

## OTBG 20 Meeting Note

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20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Overseas Territories Biodiversity Group  
Held in Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London  
29 June 2017: 14:00 – 16:30

**Organisations represented:** Defra, FCO, UKOTA, BEIS, DExEU, MoD, JNCC, Cefas, RBG Kew, Natural History Museum

#### 1. Introductions, apologies and review of actions from previous meeting

#### 2. Review of the role and implementation of the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy – Defra

The 2009 UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy (OTBS) was last updated in 2014, taking the form of a progress report on the implementation of the original strategy.

The Group considered how the OTBS is and could be used by HMG and the OTs and the appropriate next steps for the strategy.

The Group noted that:

- In the past, the OTBS has predominantly been used as a tool internal to HMG in cross-Government coordination, engaging ministers, and justifying the allocation of resources to activity in the OTs within individual Departments or agencies.
- EU Exit and the revision of the international biodiversity framework post-2020 will continue to re-shape priorities. As the implications of EU Exit need to be understood and clarity on forward commitments and funding is required for any new strategy, a full revision of the OTBS before 2019 would be unrealistic.
- Mapping the OTBS onto the Sustainable Development Goals or Aichi Targets or employing a natural capital approach could bring additional benefits.
- There has been some confusion regarding the relationship between the OTBS and the Environment Charters. HMG considers the OTBS to have superseded the Charters, which are now more than 15 years old and not legally binding.
- There is appetite for an OTBS refresh, but further work is required to consider the options and timing.

#### 3. Manifesto commitments relating to OT environment issues - FCO

The Government's manifesto gives a strong commitment to the environment and the OTs. The creation of a Blue Belt of marine protection around the OTs features in the manifesto. This issue remains a high priority for HMG for the UKOTs and FCO will continue to work closely with the OTs on implementing the Blue Belt. The Group noted that some OTs prefer the terminology 'marine conservation areas'.

#### 4. Options for responding to the 2015 Gibraltar 'Sustaining Partnerships' recommendations and for engaging with the UK OT/CD Environment Ministers' Council – Defra

HMG had formally received a set of recommendations from the 2015 Gibraltar 'Sustaining Partnerships' conference in 2016. More recently, HMG received a further statement from an OT & CD Environment Ministers' Council meeting held in Alderney in April 2017. HMG ministers were invited to Alderney but HMG was not represented due to purdah. The Alderney Statement was shared with invited ministers alongside a letter by representatives of Alderney and Gibraltar. Coordinated holding responses were sent by FCO, DFID and Defra.

The Group noted that:

- The breadth of the support for the recommendations is caveated in the conference report in that not all OT participants signed up to the Gibraltar recommendations. Territory attendance at meetings of the OT & CD Environment Ministers' Council varies.

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- UKOTA intends to discuss the Alderney Statement at their next meeting.

A joint HMG statement on environmental support for the OTs will be drafted in in close engagement with the OTs.

### 5. Update on Environmental Audit Committee activity – FCO

The Environmental Audit Committee's (EAC) report on the 'Marine Protected Areas Revisited' enquiry will be published shortly. The EAC noted that the level of ambition in the UKOTs exceeded that of the UK. Four relevant recommendations were put forward: to raise awareness of MPAs as national parks of the sea; consult more effectively and transparently with governments and local communities in the OTs; support effective OT surveillance and monitoring of marine areas and enable funding for the OTs; and support Gibraltar MPAs post EU exit. FCO are leading on the UKOT-relevant responses.

### 6. Update on HMG biodiversity projects in the OTs –FCO, Defra, JNCC, Cefas, MoD

#### a) CSSF

Funding has been secured through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund OT Programme to support the UK OT Blue Belt programme, led by FCO and Defra, and the Environmental Resilience programme, led by Defra.

The **Blue Belt programme** will support the scientific assessment, implementation, management, monitoring and surveillance of the existing and developing large-scale MPAs around the UKOTs by facilitating access to technical expertise, practical surveillance and technology solutions.

- 2016 UKOT commitments include:
  - A full no-take MPA around Pitcairn, established in 2016;
  - A sustainable use MPA declared by St Helena in 2016;
  - Ascension Island Government agreed an evidence-based, no-take MPA covering at least half of its maritime zone by 2019; and
  - Tristan da Cunha is developing a regime for protecting the waters across its maritime zone. A workshop will be hosted in London on 27 July to inform decisions for a conservation area in Tristan.
- The programme is being delivered by the Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

The **Environmental Resilience programme** provides close to £4.8m 2016-2020 for:

- 'Tackling Invasive Species in the OTs', a project delivered by the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat to support all OTs in developing comprehensive biosecurity by providing them with access to UK Government expertise on horizon scanning, pathway management, pest identification, and the development of biosecurity legislation. A gap analysis of biosecurity capability and practices in all OTs has been completed.
- The Gough Island Restoration project led by the RSPB, aims to restore seabird habitats on Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha, by eradicating invasive mice.
- 'Natural Capital in the Caribbean and South Atlantic Overseas Territories: valuation, vulnerability and monitoring change', a set of projects running for 30-month across 8 OTs, led by JNCC. The projects build upon past projects to demonstrate the economic value of the environment. The aim is to develop a common level of understanding across OTs and develop a framework for the future, while building local capability that will enable OTs to undertake further analysis themselves. Projects will deliver economic assessments for priority ecosystem goods and services, provide monetary and cultural value maps and develop metrics and indicators for the future. Training is being carried out to develop capacity. Territory to Territory partnerships are being developed to share experience and reduce dependence on the UK

The Group noted that the CSSF is not an open bidding or application process like e.g. Darwin Plus. CSSF funding is for large-scale projects which deliver against NSC priorities, rather than for individual small-scale projects.

#### b) JNCC OT & CD Programme

JNCC also provide ad hoc support to the OTs and support information sharing with and among OTs. JNCC host quarterly cross-OT Training and Research Steering Group meetings, with information sharing on a more regular basis. These meetings were reduced during 2015-16 but reconvened in late 2016, the circulation of timely information continued. Themes for meetings are agreed by the group in advance for example, data

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management strategy, i.e. how OTs can manage, store and analyse the vast amounts of data generated by project work. This now also links into CSSF projects.

### c) Other activities

Cefas advised that:

- The **Commonwealth Marine Economies programme**, which aims to help Commonwealth Small Island Developing States (SIDS) within the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, has some overlaps with CSSF work in the OTs. The programme is funding Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States workshops.
- FCO and the Cabinet Office are working in Commonwealth countries throughout the Caribbean (neighbouring OT countries) to support sustainable fisheries management, e.g. lobster fisheries.
- Cefas is working on capacity building, collecting data for the future management of MPAs, and the development of laboratory facilities in St Helena; and a Darwin Plus project in Anguilla, BVI and TCI, in partnership with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.
- MMO are using satellite imagery and planes to track illegal fishing and helping implement management regimes for the OTs to take forward themselves.

The MOD has a small Conservation Stewardship Fund for OTs. This fund aims to deliver conservation gains on OT MOD sites. The bidding process is internal to MOD. Over the last three years, most of this funding has supported the removal of invasive Acacia trees and efforts to reduce illegal bird trapping on the Cyprus SBAs.

The Group noted that while the OTs welcome HMG funding, there is a perception that HMG support can be disjointed, particularly in relation to marine work being undertaken by various UK organisations. FCO and Defra highlighted recent efforts to increase dialogue and create better links between the different components of the CSSF OT Programme.

### 7. Funding for biodiversity activities in the OTs –Defra

#### a) Darwin Plus

Following the creation of the Darwin Plus fund in 2012, there have been 5 Darwin Plus rounds. 70 projects have received funding amounting to £10.9m. In Round 5, 16 projects were funded, including one fellowship, with total funding amounting to £3.5m. The 6<sup>th</sup> round of Darwin Plus will be launched in due course.

The Group noted that some OTs feel that they are not adequately consulted on the Darwin Plus priorities; this could help to increase engagement. Moreover, the application process is seen by some as bureaucratic and complex and many of the OTs do not have the resources to apply. JNCC are currently writing 2 webinars with support from Defra and LTS. One on Darwin Plus data clause requirements and the second 'from project concept to application'. Dates for these webinars will be agreed shortly.

### 8. AoB

#### MEA calendar – Defra

Defra is producing a calendar to provide an overview of key meetings relating to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) over the next few years, which will be shared with OTs and Devolved Administrations.

Defra will also continue to share meeting agendas and draft decisions with the OTs.

#### Kyoto Protocol - BEIS

BEIS are working to determine which OTs and CDs the second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol will extend to; BEIS has been advised that it will not be possible to extend the Protocol to OTs who did not take part in the first commitment period at this stage. BEIS will subsequently also consider the geographical scope of the Paris Agreement, and will engage with OTs as widely as possible ahead of the COP in 2018, at which point it is expected that countries individual commitments will be better understood.

#### Engagement on EU Exit - Defra

Work is on-going in Defra to consider the implications of EU Exit in discussion with the non-European OTs. Priority areas include: trade, fisheries and agriculture; the key concern raised in the area of biodiversity is access to EU funds such as BEST and EDF.