



## **Consultation on Implementing the Overseas Territories Strategy**

### **Response from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum**

i) Note: The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (hereinafter UKOTCF or "the Forum") was created in 1987 and formally constituted as a charitable company in 1996. The Forum brings together, as its Members and Associates, conservation and science bodies in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) & Crown Dependencies (CDs), supporting ones in Great Britain & Northern Ireland (GB) and elsewhere; and a wider network of specialist volunteers. It advances and promotes the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystem services, and their contribution, together with other aspects of natural and human heritage, to the well-being and sustainability of the UK's Overseas Territories.

ii) This document uses the questions asked by HMG as its main sub-headings.

#### **Summary**

iii) UKOTCF has long been committed to working closely with government departments in the UK and in the UK's Overseas Territories (and in the Crown Dependencies). We welcome this opportunity to contribute to a fresh look at how best to protect and improve the well-being of these far-flung parts of the British family. Key points we believe should be included in the proposed White Paper are:

a) UKOTCF would wish to see in the forthcoming White Paper specific reference to environment and biodiversity conservation, given the general recognition of the global and local importance of the rich but vulnerable biodiversity of the UKOTs, and its relationships to the livelihoods and well-being of the UK citizens (and visitors) that reside in the UKOTs.

b) Clarification of the relationships between the HMG bodies with apparently overlapping responsibilities would be welcome.

c) We recommend that HMG both restore OTEP as a small-projects fund to respond to applications for environmental work in the UKOTs, as committed by the Environment Charters, and institute a larger fund for larger – and often urgent – conservation needs.

d) We recommend that the White Paper address the issue of profitable engagement with civil society and that, for example, FCO explore with UKOTCF reconvening the bi-annual joint meetings between HMG bodies and NGOs.

e) Given the FCO's current oversight and lead on the proposed White Paper, we recommend that the White Paper clarifies strategic level planning and budgeting across HMG departments and agencies with respect to the UKOTs.

f) Support from Britain is essential and the FCO thus has a dual role both in providing support and in making sure that appropriate support is provided by other government departments and by NGOs.

g) We recommend that HMG work with UKOTCF, its members and other NGOs, together with UKOT governments, towards a common view of biodiversity and other environmental targets. This will help pool resources and attract them from other funders, both charities and individuals.

h) We recommend that JNCC, together with representatives of relevant departments, and representatives of the NGOs, is tasked with preparing an action plan for biodiversity conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. This would not only progress a strategy lacking clear objectives and activities, but also generate wider and more collaborative working practices which should spread into other policy areas. We would wish to see the funding specifically allocated to JNCC, and indeed all parts of government, to be used most effectively for environmental protection and management in the UKOTs, but this would best be achieved in collaboration with the NGOs, not in isolation from them.

i) We would wish to see a strengthening of resolve on the part of the FCO (and other Departments) to ensure implementation and certainly no weakening of the commitments made under the 1999 White Paper, and reinforced by the FCO White Paper of 2006 *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities*.

j) With regard to the different Ministries leading on policy for different UKOTs and CDs (FCO, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defence), other involved departments (e.g. DFID, DEFRA), and the governing of both inhabited and uninhabited UKOTs, we recommend that HMG review the way it relates to UKOTs & CDs, drawing on recent experience in the development of the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

k) We recommend that UKOTs introduce (where lacking) and implement legal requirements for EIAs in planning matters and, in accordance with best international practice, make these easily available for reasonable time periods for examination and comment by local people and outside experts, and that, if development goes ahead, the implementation of conditions are monitored and publicly reported, and infractions being prosecuted and publicised. We further recommend that HMG takes an active interest in monitoring and advising on such matters, as well as implementing adequately its own responsibilities under international agreements.

l) Whilst welcoming the one-off contributions by HMG to the eradication of invasive species on Ascension Island and, a decade later, Henderson Island, UKOTCF recommends that substantial, regular funding be made available to meet this aspect of HMG's global responsibilities for biodiversity conservation, and that HMG support also work in the UKOTs on prevention of arrival of invasive species.

m) We recommend that HMG fulfil its commitment under the Environment Charters to support work in UKOTs on environmental education and awareness, and such activities as rainwater harvesting.

n) With regard to water and its management, and the contrast between the funding opportunities available to the UKOTs (and other Overseas Countries and Territories) compared to those available to EU Outermost Regions, FCO should consider working with DFID to (a) assess such needs within the UKOTs and (b) put considerably more effort into undertaking negotiations within the EU on changing the funding rules in favour of the UKOTs.

o) UKOTCF would wish to see specific recommendations relating to the establishment of crisis management plans by HMG and related cross-departmental teams.

p) We recommend that, on many environmental issues, departments like DFID and DEFRA deploy in support of UKOTs their own technical and social expertise, as well as national and international links

to companies and civil society organizations which will be quite unaware of needs in the UKOTs unless someone takes the initiative.

q) We recommend that HMG involves representatives of UKOTs in international discussions on MEAs and other aspects. We recommend also that the Department of Energy and Climate Change engage with the UKOTs.

r) We welcome the overall message from HMG that all HMG departments will now be expected to support UKOTs in the areas of their expertise. This will be a process that needs managing, and we call upon HMG to resource it adequately. UKOTCF, its member organizations and others have long experience in this area and could support this in a very cost-effective way, given modest support by HMG. In this context especially, we have endeavoured to maintain good working relationships with relevant departments, including FCO, DFID and DEFRA, but have found this increasingly difficult as HMG has more and more decreased its engagement with UKOTCF and other NGOs over the past five years. Engagement has now declined from a previously strong and effective level to a very weak and *ad hoc* process, and virtually always generated by those outside government. We wish to have really effective and meaningful engagement with government departments and call upon HMG to revert to its previous positive attitude and liaison practices.

s) UKOTCF considers strongly that the attitude taken by HMG's ministers and officials towards UKOTs needs to be based on recognition of the reality that they are not quasi-foreign countries, embarrassingly shackled to Great Britain so that HMG carries the can when things go wrong (as they have done over the years in several territories). The attitude should be positive: these are places whose citizens are British but with many distinctive features, so that local democracy, rather than colonial rule from Whitehall is the guiding principle. However, there also needs to be recognition that, in ways analogous to local democracy in the UK, there needs to be acceptance of common standards in such areas as the rule of law, freedom under the law, freedom of information (subject to constraints affecting privacy of personal information) on matters of public policy, responsible fiscal and environmental management, and international obligations.

t) Support for UKOTCF-organised conferences has been the principal way in which HMG has been able to meet its commitment under the Environment Charters to "promote ...sharing of experience and expertise between ... other Overseas Territories and small island states and communities which face similar environmental problems." We note also that organisation by NGOs is generally considerably more cost-effective than organisation by a government body, due partly to the deployment of large amounts of unpaid voluntary effort. Accordingly, we recommend that HMG restore its financial support for UKOTCF-organised conservation conferences.

u) We recommend the opening of bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund to applications supporting conservation and other works for the UKOTs and CDs.

v) UKOTs have advised us that they would like to see greater engagement and interaction between Britain and the UKOTs with regard to education, training, and scholarships, as well the development of exchange visits, joint teams, sharing of knowledge, skills and potential resources between Britain and the UKOTs. UKOTCF supports this, has been engaged in this sort of approach for some years, and is currently developing further a skilled volunteers programme, as resources allow, despite HMG's unwillingness so far to support it.

w) Local checks and balances need to be underwritten by a monitoring role by HMG. This should not be micromanaging, but checking that UKOTs are doing what is agreed periodically, especially in the areas of good governance and international commitments. HMG should be in a position of offering early help, if needed. This would be much less intrusive than having to intervene in a major way if failures become major.

- x) Other HMG departments need to build up close working relationships with the equivalent departments in UKOTs.
- y) Both HMG and the UKOT governments should be more ready to involve NGOs and other parts of civil society in support of good governance.
- z) We recommend that HMG engage with the European Commission to reduce the bureaucratic load on applying for, accessing and reporting on grants, especially small ones.
- aa) UKOTCF recommends that HMG give more support to NGOs and others attempting to access EU funding for UKOT conservation work.
- ab) We recommend that a greater level of creativity be adopted by DFID for environmental funding in the UKOTs, especially given the primacy of the UKOTs in DFID's responsibilities.
- ac) We recommend that HMG reviews its commitment to UKOTs in respect of EU matters and particularly its frequency and level of representation.
- ad) UKOTCF recommends that HMG either meet the needs of UKOTs as part of UK or else uses its leverage as a funding body to modify the rules of operation of the international bodies so as to include UKOTs as eligible. Crown Dependencies also are excluded from most funding sources.
- ae) We recommend that a specific output of the upcoming White Paper is the production and implementation of a communications strategy, with necessary funding, involving government in partnership with civil society, both in the metropolitan UK and in the UKOTs.

## **Detail**

### **Introductory**

1. This submission will concentrate on the environment and its intimate links to good governance. The future well-being of the territories will be bright if HMG recognises: the global significance of biodiversity in the UKOTs and its local economic importance; and that good environmental management demands the shared resources of many parts of governments and of civil society - in the UK and in the territories.

### **Question 1. Challenges**

- **What are the main challenges facing your Territory/the Territories?**

#### **A) UK Government institutional arrangements and approaches**

2. Currently HMG's "three practical policy goals" in respect of the UKOTs are:

- To strengthen the engagement and interaction between the United Kingdom and the Territories;
- To work with the Territories to strengthen good governance arrangements, public financial management and economic planning where this is necessary; and
- To improve the quality and range of support available to the Territories.