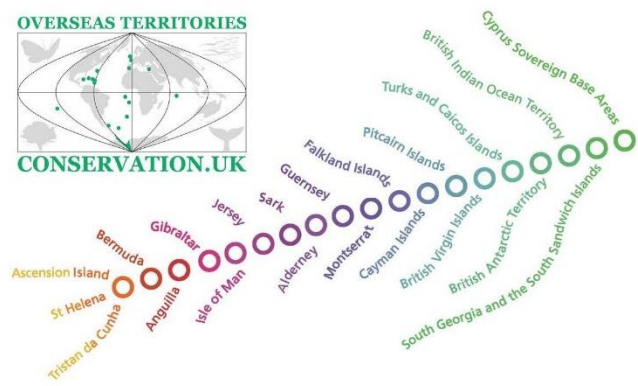
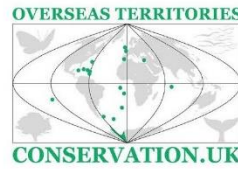


**Council of Environment Ministers
(or equivalents) of
UK Overseas Territories
and Crown Dependencies:
8th meeting,
Wednesday 15th May 2024**

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



Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies: 8th meeting, Wednesday 15th May 2024, 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 welcomed the participation of UK Defra Minister Rebecca Pow MP with her officials, updating on the pleasing progress on the international treaty on plastics, and the progress both in UK and the UKOTs and CDs towards restriction of single-use plastics and single-use vapes, while noting also the problems in affording recycling in small territories.

We received the update we had requested following the presentations on the work on plastic waste coordinated by Ascension Island Government, St Helena National Trust, St Helena Government and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) which we received at our previous meeting. Awareness is clearly important and educational material for children has been supplied, and brainstorming with retailers on St Helena has proven very constructive in terms of ideas for replacement, re-use and recycling. Research in British Indian Ocean Territory has identified practical approaches to concentrating effort in time and space to make it most effective on turtle nesting, and in recycling locally mixed types and erosional states of plastic waste to produce a plastic replacement for plywood – this approach being of great interest to several of our territories.

We heard from Professor Paul Shearing, Principal Investigator on the Faraday Institute's SafeBatt project, on the safety of Lithium-ion batteries, and noted the importance, to both the

environment and health, of separating such batteries from general waste, especially if the latter is to be incinerated.

We welcomed an update on the Blue Belt initiative from UK FCDO, on the evolution of the programme from its initial emphasis concentrating on large oceanic protected areas to include more flexible elements to address some of the identified needs of a range of UKOTs.

We commended Sark for taking up the invitation in our earlier meetings from the IUCN-UK Protected Area Working Group and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum to extend the 30-by-30 analysis from UK to an example UKOT or CD, and received a progress report. Several territories offered their experience in integrating the natural environment into physical planning procedures.

We welcomed the 28 places in the UK delegation made available to territories for the UN Climate Change Conference in November-December 2023, and noted that there would be 14 such places in the smaller UK delegation at the next conference. We are pleased at the progress in these numbers over the situation in earlier years but note that further progress is needed in terms of inclusion of territory personnel in UK's high-level negotiating team and in discussions about this prior to the conference.

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, and thanked UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for continuing to organise these meetings; we asked them to organise the next, by remote communications in the autumn of 2024, on a date to be decided later once other constraints become clearer.

Main Text

1. We, the portfolio holders for the environment in our respective territories or dependencies, held our eighth Environment Ministers' Council meeting by Zoom on Wednesday 15th May 2024. 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 welcomed the participation in one session by UK Defra Minister Rebecca Pow MP with her officials. We appreciated her update on the progress on the international treaty on plastics, which might be ready for signature in November, and her invitation to engage with her officials in the near future to ensure that the views of UKOTs and CDs be incorporated in the drafting. The approach, taking full account of minimising usage, avoiding problematic and non-recyclable plastics, and potential re-use was widely welcomed. Minister Pow invited CDs and UKOTs to join in UK's ratification of the treaty, once finalised, and we agreed to consider this actively in our administrations.

7. In domestic law and practice, we recognised that the progress in restriction of single-use plastics being made in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, described by Minister Pow has

great parallels with the efforts in many of our territories. In this context, we welcomed Minister Pow's commending of Guernsey's huge first-year progress via a reduce-reuse-recycle campaign. We appreciate also Minister Pow recognising and noting the point made by Sark that, with the opposite of economies of scale, appropriate treatment of some waste is beyond the resources especially of the least populated territories, and that help is needed, by greater producer responsibility, financial assistance or other means,

8. We appreciated too a presentation by Defra official Suzanne Stafford on progress towards a ban on disposal vapes in the domestic UK nations, following a public consultation showing huge support for such a move, especially in view of the inefficient use of critical resources, problems and costs of disposal, and various risks. As is the case in several UKOTs and CDs, whilst initial concerns related to health, the negative environment effects have become increasingly apparent. In England, legislation is planned for this summer, with the ban on supply starting on 1 April 2025, after a 6-month transition period. Several UKOTs and CDs noted that they were already moving through similar processes.

9. Later in the meeting, we received the update we had requested following the presentations on the work on plastic waste coordinated by Ascension Island Government, St Helena National Trust, St Helena Government and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) which we received at our previous meeting. This time, we heard from Matthew Owen and colleagues at the St Helena National Trust on their work on surveying the waste, its sources (being mainly from overseas on windward side of the island), and identifying ways of addressing the problems. Awareness is clearly important, and educational material for children has been supplied physically on St Helena and Ascension and digitally to Tristan da Cunha. A brainstorming physical meeting with retailers on St Helena proved very constructive in terms of ideas for replacement, re-use and recycling. Work on fish-sampling for gut contents to assess the marine problem is planned. Rachel Jones, of ZSL, updated the work at Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory, on surveying the plastic waste in time and space, using this to relate, for example, to minimising its impact on turtle nesting and identifying approaches to reduction and recycling. Success was reported in drastically reducing, through awareness-raising, single-use water bottles, and in a feasibility study to explore local recycling of mixed types and erosional states of plastic waste (mainly from beach collection) to produce locally a plastic replacement for plywood, which is cheaper than the latter and waterproof. The press and other equipment needed fit in two 40 ft shipping containers. Whilst the costs of operating this are not ideal in BIOT, there is great potential here for several territories and other small states, and several of us will be exploring further.

10. We are grateful to Professor Paul Shearing, Principal Investigator on the Faraday Institute's SafeBatt project, for meeting the request from our previous meeting for a presentation on Lithium-ion batteries and the current work to improve the already high safety levels. Discussions stressed the importance, to both the environment and health, of separating such batteries from general

waste, especially if the latter is to be incinerated. We recognised the challenges this posed to small territories and agreed that we need to consider this further, and also to work with Professor Shearing, his colleagues and others to develop best-practice guidelines for small territories.

11. We welcomed the offer of an update on the Blue Belt initiative from Kylie Bamford of UK FCDO. This described the evolution of the programme from its initial emphasis concentrating on large oceanic protected areas to include more flexible elements to address some of the identified needs of a range of UKOTs. In the future, consideration is being given to including also aspects related to climate-change, tackling marine litter, carbon storage and other priorities identified by territories, alongside compliance and enforcement.

12. We commended Sark for taking up the invitation in our earlier meetings from the IUCN-UK Protected Area Working Group and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum to extend the 30-by-30¹ analysis from UK to an example UKOT or CD. We were pleased to receive a progress report and noted the interesting analysis on how much land is effectively already protected simply because it is unsuitable for human use. While commending this starting point and the moves to confirming protected status, we noted the need to ensure that any key ecosystems not covered by this approach are covered eventually too. Several territories offered their experience in integrating the natural environment into physical planning procedures.

13. We heard reports from colleagues who had participated in the UN Climate Change Conference in November-December 2023 in Dubai. We welcomed the 28 places in the UK delegation made available to territories, and noted that there would be 14 such places in the smaller UK delegation at the next conference. We are pleased at the progress in these numbers over the situation in earlier years. We note that further progress is needed in terms of inclusion of territory personnel in UK's high-level negotiating team and in discussions about this prior to the conference. The size of the UK pavilion and prior notice of events there might also benefit from more consideration. UKOTA is picking up some of these points.

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

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,...

them to organise the next, by remote communications in the autumn of 2024, on a date to be decided later once other constraints become clearer.

Appendix: List of Ministers and other lead representatives participating

Alderney: Mr Glyn Mason, Waste and Recycling Officer (on behalf of 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: Mr Drew Pettit, Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs (on behalf of The Hon. Walter H Roban, JP, MP, Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs)

[British] Virgin Islands: Ms Angela Burnett, Environmental Officer in the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change, Ms Tessa Smith, Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change, and colleagues (on behalf of Premier and Environment Minister, Hon. Natalio D. Wheatley)

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: Hon. Clare Barber MHK, Minister for the Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture

Jersey: Apologies from Deputy Steve Luce, Minister for the Environment

Montserrat: Apologies from Ms Kei-Retta Farrell, UK Representative for the Government of Montserrat

Pitcairn: Apologies from Mr Simon Young, Mayor of Pitcairn

St Helena: Hon. Christine Scipio, Minister of Environment, Natural Resources and Planning

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

Tristan da Cunha: Apologies from Mr James Glass, Chief Islander

Turks and Caicos Islands: Hon. Josephine Connolly, Minister of Tourism, Environment, Heritage, Maritime & Gaming