

Overseas Territories Biodiversity Group (OTBG)

Stakeholder meeting

Meeting note.

Context.

This document is a note of the meeting that summarises the key points made. It is not a minute of the meeting. Statements have not been attributed to individuals or organisations, but have been highlighted as forming part of the general discussion. The meeting was chaired by Jeremy Eppel (Defra)

Attendees:

Nicolas Andrews-Gauvain (MoD)

Tom Appleby (Blue Marine Foundation)

Mark Baxter (Defra)

Sarah Brennan (Falklands Conservation)

Jeremy Eppel (Defra)

Alistair Gammell (Global Ocean Legacy, Pew Trusts)

Clare Hamilton (Defra)

Iain Orr (BioDiplomacy)

Howard Pearce (SGHT) and new island conservation trust

Tara Pelembe (JNCC)

Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF)

Helen Stevens (FCO)

Clare Stringer (RSPB)

Joining by phone:

Paul Newbegin (Cyprus SBA Administration)

Apologies:

Colin Clubbe (RBG, Kew)

Jamie Copsey (Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust)

John Croxall (Birdlife Intl)

Darren Freezor (DECC)

Si n Griffiths (FCO)

Vicky Kindemba (Buglife)

Jonathan Hall (RSPB)

Razi Latif (DfID)

Chris Mahon (IUCN NCUK)

Tony Weighell (JNCC)

Kedell Worboys (UKOTA)

Colin Hindmarch (NetBiome-CSA)

Stacey Hughes (Defra)

1. Introduction and welcome – Jeremy Eppel

JE welcomed stakeholders and set the scene, highlighting that the 2010 Overseas Territory Biodiversity strategy and the 2012 White Paper provided the policy context for HMG input into Biodiversity in the UKOTs. Yesterday, HMG published an update on its activities.

Defra is aware that it hasn't been very good at communicating action to stakeholders and this annual update and annual stakeholders meetings aim to progress positively in this area.

This stakeholder meeting is important as HMG genuinely want to work together with NGOs to achieve the best possible outcomes for the OTs.

2. Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) Inquiry on Sustainability in the UKOTs – Jeremy Eppel

JE introduced the topic and gave a brief overview of the timeline associated with the EAC inquiry: EAC report published on 16th January; HMG response submitted on 14th March; Westminster Hall debate last week; APPG meeting yesterday.

He highlighted that it was important to maintain profile of OT environment issues. And although Defra don't necessarily agree with all of the Committee's recommendations they are keen to work with stakeholders and with the OTs themselves on these issues.

Views from participants on the EAC were then invited. Key points from the discussion included:

- The EAC report was well-documented and positive. The connection to the environment charters was welcome.
- The UK Government response came across as being defensive and was probably a missed opportunity in that it didn't highlight sufficiently the quantity of work that HMG is doing.
- The 'opening up' of the lottery should continue to be explored until it is possible. For example, the option of using a local authority should be explored, or that of setting up a UKOT lottery fund. There have been examples of OT links with local government/local authorities such as Hertfordshire and Norfolk.
- There is currently too much separation between NGOs and HMG, but the recent JNCC/UKNGO meetings and this one appear to be addressing that gap.
- UK government need to make a distinction between
 - inhabited and uninhabited Territories and the related distinction between the differing environmental responsibilities in these 2 situations. They need to communicate these better.
 - OTs with very small populations and those with larger populations. The level of support required by these is very different.
- The OTBS update shows that there is a lot of positive work going on. This includes a much better, more systematic approach to MEA reporting (CBD, CITES, Ramsar) this time round.
- Environmental governance is part of good governance, and issues like having government structures in place for planning and environmental impact assessments on overseas territories need to be addressed. This includes looking at e.g. land use and how much public information is available to people in UKOTs when either are new ways of using land.
- One area for the future is making sure UKOTs have good advice (e.g. local authority level) – for planning, and for freedom of information.
- HMG's efforts to do more strategic thinking around its input into OTs are encouraging.
- Collaboration is important both within UKOTs and with UK government, and with UK NGOs.
- Cross-territory working, sharing best practice etc. is to be encouraged (e.g. South Georgia is a globally recognised example of best practice in fisheries management). Defra was thanked for providing financial support for a Gibraltar conference aimed at cross-territory skill-share.

- The Crown Dependencies present a potential opportunity for cross-island support and skill share. Good precedents here have already been set.

3. HMG strategic direction

HMG is looking at how it can be more strategic across government, in its approach to environment in the UKOTs. We need to target our activities in these resource-straitened times and ensure not only that they address defined needs but also that they offer good value for money and avoid duplication.

HMG is working together, through OTBG to develop a more strategic approach and ensure that our activities are complementary and are grounded in defined OT needs, using as a basis the annual JMC Communiqué.

As a first step HMG are looking to build on the good work done by RSPB (and funded by FCO) in the research project that is due to be launched on 20th May and that provides a stocktake of OT biodiversity by looking to commission a gap analysis and needs assessment.

HMG is working on this and is happy to share the outcomes with NGO's and wider stakeholders.

4. Hot topics:

NOTE: These topics were identified for discussion by the NGO stakeholders.

(i) Marine Protected Areas

FCO summarised HMG's position on MPA's.

- The Government has been an enthusiastic supporter of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), having already established the largest no-take MPA in the world in the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 2010, doubling the previous area of global marine protection. We have also established a sustainable-use MPA covering over 1,000,000 km² around South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, including a 20,000 km² no-fishing zone.
- We are however clear that MPAs cannot just be lines on a map. To be credible, MPAs must be underpinned by science and require active and appropriate enforcement. We also need to consider carefully the costs of such an initiative, particularly of effective enforcement, as these may be substantial.
- We are committed to working constructively with the Pitcairn Island Council and relevant stakeholders, on the MPA issue, including consideration of other practical solutions and innovative methods to achieve the same objectives.

Views from participants on the MPAs were then invited. Key points from the discussion included:

- The question of whether there are any 'obvious' candidates for MPAs was raised. The following points were discussed
 - For every UKOT, the case is different
 - Although government doesn't want paper parks, there are examples (e.g. Bahamas) of where legal designation (without an enforcement regime) has had a positive impact on the environment.
 - Sustainable use needs to be an important consideration in MPA designation. Not all MPAs are/have to be no-take.

- It would be useful to have a clear idea on what HMG's vision for MPA designation in UKOTs is.
- HMG should be proud of Chagos – this is the second biggest protected area on the planet.
- From RSPB's perspective, there are 3 'obvious' candidate sites: South Georgia, Chagos, and Ascension. As the latter have designated MPAs, RSPB is looking to promote the designation of an MPA around Ascension. Pitcairn is also a 4th possibility
- NGO's provide the skill/opportunity of winning 'hearts and minds' in support of MPA designation e.g. through documentaries on BBC. The 'heart' is as important in the process as the head/science. MPAs do not exist in isolation in terms of action in the marine environment. United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO) for example is working on addressing shortfalls on bathymetry in UKOTs so that disasters such as that of the Oliver hitting Nightingale Island are avoided. Lessons can be learnt from past events such as this. When discussing MPAs – although the focus is on the potential large MPA designation options, don't forget the inhabited islands of the Caribbean, where MPAs are as important, and the marine environment is, in some cases, under immediate threat.

(ii) Cyprus

(a) Illegal trapping of birds

Paul Newbegin (Cyprus SBA Administration) introduced the issue from the MOD position:

- There is regular lobbying on illegal bird trapping in the SBAs and in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). Illegal trapping of songbirds for the restaurant trade is prevalent in Cyprus.
- Concern was prompted by a report in late 2013 by the RSPB and affiliated NGO, Birdlife of Cyprus, which found that illegal trapping in the Eastern SBA (particularly at Cape Pyla) had increased by 180% since 2002 and 4% since 2012.
- The illegal trapping of birds is a widespread issue across the whole of Cyprus and is not confined to the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs). It is a very lucrative business and, because of this, participants remain willing to risk prosecution.
- It is clear that any long-term success on stopping illegal bird trapping depends on a change of attitude in the Republic of Cyprus. This remains a cultural issue, involving big money and, whilst there is a demand in the restaurants in the Republic, there is little prospect of significant change.
- Clearly, any change requires the support of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.
- Any additional efforts to manage the problem in the SBAs (or elsewhere in Cyprus) will have only a limited impact, and no permanent solution will be achieved until demand in the restaurants for illegally trapped birds in the Republic of Cyprus, is addressed by RoC politicians.

Discussion from the floor included the following points

- RSPB members are very concerned about the issue, and there is a lot of internal pressure within RSPB to continue to lobby for this issue to be resolved. So this will remain high on RSPB's agenda
- EU has made a political commitment to better enforce the control of illegal wildlife trade. The Cyprus illegal trapping and trade could give a higher profile in EU discussions.
- Cyprus needs to be an active member of discussions on SAC designation if it is to be effective.

(b) Development in the SBAs

Paul Newbegin (Cyprus SBA Administration) introduced the issue from the MOD position:

Issue: The recently-agreed relaxing of controls on non-military development in the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) between the UK and Republic of Cyprus (RoC).

- The Sovereign Base Areas remain vital for the national security of the UK.
- The protection of the interests of those resident or working in the SBAs remains one of the major objectives set originally in 1960. The new Arrangement on non-military development (signed in January 14) is a further example of HMG's determination to work to those objectives, while continuing to protect our national security interests.
- The Arrangement reached in January will:
 - introduce formal planning zones and policies for all parts of the SBAs, similar to those applicable in the Republic, except for military sites owned or leased directly by the UK, and subject to appropriate safeguards to protect UK military needs;
 - allow the establishment of commercial and industrial enterprises, where consistent with the new planning zones and controls and with other relevant SBA law;
 - place rights to own land and reside within the SBAs on, as far as possible, the same basis as in the Republic;
 - Ensure that the Republic of Cyprus provides appropriate public services and infrastructure where needed in the SBAs as a result of this Arrangement.
- The SBA Administration and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus are working together to introduce these new arrangements as soon as possible and to carry out the legislative and procedural measures needed to establish the new regime. The planning procedures will involve the participation of local authorities and the general public as it does in the Republic.

Discussion from the floor included the following points

- UKOTCF had raised concerns that had been fed through from local people. There didn't seem to be any procedures in place to make sure that there were development controls.
- It would be worth making a wider statement to head of concerns that there are systems/processes in place to address these concerns.
- NGOs will be included in the consultation process.

(iii) Views on EAC research question (see Recommendation 15 and para 31 in the EAC Report)

The EAC has proposed that Defra must draw together UKOTs Governments, NGOs such as the RSPB, civil society and research institutions to agree a comprehensive research programme to catalogue the full extent of biodiversity in the UKOTs.

HMG is keen to adopt a strategic approach, as explained earlier, and are keen to hear the views of stakeholders on how they consider this recommendation should be addressed. For our part, we know there is a lot of work going on and we are committed to looking at how coordination of these activities can be improved – including through the strategic approach already mentioned.

We have also been talking to Territory Governments to get their views. Keen to hear from stakeholders, bearing in mind the need to ensure that stakeholders are still able to bid for

research and other contracts (NB: if they are too closely involved in setting the direction, they could be precluded under competitive tender rules from bidding for the work).

Discussion from the floor included the following points

- RSPB have pulled together a 'stocktake report' which will be available on their website from the 20th May. This report was funded by FCO and provides a baseline for species on island Overseas Territories. The next step from an RSPB perspective is to provide a baseline for habitats, and to provide species and habitats baseline for those OTs not included in the stocktake.
- National Ecosystem Assessments' are broader than just biodiversity and have been trialled in the Falklands and South Georgia. Feedback suggests that they were seen as a duplication of work already done under the mainstreaming project.
- Science is important, but isn't the only driver. We can never know enough and can be studying species habitats and ecosystems forever. There needs to be some degree of a 'broad brush' approach combined with active management to make a real difference. UK MPA designation is an example of the negatives of science-led designation
- The Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus are funding a large number of the OT baseline information projects. A centralised point for Darwin projects would be helpful.
- It would be good to involve management in science-based projects e.g. enforcement into fisheries science projects to better utilise limited resources.
- The importance of local communities and volunteers in research and conservation management shouldn't be underestimated and should be utilized.
- Number of species is very basic, abundance, changes, contribution to climate change are equally as important.
- RSPB are looking into how better to embed Overseas territories into their state of nature report.

5. Next steps

JE summed up: HMG are keen to engage with stakeholders. We achieve more by working together. HMG Plan to hold another meeting in future. In closing, JE informed the group that we are hoping to launch the next round of Darwin Plus on 22nd May to coincide with International Biodiversity Day.