

## Meeting to review progress on implementation of the United Kingdom Government's "Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy", March 2013

### Introduction to documents provided by UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

UKOTCF) has, since 1987, brought together, as its Members and Associates, conservation and science bodies in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs), supporting ones in Great Britain & Northern Ireland (GB) and elsewhere; and a wider network of specialist volunteers.

In the invitation to this meeting, JNCC (on behalf of DEFRA) invited participant organisations to make a written submission in advance, addressing at the least the following specific issues:

- i. the scope and purpose of the Strategy;
- ii. priorities for future action to support biodiversity in the OTs;
- iii. issues not adequately addressed by the Strategy, if any, and options for remedial action.

UKOTCF has addressed these points in earlier documents and workshops. Representatives of UK Government, JNCC, UKOT Governments and NGOs, UK NGOs and others have attended various of these workshops and contributed to documents.

Although UKOTCF was not consulted during the drafting of UK Government's 2009 Strategy, UKOTCF responded positively to DEFRA's request to assist in its circulation by including it with an issue of *Forum News*.

Nevertheless, UKOTCF had doubts about the Strategy and expressed these to DEFRA. UKOTCF offered to arrange workshops to explore how best to move towards a more comprehensive strategy and action plan. DEFRA welcomed this, and both DEFRA and JNCC participated in them. However, they are not mentioned in the introductory papers for the current workshop (and neither JNCC nor DEFRA have followed up with the UKOTCF network since in order to build on these efforts). Accordingly, UKOTCF now attaches parts of the reports of the two workshops held in 2010 and 2011:

Annex 1: UKOTCF seminar on the UK Government's *UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy* (2009) [23 September 2010; <http://www.ukotcf.org/pdf/fNews/BiodivWorkshop1009.pdf>]

Annex 2: Workshop on UK objectives for biodiversity conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, held on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2011, at the Linnean Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London [full proceedings at <http://www.ukotcf.org/pdf/fNews/BiodivWorkshop1106.pdf>]

These address all three points in the invitation to the current meeting, as does UKOTCF's submission to FCO prior to the drafting of the 2012 White Paper on UK Overseas Territories. Part of this is attached as:

Annex 3: Consultation on Implementing the Overseas Territories Strategy: Response from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum [full version at <http://www.ukotcf.org/pdf/Consultations/submission.pdf>]

Following publication of UK Government's White Paper, UKOTCF held a further workshop at which a wide range of parties discussed how this could be built upon. The summary of the proceedings of this are at:

Annex 4: Environmental conservation and UK Government's June 2012 White Paper *The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability (Cm 8374)*: Proceedings of a workshop on 2nd October 2012 at Gibraltar House, the Strand, London, organised by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum [full version at <http://www.ukotcf.org/pdf/Consultations/Workshop2012Proceedings06b.pdf>]

Some of the main points which arose from the widely based discussions reported in these documents were:

1) The need to engage NGO partners, as well as governmental ones, if conservation measures are to be successful. The current meeting represents a welcome, but limited, move back in this direction. The UKOTCF network has sought to maintain good working relationships with all relevant departments, but has found this increasingly difficult as HMG has progressively cut back its engagement with the UKOTCF network over the past five years. We urge HMG to revert to its previous positive attitude and liaison practices. Several UKOT bodies (both NGO and governmental) have called for the re-instatement of UK Government support for UKOTCF-organised conferences, and also resumption of biannual meetings between UK Government bodies and the UKOTCF network.

2) The need for a strategy to have clear objectives, the degree of achievement of which can be assessed. The UK National Security Strategy notes helpfully "A national security strategy, like any strategy, must be a combination of ends (what we are seeking to achieve), ways (the ways by which we seek to achieve those ends) and means (the resources we can devote to achieving the ends). A strategy must reflect the context in which it is developed, the particular strengths and skills that we can bring to bear (our areas of comparative advantage); be clear, but also flexible, to take account of uncertainty and change. It must also take account of the activities of others: the positive contributions of allies and partners and of the private sector; and the negative effect of adversaries seeking to thwart our objectives. Therefore a strategy must also be based on creative insight into how best to achieve our own objectives and prevent adversaries from achieving theirs. It must balance the ends, ways and means. The ways and means by which we seek to achieve our objectives must be appropriate and sufficient and the objectives must also be realistic in light of the means available".

3) The need to involve other appropriate UK Government Departments, not just FCO, DFID & DEFRA. This applies also within the FCO, where three different Ministers have responsibility for different UKOTs (one for UKOTs in general; one for Gibraltar; and one for the Falkland Islands). The MoD has a very specific role with respect to the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas and to a great extent in Gibraltar. The strategic level planning and budgeting across HMG departments and agencies with respect to the UKOTs needs clarifying. In particular the funding element from DFID needs to be clarified given that UKOTs should have the first call on DFID funds, but DFID is looking to meet the 0.7% of ODA target and suggestions have now been made by the Prime Minister that some DFID funds should now be used for subsidising defence expenditure. UKOTCF welcomes the overall message from HMG that all HMG departments will now be expected to support UKOTs in their areas of expertise. This will be a process that needs managing. UKOTCF, its member organizations and others have long experience and could support this process in a very cost-effective way, given modest support by HMG.

4) Whilst there is no suggestion that UK bodies impose a strategy on individual UKOTs, there is a need for UK bodies to have strategies themselves if they are to be effective in supporting UKOT conservation – and there are obvious benefits in these strategies being mutually informed.

5) As noted at UKOTCF's 2011 workshop, it is highly desirable that strategies take account of the Environment Charters, UKOT strategies for their implementation incorporating local need, and international commitments, including the Aichi Targets, agreed in 2010. At that seminar, DEFRA felt that the Aichi Targets are inappropriate for UKOTs, and UKOTCF welcomes that DEFRA has now changed view on this point.

6) The need for lead UK Government Departments to champion, within Whitehall and more widely, the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Territories.

7) Whilst welcoming the re-instatement of the previous OTEP grant funding, albeit in another form, and the UKOT element of Darwin Initiative funding, several partners are concerned at the increasing remoteness of decision making from those with direct experience of UKOT conservation projects and conservation grant programme management.

8) The 2009 strategy document recognised the need for a larger fund for larger – and often urgent – conservation needs, additional to and not replacing the already overstretched small project fund (and it is not fully clear that the new Darwin+ scheme adequately fulfils the small-projects need). With regard to larger projects, there is still an unfulfilled need, for *e.g.*:

- building capacity in UKOT bodies;
- more work on eradication of invasive species, consistent with HMG's global responsibilities for biodiversity conservation, and HMG support for work in the UKOTs on prevention of arrival of invasive species; and
- supporting work in UKOTs on environmental education and awareness, and such activities as rainwater harvesting.

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 also 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.

9) The UKOTCF network would like 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*.

10) The UKOTCF network recommends 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, with 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.

11) The UKOTCF network would wish to see the establishment of crisis management plans by HMG and related cross-departmental teams, building on experience from avoidable and minimizable disasters such as the grounding of two internationally travelling vessels in recent years at Tristan da Cunha.

12) The UKOTCF network considers strongly that the attitude taken by HMG's ministers and officials towards UKOTs needs to be based on recognition that they are not quasi-foreign entities, 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. As with 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.

13) The UKOTCF network recommends 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, and changes to application procedures to remove further blockages. The Dutch national Postcode Lottery provides many useful lessons in supporting conservation in their overseas territories.

14) UKOTs have advised that they would like to see greater engagement and interaction between Britain and the UKOTs on 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 a skilled volunteers programme, as resources allow, despite HMG's unwillingness so far to support it.

15) Local checks and balances need to be monitored by HMG. This should not be micromanagement, but to check that UKOTs are doing what is agreed periodically, especially in the areas of good governance and international commitments. HMG should offer early help, if needed. This would be much less intrusive than having to intervene later on a larger scale.

16) Both HMG and the UKOT governments should be more ready to involve NGOs and other parts of civil society in support of good governance.

17) UKOTCF recommends that HMG reviews its commitment to UKOTs in respect of EU matters and particularly its frequency and level of representation to EU institutions. UKOTCF recommends also that HMG engage with the European Commission to reduce the bureaucratic load on applying for, accessing and reporting on grants, especially small ones.

18) UKOTCF recommends that HMG either meet the needs of UKOTs as part of the 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.

19) UKOTCF recommends that UK Government produces and implements a communications strategy, with necessary funding, involving government in partnership with civil society, both in the metropolitan UK and in the UKOTs. This needs also to address the general attitude in British institutions. For example: British news media, when (rarely) reporting items in UKOTs, usually do not mention that these are British territories; in contrast, the French TV weather channel reports French territory weather after dealing with metropolitan France, and the Dutch Caribbean Islands feature on the Dutch Tourism website. In some cases British ministers have failed to mention that the beneficiaries of conservation grants being announced were UKOTs!