

*“The Netbiome partnership is a unique example of a research network built by and for the EU Overseas”*

José Azevedo, Project Coordinator

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**Policy-makers and stakeholders gathered in the European Parliament to engage with the NetBiome network, which highlighted the need to face the challenges of conserving the rich biodiversity found in the EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories. It called upon Europe to reconcile nature protection with sustainable human development by bringing together civil society, the scientific community, companies, and policy-makers to set out and pursue common biodiversity research and management goals.**

Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP and Maurice Ponga MEP co-hosted on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April the conference *“Boosting Biodiversity Research Cooperation – A NetBiome Roadmap for European (Sub) Tropical Overseas”* promoted by the [NetBiome-CSA project](#), an initiative supporting smart and sustainable management of tropical and subtropical biodiversity in Europe’s Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). These EU overseas entities are home to 80% of the species biodiversity in Europe while also being more fragile and experiencing more threats by global changes and human activities than continental Europe. Building on work going back over a decade, including the NetBiome ERA-Net project, NetBiome-CSA has strengthened and extended partnerships and cooperation among researchers, policy-makers, companies and civil society. This was based on a participatory process mobilising stakeholders’ knowledge and resources for initiatives such as policy and priority analysis, multi-stakeholder dialogues, exchange of good practices and issuing of policy recommendations and research priorities.

Members of the European Commission were present to provide support to the network and to highlight the need to tackle the challenges these entities face. Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director for Natural Capital within DG Environment stressed the *“important role of European overseas as a repository of biodiversity”* and the need to increase that perception in Europe, particularly in the context of advancing the European Biodiversity Strategy. Birgit de Boissezon, Head of Unit for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources within DG Research & Innovation underlined the fact that *“NetBiome results provide visibility and momentum to the research capacities in ORs and OCTs”*, constituting an excellent example of open science and innovation. In her view, the research done in the EU’s overseas entities is an asset and must be integrated in the wider European biodiversity research landscape, while respecting its specificities and requirements.

NetBiome ERA-Net researchers contributed to the conference by highlighting the importance of working with local stakeholders from the very beginning. Thanks to the network, they have been successful in strengthening partnerships, bringing together complementary skills and expertise, and producing good science.

As part of the project, information has been collected on ecosystem valuation resources in order to provide a policy tool and show the biodiversity contribution to EU overseas economies. These resources are included in a Biodiversity Management Toolbox, an online information and communication system developed by the consortium. Other critical elements of this toolbox are a database of stakeholders on (sub)tropical biodiversity management and research, and an online forum through which all stakeholders are able to communicate to share information or look for partners.

By conducting an extensive stakeholder consultation, a number of policy recommendations have been identified in order to tackle common challenges in biodiversity research and management. The needs for coherent spatial planning, to adapt international legislation to the regional context, to promote more efficient use of resources, and to put ecosystem management principles into practice were all stressed. To support these policies, a number of research priorities have been identified: improve tools for stakeholder participation, predict effects of climate change, increase the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystem services in environmental assessment and valuation methods, and map ecological limits to extractive activities.

Possibilities for the way forward were discussed, including integration of the network activities in existing networks and funding through different programmes.

The project coordinator for the Azores Regional Fund for Science and Technology, José Azevedo, pointed out that NetBiome is a concrete manifestation of the willingness to support biodiversity research in ORs and OCTs, and emphasised the need to enlarge and formalise the network. He added that in moving forward *“European overseas entities must raise a common voice on shared biodiversity challenges in order to bridge the gap between science and decision-making, and NetBiome is an ideal platform through which to achieve this”*.

The conference was chaired by Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP and Co-Chair of the Working Group *“Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services”* of the EP Intergroup *“Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development”*.

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