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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

PRIORITIES FOR JNCC'S OVERSEAS TERRITORIES PROGRAMME

Paper by Tara Pelembe and Wyn Jones

1. Background

- 1.1 JNCC has established an Overseas Territories programme to deliver the strategic objective to *'promote measures that protect and enhance biological and geological diversity in the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and share good conservation practice worldwide'*.
- 1.2 In June 2006, the Joint Committee discussed JNCC's role in supporting nature conservation in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (paper JNCC 06 D07), and endorsed broad recommendations for future work..
- 1.3 Since 2006, considerable progress has been made in taking forward these recommendations, facilitated by the appointment of an Overseas Territories officer, Tara Pelembe. Funding for the programme is provided by JNCC's financial settlement, supplemented by support for specific projects from the DFID-FCO Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). However, the total budget for the programme remains modest (£230k in 2007/08).

2. Nature conservation priorities in the Overseas Territories

- 2.1 In March 2007, the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity (IDMGB) asked JNCC to review strategic priorities for nature conservation in the Overseas Territories. This exercise was undertaken in consultation with Overseas Territory governments.
- 2.2 The main conclusions from the review were:
 - i. the drivers of biodiversity loss for which most priority issues were identified were invasive alien species and habitat transformation (often associated with tourism development);
 - ii. the main activities required to address these drivers of loss were survey and monitoring (to inform decision-making), eradicating/controlling invasive species, and increasing the human and financial resources available for nature conservation work;
 - iii. the resources currently available for biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories are insufficient to meet the priorities identified¹;

¹ RSPB have also conducted an exercise to cost biodiversity priorities in the UK Overseas Territories and reached a similar conclusion (http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/ukotfinancingcons_tcm9-158352.pdf)

- iv. the importance of some issues has probably been under-played by the Territories, e.g. climate change and economic valuation of ecosystem services were mentioned by only a few respondents.
- 2.3 The report has been considered by officials from Defra, DFID and FCO but has not yet been submitted to ministers.
- 2.4 In a separate exercise, the Territories were consulted by JNCC on their biodiversity research priorities. This was undertaken at the request of the Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee of the Global Environmental Change Committee. Not surprisingly, the results mirrored the conclusions of the IDMGB report. The review is providing a useful list of potential Overseas Territories research projects for the UK academic community.
- 2.5 Neither of the priority identification exercises covered the three UK Crown Dependencies, but it is intended to address this gap in due course. The Crown Dependencies have a different status to the Overseas Territories (e.g. they are not eligible for OTEP funding and the lead UK Government department is the Ministry of Justice rather than FCO) and yet are not fully covered by UK biodiversity initiatives. However, JNCC is seeking to include them in our work plans at every opportunity.
- 2.6 The review of strategic priorities for nature conservation in the Overseas Territories has informed the identification of JNCC's own priorities and the preparation of a costed work plan for the next three years. This is summarised in the draft corporate plan for 2008-11, and the main strands of work are described in more detail in sections 3-8 of this paper.

3. Communications and networking

- 3.1 JNCC staff have close working relationships with officials in Defra, FCO and DFID, and it is hoped that the profile of Overseas Territory issues can be raised at ministerial level through the chairman.
- 3.2 JNCC has established a network of contacts within the Overseas Territory and Crown Dependency governments and with their UK representatives, where they exist. Regional groups have been set up and regular tele-conferences have been arranged with the Caribbean and South Atlantic Overseas Territories regions and the Crown Dependencies, to discuss issues, exchange views and capture experiences. In addition, contact has recently been established with Pitcairn Island. In March 2008, the Isle of Man government will host a workshop for Crown Dependency government officials; representatives from Gibraltar and the Cyprus sovereign base areas Overseas Territories have also been invited.
- 3.3 Good relationships have been established with other key UK players, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, the Ministry of Defence, and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum.

- 3.4 Information concerning nature conservation in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies has been added to the JNCC website and will continue to be updated as initiatives progress. A twice-yearly newsletter is planned, and a leaflet will be produced describing JNCC's role in the Territories and Dependencies.
- 3.5 As a contribution to increasing the capacity of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies for work on nature conservation, JNCC intends to encourage the sharing of skills and experiences. Training in workshop facilitation is proposed for 2008.
- 3.6 A conference, *Islands and the European Union: strategies in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss*, will be held under the auspices of the EU French presidency on Reunion in July 2008. This will provide excellent opportunities for JNCC to establish contacts with individuals and organisations working in the EU's Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories.

4. Multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs)

- 4.1 JNCC continues to provide support and advice to UK Government departments and Overseas Territory governments on the interpretation and implementation of MEAs. A training event is proposed in the Caribbean this year on the implementation of the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species. Advice on the implementation of Environment Charters in the Overseas Territories has also been provided.
- 4.2 The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) is of particular importance for the south Atlantic territories because of their globally significant populations of these birds. JNCC has recently recruited a support post (with financial support from DFID, Defra and the Falklands Island government) to co-ordinate activities in support of ACAP. The post will be based on the Falkland Islands.

5. Sustainable development

- 5.1 In 2007, JNCC successfully led an OTEP-funded project to produce a toolkit for the Overseas Territories on the economic valuation of ecosystem services. The toolkit has now been published (<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4065>). It has generated considerable interest, and has been widely disseminated, not only within the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies but also globally. In December 2007, it was presented to the UK Overseas Territories Consultative Council, which is attended by the Territory Chief Ministers. The toolkit was the core document for a training workshop on Cayman Island in autumn 2007, and there have been requests for other follow-up workshops. A French translation of the toolkit is being considered for the Reunion conference in July 2008.
- 5.2 JNCC is currently leading an OTEP-funded project to produce outreach materials intended to raise awareness of climate change in the Overseas

Territories. The project will be completed by April, after which a dissemination strategy, including workshops, will be undertaken. This report may be presented at the Reunion conference. JNCC has also supported DFID by providing advice to the project “Mainstreaming Adaptation to Climate Change in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories”.

- 5.3 At the invitation of the Turks and Caicos Islands Department of Environment and Coastal Resources, JNCC assisted in a workshop on ecosystem mapping in the Caribbean in 2007. The recommendations from the workshop have been consolidated into a project application for OTEP funding. If successful, JNCC will play a core advisory role in the project implementation.
- 5.4 In June 2007, JNCC hosted a workshop on invasive species with participants from UK and Overseas Territory governments, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, NGOs and academics. One of the key issues is the availability of information on invasive species affecting, or likely to affect, the Overseas Territories. Information from the audit of invasive alien species in the Territories commissioned by JNCC is being made available through JNCC’s website, and we are exploring the possibility of sharing data with the Global Invasive Species database.

6. Research

- 6.1 The review of biodiversity research priorities in the Overseas Territories has generated a lot of interest, and JNCC has already brokered a number of potential research partnerships. It is planned to publish a prospectus of the Territories’ research requirements on the JNCC website. JNCC is also drafting a standard for best practice for projects in the Territories, including research protocols. It is hoped that this initiative can be extended to the Crown Dependencies.

7. Geodiversity

- 7.1 Although geodiversity has not been identified as a priority issue by any of the Overseas Territories or Crown Dependencies, many of them are likely to have features of considerable significance. Following consultation with the Territories JNCC will consider undertaking a review of Earth heritage interests.

8. Funding

- 8.1 The RSPB and JNCC reviews of nature conservation priorities in the Overseas Territories have confirmed that additional funds are required to address the identified needs. Government funding has been secured for a proposal to create a post based in JNCC to identify potential funding sources and to aid project applications.