



JNCC's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Programme

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

JNCC's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Programme

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1. The external context for JNCC's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies work

1.1. The 2012 White Paper *The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability*¹ provides the high-level policy background to UK Government engagement with the Overseas Territories, and reiterates the UK Government's commitment to supporting the Territories in the development of policies and strategies to protect their environment.

1.2. In the context of biodiversity conservation, the primary UK policy context is the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy². The overarching objective of the Biodiversity Strategy is to 'enable the UK and Overseas Territory Governments to meet their international obligations for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories'. The Strategy contains five strategic priorities:

- i. obtaining data on the location and status of biodiversity interests and the human activities affecting biodiversity to inform the preparation of policies and management plans (including baseline survey and subsequent monitoring);
- ii. preventing the establishment of invasive alien species, and eradicating or controlling species that have already become established;
- iii. developing cross-sectoral approaches to climate change adaptation that are consistent with the principles of sustainable development;
- iv. developing tools to value ecosystem services to inform sustainable development policies and practices;
- v. developing ecosystem-based initiatives for the conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment.

1.3. Overseas Territories Ministers meet annually with UK Government Ministers at the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council. An annual communiqué is agreed with a set of priorities that include ones specific to the environment. Environmental priorities contained in the most recent communiqué, issued in November 2013, include:

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-overseas-territories>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/united-kingdom-overseas-territories-biodiversity-strategy>

- i. promoting the development of, and investment in, sustainable fishing industries, particularly in Territories where potential resources are underutilised or illegally exploited;
 - ii. publishing road maps by the end of May 2014 setting out plans to implement our environmental commitments and demonstrating our contribution to the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy;
 - iii. ensuring the continuation of relevant funding programmes for Overseas Territories environment, conservation, biodiversity and climate-related projects.
- 1.4. The UK Government recognises that (inhabited) Territory Governments are responsible for the protection and conservation of their natural environments but has undertaken, through the White Paper and the Biodiversity Strategy, to assist the Territory Governments in meeting their international obligations and addressing priorities for conservation research and management. Each of the 14 Overseas Territories and three Crown Dependencies has their own specific suite of policies and plans relating to biodiversity and the environment.

2. JNCC's current work programme

- 2.1. JNCC's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Programme supports UK Government policy and individual Territory biodiversity conservation policies by primarily working with UK Government departments (mainly Defra and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and governments in the Overseas Territories. The aim is to work with the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, collectively and individually, to assist them to acquire the knowledge and capacity to develop evidence-based policies to conserve and manage their biodiversity. An overview of the programme is provided in Annex 1.
- 2.2. The Programme uses JNCC grant in aid, and additional income from UK Government departments, to support a wide range of projects in individual Territories and Dependencies and also to address issues that are common to all of these entities.
- 2.3. JNCC's current approach is to focus on areas where our expertise can directly support the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in data acquisition, developing tools for valuing ecosystem services and encouraging ecosystem-based approaches to conservation.
- 2.4. Key achievements in 2013 include:
- i. supporting eleven 'on the ground' projects;
 - ii. implementing the Anguillan Green Economy project;
 - iii. funding thirteen staff from Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies to attend conferences/workshops or training courses;
 - iv. supporting two secondments;

- v. completing eight new publications (made available via our website);
- vi. holding five technical workshops (four of which were held in Overseas Territories);
- vii. providing regular advice and support to UK and Territory governments on request.

3. Environmental Audit Committee report on Overseas Territories

- 3.1. In January 2014 the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee published a report on *Sustainability in the UK's Overseas Territories*³. The report contains a number of recommendations in respect of Government policy towards the Overseas Territories. Most of the recommendations do not impact on JNCC's work. There is, however, a recommendation 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".
- 3.2. The UK Government response to the Environmental Audit Committee report has not yet been published, but cataloguing the 'full extent' of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories would be a major undertaking, and is not necessarily the most effective use of limited resources. An understanding of threats and how to manage them is equally important in addressing biodiversity loss.
- 3.3. One of JNCC's core strengths is collation, analysis and dissemination of biodiversity evidence. JNCC has supported acquisition of basic biodiversity data for the Overseas Territories, prioritising activities and management systems according to the needs of individual Territories. We are well placed to contribute to a targeted programme to improve the knowledge of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories and will explore how JNCC's expertise in information management can be best used in such work.
- 3.4. JNCC is also well placed to foster better understanding, sharing and application of existing information and knowledge across all user groups. JNCC's expertise with the UK National Biodiversity Network and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility is truly world leading and could be applied to the management of Overseas Territories biodiversity data without prescribing how the information should be used or setting conservation priorities for the Territories themselves.

4. JNCC's Triennial Review and engagement with NGOs

- 4.1. One of the conclusions of the recent Triennial Review of JNCC⁴ was that "JNCC will build on its current partnership working with stakeholders and in particular improve engagement with civil society, including with the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies".

³ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/sustainability-in-the-united-kingdom-overseas-territories/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/triennial-review-of-the-joint-nature-conservation-committee-inc>

- 4.2. To improve engagement with NGOs, JNCC has established a new group comprising representatives from JNCC and UK-based NGOs with an interest in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. The first meeting of the group took place on 7 January.
- 4.3. A key point to emerge from the discussion at the first meeting was that there was a need for a strategy or framework to enable more effective collaboration and more effective focus of collective effort by UK-based organisations in the Overseas Territories. It was agreed that the next meeting of the group would focus primarily on the development of ideas and parameters for this concept.

5. Next steps

- 5.1. The policy background to JNCC's Overseas Territories work is complex. Territory governments are responsible for establishing their own environmental policies and programmes, while the UK Government has strategic objectives. It is also important to recognise that each Territory is different in terms of policies, capacity and established priorities.
- 5.2. JNCC's focus has been on working with Government departments and agencies in the UK and in the Overseas Territories. However, we recognise that NGOs have an important role to play, e.g. undertaking conservation activities on the ground, highlighting the value of biodiversity, and advocating particular policies. JNCC can and does collaborate with NGOs in the Territories themselves and in the UK but must do so carefully and with regard to the sensitivities of the Territory (and UK) Governments.
- 5.3. In light of recent developments it would be timely to review the strategic priorities for JNCC's Overseas Territories programme. One strand of this would be for JNCC to adopt a more focussed approach to Overseas Territories biodiversity data management, building on the organisation's significant expertise in this area. This would assist Government to make a positive response to the Environmental Audit Committee report whilst also offering scope for significant JNCC-NGO co-operation.
- 5.4. There are various options for developing the framework noted in 4.3. Three options are described below. They are increasingly ambitious, complex, prescriptive in relation to priorities, and demanding in terms of stakeholder engagement.
- 5.5. *Option 1: A framework for partnership.* It is inevitable that Overseas Territory Governments, UK Government and NGOs do not always agree about environmental priorities in the Overseas Territories or how they should be implemented. However, this should not prevent constructive partnerships from being built around areas of common interest. A framework that identified common nature conservation interests in relation to the Overseas Territories and helped to build implementation and funding solutions for these activities would be of benefit to all. It could serve to maintain relationships between all stakeholders even when positions conflict.
- 5.6. *Option 2: A framework for implementation of the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy.* This type of framework would form a more in-depth implementation plan for the Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy. It could mimic the UK Biodiversity Framework by mapping existing nature

conservation activities to global and regional commitments to enable the reporting of collective effort, the allocation of lead roles and the identification of gaps. JNCC has a great deal of experience in building frameworks of this nature and understands the various sensitivities and how to deal with them. JNCC could promote the benefits of international activities under the Convention on Biological Diversity and related biodiversity-relevant conventions, as a means of making UK and Overseas Territories governments receptive to this type of framework.

- 5.7. *Option 3. A framework for setting Overseas Territories Nature Conservation priorities.* This would use available evidence on the status of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories to identify the highest priorities for nature conservation activity. It could set priorities based on criteria such as avoiding global extinctions and meeting international commitments. This would move beyond the objectives of the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy. It would also not be homogeneous in terms of quality and quantity of evidence, and could therefore cause policy “distortion” if not carefully checked and managed.

Annex 1. Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Programme

1. JNCC's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Programme is funded by grant-in-aid from Defra. In recent years income from Defra and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), to support specific projects, has significantly increased the total budget. Programme budgets (excluding salaries) since 2006/07 are shown below.

Year	All figures (£k)		
	GIA	Income	Total
2006/07	30	0	30
2007/08	22	39	61
2008/09	42	104	146
2009/10	57	301	358
2010/11	141	38	179
2011/12	222	134	356
2012/13	117	529	646
2013/14	75	15	90

2. The Programme has three full-time staff. A Programme Leader and Senior Officer are based in Peterborough. There is also a Falklands-based staff member who works to support the UK Government and South Atlantic Territories in respect of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), and acts as a focal point for JNCC work in the region.
3. JNCC's main functional link to the Territories and Dependencies is through a Co-ordinating Group established in January 2009. Representation is from Overseas Territory and Crown Dependency governments. The Group typically holds at least two virtual meetings a year (through telephone, Skype etc) and JNCC aims to host face-to-face meetings every two years. JNCC is able to use the meetings to regularly update its work programme to meet the changing needs of the Territories and Dependencies.
4. JNCC has close working links with Defra and FCO. Defra chairs the interdepartmental Overseas Territories Biodiversity Group which oversees implementation of the UK Government's Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy. JNCC provides the secretariat role for this group.
5. Links to the FCO are primarily through JNCC's support for the Department's environmental mainstreaming work, including implementing mainstreaming projects in individual Territories and supporting follow-up activities. These projects are a key part of the FCO's strategy to encourage the Territories to identify long-term environmental priorities including biodiversity but also in terms of renewable energy, water resource and waste management strategies. Three of these projects have been completed to date (Falklands, Anguilla and British Virgin Islands) and two are planned for 2014 (Bermuda and Turks and Caicos Islands). Reports on the completed projects are available on the JNCC website. The FCO has also funded JNCC environmental economics projects in the Caribbean and work to support development of a lionfish response strategy in the Caribbean Overseas Territories.