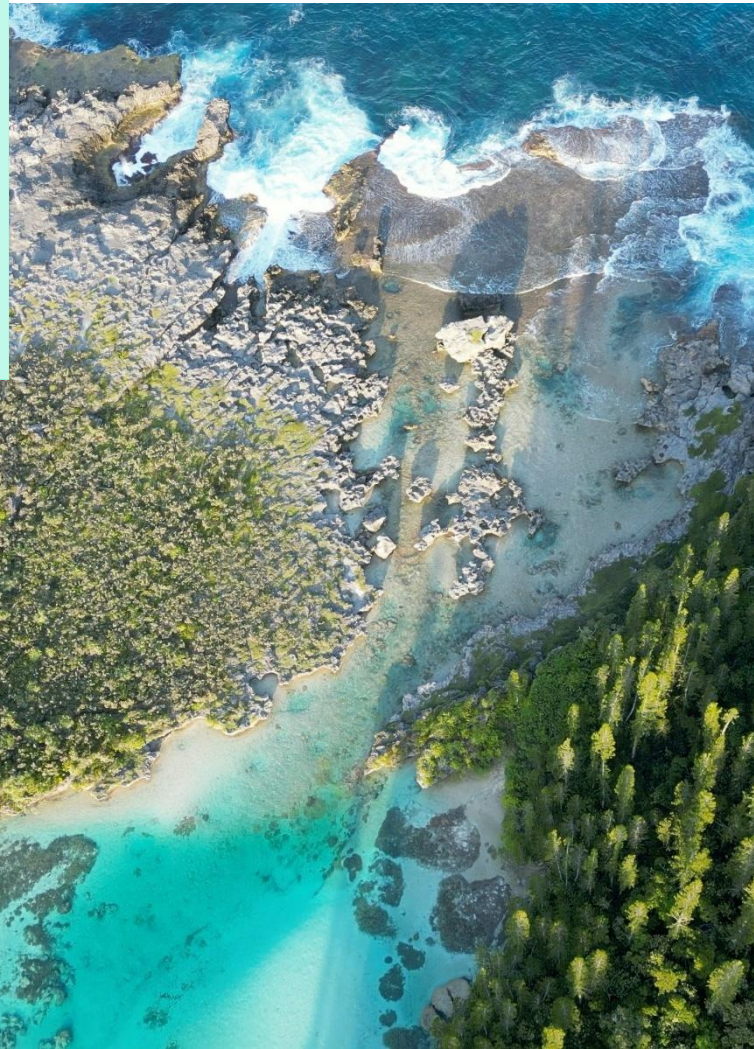
## 8. Unified storyline

- **Event 1 (Aruba):** OCTs are delivering. They are already champions.
- **Event 2 (Brussels):** Europe must invest accordingly for sustained results.
- **Event 3 (Yerevan):** Island territories as global biodiversity solution leaders.

**Complete strategic arc: (full circle back to the islands)  
Champions → Investment → Global recognition**

IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature  
IUCN EU Representative Office  
64, Boulevard Louis Schmidt  
BE-1040 Brussels, Belgium

bestlife2030@iucn.org  
bestlife2030.org



Coordinator



Regional hubs



Donors



Co-funded by the European Union

Associated partners

