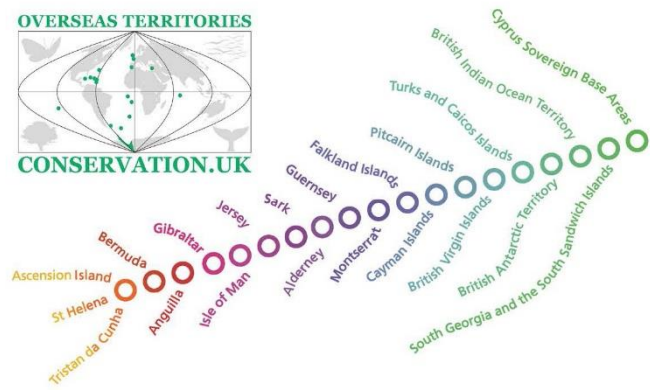
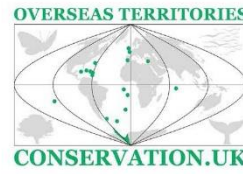


**Council of Environment Ministers  
(or equivalents) of  
UK Overseas Territories  
and Crown Dependencies:  
9<sup>th</sup> meeting,  
Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

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



**Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and  
Crown Dependencies: 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025, 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 for Nature Mary Creagh MP with her officials, and her wish for greater engagement with our territories in matters relating to the Convention on Biological Diversity. We stressed that UK’s performance in these international fora relied heavily on UK’s financial contributions to the work of our personnel and NGOs in this area and welcomed Minister Creagh’s commitment to strive to ensure such funding.

We heard from Professor Paul Anderson of the Faraday Institution's ReLiB project and Professor Paul Shearing of the Faraday Institution’s SafeBatt project about safe disposal of Li-ion batteries. We noted the challenges to small islands in that new batteries may be imported but shippers decline to carry used ones. We noted that an alternative of manual dismantling could generate much higher value material than industrial methods, provided that safety measures are adequate. We noted also the concept of “second life” whereby batteries no longer suitable for e.g. use in vehicles might still be appropriate for use in storing wind- or solar-generated electricity.

We welcomed a presentation from global lawyers DLA Piper on their *pro bono* work, and its potential relating to international conventions, implementation plans, nature finance, training resources for civil servants and identification of gaps in legislation was also noted with interest. We intend to follow this up.

We welcomed a positive update from Sark which had taken up the invitation in our earlier meetings from the IUCN-UK Protected Area Working Group and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum to extend the analysis of the UK’s contribution to the Global Biodiversity

Framework target of protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030, known as 30-by-30, to an example UKOT or CD.

We welcomed presentations on the environmental importance and conservation needs of the Chagos Archipelago (British Indian Ocean Territory) from Dr Pete Carr (of the NGO Chagos Conservation Trust) and Dr Mark Spalding (Scientific Advisor to the BIOT Administration). We were impressed with the immense biological importance of the area and the international economic value of maintaining its ecology. We noted that the whole of the Exclusive Economic Zone has been a protected area since 2010 and remains one of the healthiest coral-reefs in the world. “Spill-over” of marine life to beyond the boundary makes adjoining seas so rich that its boundary can be seen just by remote mapping of fishing vessels. We commended the BIOT Administration and the Chagos Conservation Trust on their outstanding conservation work, and hope that the current proposal to Darwin Plus to extend work to eradicate human-introduced invasive rats to make the eastern Penos Banhos the largest rat-free chain of islands in the Indian Ocean will be successful. Whatever the future of the Chagos Archipelago we, as fellow overseas territories, consider it essential to maintain the work to conserve the ecology of the area. This is not just for nature conservation reasons, but also because of its economic importance to surrounding nations, as outlined above.

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, probably in autumn 2025, 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 ninth Environment Ministers’ Council meeting by Zoom on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025. 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, carbon-capture). 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 94% 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 recognise 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 for Nature Mary Creagh MP with her officials. Minister Creagh thanked the Council for the invitation and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for organising this series of meetings, to which she looked forward to contributing. We welcomed Minister Creagh's indication that UK's new Biodiversity Strategy for UK Overseas Territories would be published this spring and will strive to supply our final comments within this month. We welcomed Minister Creagh's wish for greater engagement with our territories in matters relating to the Convention on Biological Diversity. We noted that interaction and flow of information between territory and UK delegates to that Convention had increased recently and welcomed further progress in this regard. We expressed the hope that interactions and flow of information in respect of the Framework Convention on Climate Change improve at least to similar levels. Noting that 94% of the global biodiversity for which UK is responsible being dependent on UK Overseas Territories, we stressed that UK's performance in these international fora relied heavily on

UK's financial contributions to the work of our personnel and NGOs in this area. We welcomed Minister Creagh's commitment to strive to ensure such funding, e.g. through Darwin Plus and the Blue Belt programme and, once finances reach a more satisfactory level, to explore an equivalent of Blue Belt for terrestrial areas, on which most of our unique species depend. We welcomed the encouragement to engage with Baroness (Jennifer) Chapman of Darlington, Minister of State, on FCDO aspects.

**7.** In the context of Minister Creagh's commending Tristan da Cunha's pioneering Marine Protection Zone, we joined with Tristan da Cunha in thanking Minister Creagh for her support in events raising the profile, especially with the many new MPs, of the importance of territory biodiversity and UK's shared responsibility. We welcomed the encouragement from Minister Creagh to identify other routes to link to MPs, such as via diaspora concentrations in constituencies or historical links.

**8.** We welcomed the presence of Professor Paul Anderson (University of Birmingham) of the Faraday Institution's ReLiB project and Professor Paul Shearing (University of Oxford) of the Faraday Institution's SafeBatt project. Professor Anderson gave a presentation about safe disposal of Li-ion batteries, following Professor Shearing's presentation on safe use to our previous meeting. We noted the importance of considering disposal issues before embarking too heavily on use, and the challenges to small islands in that new batteries may be imported but shippers decline to carry used ones. The session noted that recycling methods generally used are highly inefficient, generating a low-value mulch of fragments of all components. An alternative of manual dismantling could generate much higher value material, provided that safety measures are adequate, and some of our members expressed interest in exploring this further. We noted also the concept of "second life" whereby batteries no longer suitable for e.g. use in vehicles might still be appropriate for use in storing wind- or solar-generated electricity. In thanking the professors, we warned that we might turn to them again for advice. We noted that several territories are developing electrification and wider energy strategies, and considered that we should hold a session on this at a future meeting.

**9.** We welcomed a presentation by Claire Donse and Marie Kingston of global lawyers DLA Piper on their *pro bono* work, particularly the aspects in support of environmental conservation for small island states and its potential value to our territories. We were impressed both by the volume and quality of their *pro bono* work, and noted particularly the aspects relating to international conventions, implementation plans, training of civil servants, and to nature finance and its potential. In respect of the last, DLA Piper's legal drafting help in setting up the community trust fund enabling Tristan da Cunha's Marine Protection Zone was noted with gratitude. We noted with approval also the litigation progress including establishing the right of environmental NGOs to represent nature and receive reimbursement for it via additional fines. The work on identification of gaps in legislation was also noted with interest. We welcomed that contacts with DLA Piper will be passed on by the Secretariat, so that direct communication can be established by territories with an interest.

**10.** We welcomed an update from Sark which had taken up the invitation in our earlier meetings from the IUCN-UK Protected Area Working Group and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum to extend the analysis of UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Global Biodiversity Framework target, known as 30-by-30, from UK to an example UKOT or CD. Sark has challenges in restoring grazing on steep marginal slopes where it is no longer economic but important for wildlife, and a lack of nature legislation but a rather involved process for new laws, so that the possibility for deployment of existing laws as well as developing an island plan are being explored, with optimism for progress. We noted that any other territory which wished to explore help from the IUCN-UK Protected Area Working Group and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum in assessing how their protection measures match 30-by-30 requirements should contact the Secretariat in the first instance.

**11.** We welcomed presentations on the environmental importance and conservation needs of the Chagos Archipelago (British Indian Ocean Territory) from Dr Pete Carr (of the NGO Chagos Conservation Trust) and Dr Mark Spalding (Scientific Advisor to the BIOT Administration). We were impressed with the immense biological importance of the area and the international economic value of maintaining its ecology. The complex has 5 atolls with islands, including the largest atoll in the world, and 4 drowned atolls, as well as some 80 seamounts, with a larger area of coral-reefs than all other UKOTs combined and, with these, making UK the 12<sup>th</sup> coral-reef nation, ahead of the Bahamas. On land, it has the highest density of Robber (or Coconut) Crabs in the world, and huge sea-bird colonies, totalling more than a million birds, whose cycling of nutrients from sea to land and back again have been shown to be crucial to the huge marine productivity. The whole of the Exclusive Economic Zone has been a protected area since 2010 and remains one of the healthiest coral-reefs in the world. "Spill-over" of marine life to beyond the boundary makes adjoining seas so rich that its boundary can be seen just by remote mapping of fishing vessels.

**12.** We commended the BIOT Administration and the Chagos Conservation Trust on their outstanding conservation work, and hope that the current proposal to Darwin Plus to extend work to eradicate human-introduced invasive rats to make the eastern Penos Banhos the largest rat-free chain of islands in the Indian Ocean is successful. We do not wish to enter into the political aspects of the future of the Chagos Archipelago. However, whatever the future of the Chagos Archipelago, we, as fellow overseas territories, consider it essential to maintain the work to conserve the ecology of the area. This is not just for nature conservation reasons, but also because of its economic importance to surrounding nations, as outlined above. If the Archipelago remains as BIOT, we expect UK Government to maintain this. If it is transferred to Mauritius, we urge UK and Mauritius governments to agree a gradual transition in respect of conservation. This is because, Mauritius may be limited in resources, is over 2000km from Chagos (about the same distance as from London to Agadir in south Morocco) with no existing transport link, and without experience of management of the area – so that a progressive hand-over period would be of obvious benefit to all.

**13.** We share the view expressed by Sark that this Council is inspirational in informing each other on what others are doing so that we can benefit, and thank UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for organising it. These meetings 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 appreciate greatly our joint working, both with UKOTA and UKOTCF. We welcome those representatives new to the Council by virtue of elections or other changes in territories, and express thanks and best wishes to the two delegation leaders who are participating in their last meeting. We ask UKOTCF to organise the next meeting, probably in the autumn after considering avoiding clashes with other relevant events.

#### **Appendix: List of Ministers and other lead representatives participating**

**Alderney:** Mr James Robinson, Head of Operations (on behalf of States Member Iain McFarlane, States of Alderney)

**Anguilla:** Ms Melissa Meade, Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment (on behalf of Hon. Kyle Hodge, Minister of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment)

**Bermuda:** Apologies from Hon. Jache Adams. JP, MP, Minister of Public Works and Environment

**[British] Virgin Islands:** Apologies from Hon. Julian Fraser, RA, Deputy Premier and Minister with responsibility for the environment

**Cayman Islands:** Mrs Lisa Hurlston-McKenzie, Senior Policy Advisor for Climate Resiliency, Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency (on behalf of Hon Dwayne S Seymour, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency)

**Falkland Islands:** Pete Biggs MLA, portfolio holder for Environment and Public Infrastructure

**Gibraltar:** Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate, 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:** Mr Willie Peggie, Group Director of Natural Environment (on behalf of Deputy Steve Luce, Minister for the Environment)

**Montserrat:** Apologies from Hon. John P. Osborne, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, Environment, Youth Affairs & Sports

**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, Agriculture, Environment and Sea Fisheries Committee of the Chief Pleas of Sark

**Tristan da Cunha:** Mr Chris Carnegy, UK representative (on behalf of Cllr Ian Lavarello, Chief Islander)

**Turks and Caicos Islands:** Ms Tracy Knight, Representative & Head of London Office (on behalf of Hon. Zhavargo Jolly, Minister of Tourism, Environment, Heritage, Maritime & Gaming)