

10th OTBG Meeting

**Meeting of the Overseas Territories Biodiversity Group
Held at Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR**

Tuesday 23 July 2013 11:00 am – 1.00pm

Attendees:

Nicola Clarke, Defra
Colin Clubbe, Kew
Sally Cunningham, Defra
Jeremy Eppel, Defra
Siôn Griffiths, FCO
Clare Hamilton, Defra (Chair)
Stacey Hughes, Defra
Razi Latif, DFID
Helen Stevens, FCO
Tony Weighell, JNCC
Kedell Worboys, UKOTA

Main business

1. Introductions to new OTBG members

Clare Hamilton introduced herself as Eric Blencowe's successor, Head of Defra's International Biodiversity Policy Unit. Razi Latif has recently taken up post as Christine Roehrer's successor at DFID. Helen Stevens now works as the Sustainable Fisheries Manager in the Polar Regions Department at FCO. Tony Weighell reported that Tara Pelembe, who is currently on secondment to the St Helena Government, will return to JNCC at the end of October.

2. EAC update (FCO/Defra)

Clare Hamilton and Siôn Griffiths reported on the Environmental Audit Committee hearing that took place on 9 July 2013. Evidence was given by Defra Environment Minister Richard Benyon and FCO Minister for the Overseas Territories, Mark Simmonds, with support from Dr Peter Hayes FCO Director, Jeremy Eppel, Defra Deputy Director and Ian McKendry, DFID Deputy Director.

3. JNCC Triennial Review - proposed response (JNCC) (please see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/triennial-review-of-the-joint-nature-conservation-committee-jncc>)

Tony Weighell provided a summary of the conclusions of JNCC's Triennial Review. One of the recommendations was that JNCC should build on its partnership working with stakeholders and, in particular, improve its engagement with NGOs, including in the OTs. As part of its response to the Triennial Review, JNCC intends to produce a bi-annual summary of activities, which will be made available to OTs and NGOs and to hold biannual NGO meetings. The first of these will be held in November.

As part of the Review, and in response to UK NGO comments, JNCC is carrying out an analysis of its OT funding mechanisms in late 2013. The objective of the review is to ensure that the mechanisms through which funding is made available to the OTs are sufficiently transparent.

4. OT Biodiversity Strategy - outcome of the Kew consultation & possible responses (Defra/FCO/JNCC)

Tony Weighell gave an update on the meeting that took place at Kew on 14 March to review progress on the implementation of the UK OTs Biodiversity Strategy. The report of the meeting had yet to be finalised and an email has been sent to participants inviting amendments to the draft until 16 August.

The OTBG discussed the various activities that are being undertaken to implement the strategy and agreed that more needs to be done to raise awareness of these.

5. Darwin Plus update (Defra/FCO)

Sally Cunningham gave some background on why Darwin Plus had been set up for new members of OTBG and confirmed that under Round 19 of the Darwin Initiative 18 projects in the UK OTs (4 main round and 14 Darwin Plus) had been granted Darwin funds totalling £2.6m. Round 20 is now underway and Darwin Plus applicants have until 23 September to submit proposals. It is hoped that decisions on the successful projects will be announced in December to give the project teams at least three months lead-in time before the projects start in April 2014.

The Group discussed the need for wider expertise (beyond biodiversity) on the Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG) to assess potential project applications on wider climate and environmental issues. The Group was asked to consider any potential nominations and let Sally know.

Action point: Sally to e-mail DPAG members to ask them for possible nominations. OTBG members to consider people who may be suitable and let Sally know.

6. Life Plus update (Defra)

Clare Hamilton explained that negotiations on the LIFE Plus Regulation have now concluded. The UK was successful in securing explicit funding for OTs under programme despite considerable resistance from the European Commission and other EU Member States.

Under the Commission's original proposals, OTs were not included but they are now written into the main text of the Regulation. Despite extensive lobbying by HMG, working in conjunction with UKOTA, MEPs and NGOs, we were unable to gain sufficient support to reduce the conditionality placed on this access. This means that it could be challenging for OTs to fulfil the requirements for funding. The OTBG agreed that we should encourage stakeholders, working with the OTs, to seek funding for projects, possibly in conjunction with NL and FR OTs on projects of common interest.

HMG intends to hold the Commission to its promise of providing complementary support for OTs through development funding. Clare explained that, although we have yet to see the full details, we understand that this will be via the new Global Public Goods and Challenge fund of the Development Cooperation Instrument.

Whilst discussing Commission engagement with the OTs, Kedell Worboys mentioned a forthcoming meeting of the Partnership Working Party on Environment (PWP3) in Brussels in September. These meetings between the Commission, Overseas Countries and Territories of the EU (OCTs) and associated Member States facilitate discussion on environmental and climate change issues.

Action point: Kedell Worboys to circulate to the group information about the next PWP3 meeting.

7. Lionfish response strategy - brief report and forward look (JNCC)

Tony Weighell gave an update on efforts to co-ordinate action across relevant OTs to tackle the problem of invasive lionfish following workshops held in Anguilla in February this year and the Cayman Islands in early July.

8. Aichi targets OT consultation (JNCC)

Tony Weighell reported on a recently completed survey of OT attitudes to the Aichi targets. The objective of the review is to establish the ways and means whereby relevant Aichi targets can provide a common approach to promoting biodiversity conservation in the OTs and assist in establishing common objectives.

Action point: Tony Weighell to circulate the report to the OTBG, once available.

9. Date of next meeting and proposed business

The next meeting will be held during w/c 21 October 2013. Agenda items will include the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy.

10. AOB

Clare Hamilton brought to the attention of the OTBG the European Commission's draft tender ToRs re OCT environmental profiles; and the draft letter addressed to Richard Benyon that has been provided by RSPB to OTs.