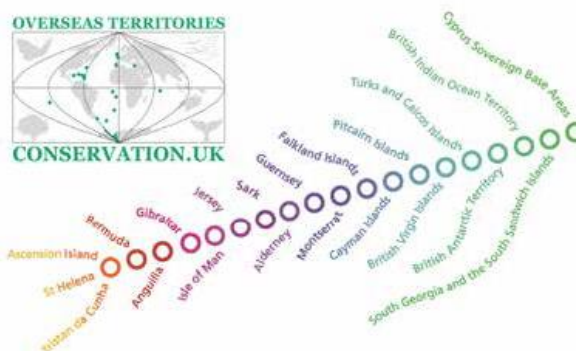


**Council of Environmental Ministers
(or equivalents) of
UK Overseas Territories
and Crown Dependencies:
7th meeting,
Tuesday 21st November 2023**

Zoom hosting by:
UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
(UKOTCF)



Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies: 7th meeting, Tuesday 21st November 2023, by Zoom

Statement

Summary

In this Statement, the Council recognises the context of its meeting, stressing the value of, and responsibilities to, the natural environment.

We received presentations relating to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity's Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework commitment to conserve 30% of land and sea areas by 2030, from the IUCN-UK Protected Areas Working Group (PAWG) on that Group's work and impending report on matching types of protected areas in UK to 30-by-30 requirements, Defra on the approach in England to 30-by-30 on land, and from several colleagues on their approaches and challenges on this issue. Several general points made in discussions included: the sharing of good news on progress; the importance of clear objectives, approaches developed to achieve these, monitoring, adjustment of approaches in the light of this, open-ness and reporting, as well as co-operation between territories and with others, collaboration with NGOs and recognition of their work, and inclusiveness; the challenges of enforcement, especially in extensive marine areas, where the lack of appropriate patrol vessels is a major challenge even when some coverage can be given by satellite surveillance; the challenges of: limited human capacity in small communities; integration with other economically necessary land- and sea-uses; remoteness; the continued major threats from invasive non-native species; and others. We welcomed the offer by UKOTCF and PAWG to use the approach of the UK analysis to do similarly for one or two pilot UKOTs or CDs

We welcomed presentations on the work coordinated by Ascension Island Government, St Helena National Trust, St Helena Government and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), to address the problem of plastic pollution and the negotiations around the UN Global Plastics Treaty.

The trans-boundary nature of the problem was stressed, as was the nature of the substrate which could bring plastic waste to key wildlife sites, e.g. deep sand is needed for turtle-nesting but also favours plastic-accumulation. Local uses for recycling plastic are needed, using processes appropriate for small, in some cases remote, territories. We heard some examples of new emerging technologies that could provide sustainable solutions to utilising the never-ending tides of plastics that wash up on shorelines. At least 8 territories were already involved in the project, which is centred on community needs and participation, and there was enthusiasm on all sides to bring in more.

We discussed the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference which will convene from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Those participating invited any input from those who would not and undertook to supply a report after the meeting. We welcomed and provided support for the UKOT Climate Change Pledge, prepared by the UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA), building on our united voice at COP26. We agreed that we are louder with one voice on this issue which impacts us all. We thank UKOTA for their support.

We discussed the challenges, including the risk of fire as well as of pollution, from lithium-ion batteries and their disposal, and agreed that should be a topic at our next meeting. The topic of vapes, especially disposal ones and – whilst noting the benefits of vapes to present smokers – compared our approaches to addressing their threats both to the health of children and other non-smokers and to the environment.

We underlined the value of these meetings, which give us the opportunity to discuss issues and approaches shared by the participants as elected environmental leaders in the UKOTs and CDs, with also possibilities to invite to certain sessions within the meetings UK ministers to enable time-efficient discussion, as well as to invite in certain sessions UK government officials or our own, and NGOs or others, to provide presentations on, and discuss, particular topics. We thanked UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for continuing to organise these meetings and asked them to organise the next, by remote communications in May 2024, when we would like to discuss conferences of the parties to environmental conventions, lithium-ion batteries and other topics, and receive an update on plastic pollution.

Main Text

1. We, the portfolio holders for the environment in our respective territories or dependencies, held our seventh Environment Ministers' Council meeting by Zoom on Tuesday 21st November 2023. We continue to fulfil the role recognised by the November 2017 Joint Ministerial Council, which emphasised the importance of meetings of environment ministers in work on environmental management and climate change issues.

2. The UKOTs boast some of the world's most delicate and complex ecosystems and habitats, with at least 3,300 species which occur nowhere else in the world. Collectively, they harbour a truly staggering amount of biodiversity, which in turn provides them with many goods and services (e.g. fishing, tourism, storm-protection, renewable energy supply). In terms of endemic species (i.e. those occurring nowhere else), proportions of other species supported, sensitive ecosystems and threatened species, they hold even greater importance than that of the metropolitan UK. In fact, an estimated 90% of the biodiversity for which UK is internationally responsible is in the UKOTs, rather than in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3. We confirm our commitment to conserve our environmental capital, and, recognising its global importance, some territories have chosen to be included in UK's ratification of international environmental agreements. We share with the UK a partnership approach to integrating environmental considerations in government decision-making, marked in the case of most Overseas Territories by individual Environment Charters as envisaged in the 1999 White Paper *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity*, on which the 2012 White Paper *The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability* is explicitly built. The approach is shared by other territories and dependencies through their commitment to the international agreements in which they are included. The Territories are vital to the delivery of UK's global environmental promises.

4. We recognise that Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies have materially different relationships with the UK and we further recognise that there are differences between Overseas Territories. These differences are particularly reflected in approaches to funding, which we recognised in our consideration of future aspirations, expectations and obligations. But for all of us, particularly in the light of the major challenges noted above, funding remains the key issue. External funding for initiatives to tackle the priorities we identified in previous meetings, such as unsustainable development, invasive species and the impacts of climate change, remains a challenge. For some of us, the EU was a source of considerable funds for project work, technical advice and infrastructure development. We are pleased to see changes and resourcing so far through the Darwin Plus programme to start to address this, but note that some key aspects, particularly terrestrial conservation, still lag behind in funding.

5. We again recall our governments' commitments to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development by choosing to be included in various international environmental agreements. We recognise with thanks the key role that local conservation leaders play in maintaining community motivation throughout the planning and implementation of long-term conservation projects. Their importance cannot be overstated if we are to ensure that community support for conservation projects does not fade over generations, and that future conservation projects will be embraced as readily as those currently being undertaken.

6. We received a presentation relating to the 30-by-30 commitment¹ from Dr James Robinson, Chair of IUCN-UK Protected Areas Working Group, updating from his presentation to our meeting a year ago on that Group's work and impending report on matching types of protected areas in UK to 30-by-30 requirements and requested that report, when published, be circulated to us by the Secretariat. We welcomed the offer by UKOTCF and Dr Robinson to use volunteer support from some of the persons who worked on the UK analysis to do similarly for one or two pilot UKOTs or CDs, and encouraged each other to contact UKOTCF to explore, as one did during the meeting.

7. We received also a presentation from Mr Sion McGeever, Deputy Director for Access, Landscapes, Peatland and Soil, UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with his colleague, Mr Elliott Miller, on the approach in England to 30-by-30 on land, the presenters noting that work was in progress on marine areas too (and in the other countries of UK) but that they were aware of the very great progress the UKOTs were making in marine protected areas. Stressed were: it is up to individual UKOTs and CDs to decide how to approach the issue; the need for implementing well designed management plans as well as effective protection; there are many approaches that can be made to achieve the ends, rather than some prescribed route; the appropriateness of individuals who provide the public goods of environmental conservation being paid from public funds; and the importance of NGO involvement at all stages. The offer of these Defra officials to supply via the Secretariat their report, when published, and to be available for advice was noted with thanks. We encouraged that the approach be shared across governmental departments, not just environmental ones.

8. We enjoyed also presentations from colleagues on the experiences and challenges in their own territories:

- Mike Jervois, Biodiversity Protection Advisor, Falkland Islands Government, on plans for their new national park, ambitions for new marine managed areas, and a forthcoming review of the entire terrestrial reserve network.
- UK representative, on behalf of Chief Islander James Glass, on the importance of Tristan da Cunha for endemic species and others of global importance, and noting that it is way past its 30-by-30 targets with 40% of land and 90% of sea protected, as well as an exemplary sustainably managed fishery. He noted that Tristan, alongside other territories, had allowed UK to reach its marine area protection targets in the previous (Aichi) targets. The Atlantic Guardians initiative is providing a platform for community-led marine conservation to inspire others.

¹ by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, ... and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes,...

- Dr Richard Selman, Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, outlined a very public participatory approach, with much online material (with safeguards for personal privacy) and close collaboration with the NGO Manx Wildlife Trust as well as farming, fisheries and other partners. Overall 20% of land and 11% of marine areas are protected and this will increase as other types of protection are included. However, 87% of the Isle of Man's total area within the 12-nautical-mile limit is marine, so that much work is in progress to consider and negotiate options there.
- Lin Maurice, Chair, General Services Committee, noted that Alderney had in 2005 designated 15,629 hectares (approximately 12%) of marine habitat under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands for conservation and sustainable use; and also the challenges of agreeing a strategy and a new approach addressing agriculture and fisheries alongside conservation.
- Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, on Safeguarding Biodiversity and Habitats in the Cayman Islands, noting that approximately 12% of their terrestrial environment is protected, with areas being added. Challenges include; rapid land-use change and illegal land-clearing; lack of funds for protection; lack of buy-in for conservation agreements; pollution; illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing; and climate-change.

9. Several general points were made in discussions:

- The sharing of good news on progress (and we encouraged each other to provide brief summaries of this, to circulate ourselves and by the Secretariat);
- The importance of clear objectives, approaches developed to achieve these, monitoring, adjustment of approaches in the light of this, open-ness and reporting, as well a co-operation between territories and with others, collaboration with NGOs and recognition of their work, and inclusiveness;
- The challenges of enforcement, especially in extensive marine areas, where the lack of appropriate patrol vessels is a major challenge even when some coverage can be given by satellite surveillance;
- The challenges of: limited human capacity in small communities; integration with other economically necessary land- and sea-uses, e.g. agriculture, fisheries and tourism; remoteness, leading to higher costs and longer lead times and difficulty in securing support from elsewhere; physical challenges;

- The continued major threats from invasive non-native species, and the need for action to prevent further introductions and remove or manage those already introduced by previous human action;
- The need to encourage fulfilment of the Paris Agreement;
- The need for territories to shape their own solutions but informed by the experience of others.

10. We welcomed presentations on the work coordinated by Ascension Island Government, St Helena National Trust, St Helena Government and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), to address the problem of plastic pollution and the negotiations around the UN Global Plastics Treaty. The presentations were:

- Shauna Young, ZSL: Introduction to ZSL's plastics work across the UKOTs, including the UKOTs steering group being built and the UN Global Plastics Treaty work ZSL is leading on.
- Rachel Jones, ZSL: ZSL's plastics project in Chagos (BIOT) – wildlife impacts and local solutions
- Maria Freitas, St Helena National Trust; and Tobias Capel, Ascension Island Government: South Atlantic Plastics Project in St Helena and Ascension.

11. The trans-boundary nature of the problem was stressed, as was that the nature of the substrate could bring plastic waste to key wildlife sites; for example, deep sand is needed for turtle-nesting but also favours plastic-accumulation. Local uses for recycling plastic are needed, using processes appropriate for small, in some cases remote, territories. In this regard, investigation of new technologies able to recycle some plastics into an equivalent of plywood is under investigation; the report of this, once published, would be made available for circulation via the Secretariat. At least 8 territories were already involved in the project, which is centred on community needs and participation, and there was enthusiasm on all sides to bring in more. Lively discussion followed, and we asked the Secretariat to investigate making these and as many as possible of other presentations to the meeting available to use more widely.

12. We discussed the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) which will convene from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Bermuda is resourcing coordination between UKOT delegates, and those participating invited any input from those (UKOT or CD) who would not; they undertook to supply a report after the meeting. Mrs Kedell Warboys had asked the Secretariat to circulate an updated version of the UKOT Climate Change Pledge that was prepared by UKOTA and made at COP26:

United Kingdom Overseas Territories Climate Change Pledge

We, the Governments of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories have a shared ambition to work towards Net Zero as we are all on the front line of climate change. We are custodians of internationally important habitats which span the globe from the Antarctic to the Caribbean, the South Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. Together with the UK we represent the world's fifth largest marine estate; over 90% of the UK's biodiversity; and are essential to the UK meeting its pledge by 2030 to protect 30% of the world's oceans. Climate change will have a profound impact upon our environments, economies and societies, a failure to act will impact not just us, but our children and all generations to come. To overcome the climate crisis facing our communities we must increase global solidarity and align our actions.

As coastal and island communities, our economies rely upon maintaining healthy, sustainable marine and terrestrial environments. We commit to take action to protect our fisheries resources and to conserve and, wherever possible, restore our marine ecosystems and biodiversity. Building on the good work already undertaken by the Overseas Territories, we reaffirm an alliance to take action to tackle the harmful effects of plastic pollution and marine litter, often as a result of other countries which have impacted our shores.

Our biodiversity, terrestrial and marine, support not only our wellbeing, but also contribute to our uniqueness, our nature-based fight against climate change and are important to those of us where tourism makes an important contribution to our economies.

It is imperative that all nations prioritise their response to prevent further acceleration of human-induced global warming, and collectively commit to developing preventative measures to ensure the surface temperature does not exceed an increase of 1.5C.

We, as individual Territories, pledge to work with the UK Government to develop Territory-led actions that tackle the specific challenges climate changes poses for each of us, to use our oceans and natural resources sustainably, for the benefit of current and future generations, and to take action to protect and restore our biodiversity.

As Overseas Territories we pledge to work with others in a spirit of cooperation to secure meaningful outcomes from COP28 that will make a tangible difference in tackling the impacts of climate change in our territories.

We approved that document and also thanked UKOTA for this and their other support.

13. At the suggestion of States Member Lin Maurice, we discussed the challenges, including the risk of fire as well as of pollution, from lithium-ion batteries and their disposal, and agreed that, given that it was a challenge shared by many UKOTs, it should be a topic at our next meeting. The need for separate arrangements from other batteries for their collection and recycling was noted. The topic of vapes, especially disposal ones was discussed and – whilst noting the benefits of vapes to present smokers – compared our approaches to addressing their threats both to the health of children and other non-smokers and to the environment.

14. We underlined the value of these meetings, which give us the opportunity to discuss issues and approaches shared by the participants as elected environmental leaders in the UKOTs and CDs, with also possibilities to invite to certain sessions within the meetings UK ministers to enable time-efficient discussion, as well as to invite in certain sessions UK government officials or our own, and NGOs or others, to provide presentations on, and discuss, particular topics. We thanked

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for continuing to organise these meetings and asked them to organise the next, by remote communications in May 2024, when we would like to discuss conferences of the parties to environmental conventions, lithium-ion batteries and other topics, and receive an update on plastic pollution.

Appendix: List of Ministers and other lead representatives participating

Alderney: States Member Lin Maurice, Chair of the General Services Committee, States of Alderney.

Anguilla: Hon. Quincia M. Gumbs-Marie, Minister of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment

Bermuda: The Hon. Walter H Roban, JP, MP, Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs

Cayman Islands: Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency

Falkland Islands: Mr Mike Jervois, Biodiversity Protection Advisor (on behalf of Hon. Pete Biggs MLA, portfolio holder for Environment and Public Infrastructure)

Gibraltar: Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport

Guernsey: Deputy Lindsay De Sausmarez, President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure

Isle of Man:

Mr Ken Milne, Director of Environment, and Dr Richard Selman, Head of Ecosystems (representing Clare Barber MHK, Minister for the Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture)

Jersey: Mr Willie Peggie, Group Director - Natural Environment (representing Deputy Jonathan Renouf, Minister for the Environment)

St Helena: Mrs Kedell Worboys, St Helena UK Representative (representing Minister Christine Scipio, Minister of Environment)

Sark: Dr Carol Cragoe, La Société Sercquaise (representing Conseiller Helen Plummer, Chairman of Agriculture, Environment and Sea Fisheries Committee of the Chief Pleas of Sark)

Tristan da Cunha: Mr James Glass, Chief Islander

Apologies for absence

[British] Virgin Islands; Pitcairn; Turks & Caicos Islands