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DAY 1: Tuesday 29 June 1999

Registration at London Zoo Meetings Building

Coffee

Introduction by

Conference Chairman Nick Ross

Curtain raiser:

Poems celebrating biodiversity: Mark O'Connor

Speech by Mr Geoff Hoon MP (FCO Minister responsible for environmental issues) to open conference

Welcoming response from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski)

Questions to Mr Hoon

Introducing the Overseas Territories

British Virgin Islands

Ms Sheila Brown (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources & Labour, BVI)
Mr Joseph Smith Abbott (Director, BVI National Parks Trust)

Falkland Islands

Ms Becky Ingham (Falklands Conservation)

Anguilla

Ms Avon Carty (Vice-President, Anguilla National Trust)

Coffee break

St Helena

Ms Isabel Peters

Turks & Caicos Islands

Mr Terry Smith (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, TCI)
Ms Ethlyn Gibbs Williams (Executive Director, Turks & Caicos National Trust)

Gibraltar

Cayman Islands

Mr Fred Burton (Environmental Programs Director, National Trust for the Cayman Islands)
Mr Tim Austin (Acting Director, Department of Environment, Caymans)

Bermuda

Mr Brian Rowlinson (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of the Environment, Bermuda)

Montserrat

Gerard Gray (Chief Forestry Officer, Montserrat)
Sarita Francis (President, Montserrat National Trust)

Commercialising Biodiversity Assets (Talk)

Professor Ian Swingland (Durrell Institute for Conservation Ecology)

Response

from Mr Fred Burton (National Trust for the Cayman Islands)

Comments/questions

from the floor.

Fork Lunch in Raffles Suite

PANEL DISCUSSION: Environmental Charter and Legal Issues.

Mr David Taylor (Chairman UKOTCF South Atlantic Working Group)
Ms Sheila Brown (Permanent Secretary BVI Ministry of Natural Resources & Labour)
Mr John Ashton (Head of Environment, Science & Energy Dept, FCO)
Professor Patricia Birnie

Questions

SIMULTANEOUS WORKING GROUPS

A: Drawing Up an Environmental Charter. Co-ordinating team led by

Penny Law (UKOTCF and British Association of Nature Conservationists), supported by:
Nigel Wenban-Smith (Chairman, Friends of the Chagos and UKOTCF British Indian Ocean Territory Working Group)
Ann Brown (Falklands Conservation)
Bruce Potter (Island Resources Foundation)

B: Conducting Environmental Impact Assessments. Co-ordinating team led by

Dr Jo Treweek, supported by:
Jim Stevenson (RSPB and UKOTCF)

Questions and Discussion

Session ends

Reception with finger food in FCO

(hosted by Mr Geoff Hoon MP)



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DAY 2: Wednesday 30 June 1999

Resume in Lecture Theatre

- **Short poetry readings** by Mark O'Connor

- **Report back from working groups A** (by Penny Law) **& B** (by Jim Stevenson)

PANEL DISCUSSION: FUNDING

Panellists representing:

FCO (Mr Iain Orr)
DETR (Ms Valerie Richardson)
DFID (Mr Michael Ellis)
Funding NGOs (Sally Nicholson, WWF-UK & Forum Vice-Chairman)

SIMULTANEOUS WORKING GROUPS

C: Legal issues (including CITES and CBD)

Co-ordinating team led by:

Prof Patricia Birnie, supported by
Gerard Gray (Government of Montserrat)
Julian Claxton, DETR (on CITES)
Sara Oldfield (Fauna & Flora International)
Jill Barrett
Clare Coffey (Institute of European Environmental Policy)
Tracey Andre DICE

D: Invasive Species

Co-ordinating team led by:

Dr Colin Clubbe (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew)
Dr Michael Brooke (Chairman UKOTCF Pitcairn Working Group)
Mr Fred Burton (National Trust for the Cayman Islands)

Buffet Lunch (including prearranged meetings)

Simultaneous Sessions:

- 1. Private Consultation Sessions**
- 2. Involving Local Communities Seminar** - led by Ms Diana Pound (English Nature)
- 3. Island Networking: How to Share Solutions - Illustrated Talk**
- Professor Peter Meincke (Island Web Consortium, PEI)

Report back on Working Group C - Sara Oldfield

Launch of Ascension Island Management Plan by:

Mr Roger Huxley (Ascension Island Administration)
Tony Pickup (RSPB)
Jim Stevenson (RSPB and UKOTCF)

Pitcairn - Leon Salt (Commissioner)

PANEL DISCUSSION: Environmental Education and Public Support

Panellists:

Tom Burke (BP Amoco and Rio Tinto Environmental Adviser)
Ethlyn Gibbs-Williams (Turks & Caicos National Trust)
Sarita Francis (Montserrat National Trust)
Martin Drury (National Trust)
British Antarctic Survey.

Report back on Working Group D - Dr Colin Clubbe (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew)

Capturing Ideas and Commitments for Future Work

Sara Cross (Director for Development, UKOTCF)
Bertrand Lettsome (Chief Environmental & Fisheries Officer, British Virgin Islands)

Chairman's Summing Up of Conference

Mastermind - Questionmaster Magnus Magnusson KBE

DINNER - Prince Albert Suite
END OF CONFERENCE



UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM

CAPTURING IDEAS AND MOVING FORWARD

(Final session, on 30 June 1999, of the conference *A Breath of Fresh Air*, jointly organised by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum)

The organisers of the conference recognised that in many territories lack of resources (especially finance), and limited technical and administrative capacity often made it difficult for Overseas Territories governments to give environmental issues sufficient attention. They hoped the conference would lead to improved understanding by government departments and NGOs in the UK of these problems and of how they could help; greater awareness in the Overseas Territories of the scope for sharing experiences and ideas and for developing a more comprehensive, systematic and integrated approach to environmental policies and planning; a greater realisation by all of the fragility of many key habitats in the OTs; and forging new links to help us all find better solutions more quickly, using limited official funds well.

The organisers also thought it vital that key ideas generated by the conference be captured and used as soon as possible to drive forward measures to conserve bio-diversity and promote sustainable development in the Overseas Territories. This view was self-evidently shared by a vast majority of the participants. Throughout the meeting, a small team kept track of the main issues and recommendations emerging (Iain Orr, FCO; Mike Pienkowski and Sara Cross, UKOTC Forum; and Bertrand Lettsome, Chief Conservation and Fisheries Officer, Government of the British Virgin Islands). Sara and Bertrand gave the presentation. Minor changes have been made to the summary below in order to include reports of working groups on the second day of the conference.

Preamble

The last two days have generated much talk and positive discussion. This conference has provided a unique and much needed opportunity for people who are normally remote from each other to come together and recognise, in spite of individual circumstances, just how many things they have in common and how many ideals they share.

We must turn our attention and effort to moving things forward. It is now up to all those gathered here to turn the ideas we have discussed into policies and programmes.

During the next few minutes we want to start the ball rolling, and try to set ourselves clear targets. The message coming back to us from delegates is not to lose momentum, but to start now to build on the foundations laid during the panel discussions and in workshop sessions.

To make progress on the ground in the OTs, the UK Government needs to facilitate the process wherever possible. Efforts should be made within and between Government departments to provide technical assistance and training and to assist OTs in procuring funding for these initiatives. As well as more transparent procedures in the OTs, the workings of the UK Government agencies should also become transparent to OT workers. Increased communication channels between Government departments and NGOs in the UK and in the OTs, with clear paths identified for assistance, are needed.

Environmental Charter

From the workshops, it is clear that the Territories want their ideas collated and turned into a text which can be introduced to their respective Ministers as a basis for opening discussions. There is a great deal of information from the drafts and the workshops. The UK will collate comments from the conference and e-mail an initial note on a possible model for an environmental charter to all OT participants in July, with a view to having reactions by the end of August. As was made clear by many participants, the document is not meant to have the force of law. The process should be consultative; and one owned by the OTs. But we need a model to work on, based on what has been discussed here. The FCO have said they would like this to be facilitated by a small team involving (as well as the FCO) the Forum, DFID and DETR, with electronic links to some OTs participants, so that key OT concerns are taken on board.

The suggested timetable is:

Initial model of Environment Charter circulated to participants in this meeting by end July; their comments by end August; a revised model prepared by the end of September and available to UK ministers and Overseas Territories' governments before the first meeting (in October, in London) of the Overseas Territories Consultative Council.

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)

The broad conclusions of the working group were:

- Need for common standards;
- Zoning to avoid piecemeal development ("death of a thousand cuts");
- EIAs for all developments, with exceptions where justified (e.g. scale of proposal);
- Ideally EIAs would be conducted by external or independent consultants or advisers working to a brief which took account of the views of all major stakeholders in the project;
- Need to maximise positive and minimise negative environmental outcomes and to look for appropriate planning gains;
- NGOs as statutory consultees;
- Transparency and accountability in EIAs and the planning process (recognising that, in small and relatively closed island communities, those taking decisions at both official and political levels are often related by family or interest links to some of those who will be affected by the decisions);

Key initial action point:

- Forum database/web-site to have guidance notes, useful contacts, "war stories" (case histories), bibliography.

Funding (panel discussion and many contributions from the floor)

BVI delegation to report back on scope for a ring-fenced conservation fund being used in several territories (see also more detailed report below).

Early agreement of support from new FCO fund for proposed Forum database, facilitating early progress on priority issues identified at the conference.

Funding bodies need to simplify forms and should provide funding for development of project proposals, with help-lines. Small OT departments and NGOs lack the resources to spend many person-months preparing applications which — even if successful — may generate funding for only a few person-months of work. Clear information from funding bodies on available funds with criteria and timetables should be put on the Forum's proposed database.

Several participants suggested that HMG consider whether some of the new funding promised in the White Paper ("son of GEF") would, when available, be in the right place. The fund was meant to recognise the fact that because of their status OTs were not generally eligible for GEF support. However, the focus of the GEF was environmental. It might therefore be unreasonable to ask a department with (crucially important) priorities of tackling poverty, to administer a fund whose rationale was not based on these priorities.

Many participants urged HMG to see whether major funding opportunities (Lottery, Millennium, Landfill, etc) could be open to the OTs (and preferably from the start for new funds, rather than as late add-ons). There was widespread support for looking at the possibility of an OT-wide environmental trust fund.

There was also considerable discussion of the scope for the OTs finding new ways to extract greater commercial benefits from their natural resources assets (subject to this not putting these resources under excessive pressure). Ways to build public/private partnerships and to make good management of the environment self-funding needed to be explored (with the database helping give access to good ideas and then discussing how to adapt them to the individual circumstances of different OTs).

Environmental Funds in the Overseas Territories

There was considerable formal and informal discussion at the conference of ways to fund environmental projects. Several territories have already established environmental protection funds, typically through a levy on incoming and departing tourists, or through an accommodation or similar tax. This method of fundraising was seen as a useful mechanism to link environmental sustainability with economic activity, e.g. eco-tourism. The natural environment provides a major source of economic livelihood for many people in the OTs. However, environmental taxes were not seen as a solution for all environmental problems. There was recognition that the carrying capacity of valuable habitats (e.g. coral reefs and intensity of diving activity) set limits to the growth of taxable exploitation of the environment. Further, an environmental fund should not replace existing expenditure on environmental conservation; nor should it be used to fund environmental impact assessments (which should fall to the proposer of developments) or to mitigate environmental damage by any operation (which should fall to the operator). Typical uses for an environmental protection fund could include: the purchase of land to be used as a nature reserve; provision of management services for protected areas; public environmental education.

A number of OT participants thought there was strength in numbers. If more territories were willing to use tourist levies to create environmental protection funds, this could provide encouraging models for those (few) territories that remained undecided; and would give politicians reassurance that this was a publicly acceptable way to raise resources for environmental benefits to the whole community. There was widespread recognition of the need for transparency in the planning and administration of environmental levies. Several participants suggested that Boards of Stakeholders be set up to include those with key roles in environmental protection in the territory (e.g. government, non-governmental organisations, corporate sponsors, educational bodies).

In addition, this kind of good governance relies on transparency, freedom of information, consultative decision making and wide participation. And good governance criteria should also apply to procedures for levying, allocating and using environmental funds. There are useful examples in *A better quality of life* (Command 4345 May 1999), the UK's Strategy for Sustainable Development, pages 4-5 and the White Paper *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity* Command 4264 p 6. Overall, features essential to success are: openness in the management and operation of the fund; clear criteria for projects to be funded; the involvement of both governmental and non-governmental environmental bodies in the decision making; and feedback to visitors and others who contribute to the fund on how the resources are spent. These should specify outcomes achieved or intended (e.g. "This will enable us to expand the area of protected coral/mangrove/tussac grass/forest at X"; "As a result of the fund we have established a visitor information centre at Y"; "The fund will support work to expand the area covered with indigenous plant species").

Environmental education

Environmental education and public awareness were seen as critical components for the environment being properly valued in the OTs. This was a theme in all the presentations by the OTs and came up in most discussions. It is fundamental to linking the economy and politics to the environment. Everyone — the general public, administrators, technical experts, NGOs and politicians — must understand that care of the environment is a key element of successful policies for poverty alleviation, sustainable fisheries and tourism, protecting bio-diversity; and of personal and social freedom and the general quality of life. We cannot just educate children; we have to educate everyone. Public support is essential to accomplishing our goals.

There was also strong advocacy at the conference for the cultural dimension. Literature and the arts were ways for key habitats, landscapes and familiar and rare species to be counted as part of the shared wealth of a community.

International Conventions and legislation

Overseas Territories need guidance, on what international environmental conventions mean and their relevance to each Territory. This requires more input from and consultation by HMG. In addition, UK Government agencies need to develop better channels of communication to assist the OTs to implement environmental agreements. (There were examples of problems with CITES, Ramsar and other conventions.) Reliable and up-to-date information is needed, with ease of access (for instance via the UKOTC Forum's proposed database network) to skills, knowledge and training from external agencies and international bodies (which do not generally have direct links with overseas territories). Some key areas:

- Which OTs are included in which conventions.
- An inventory of local enabling legislation in place in respect of each convention.
- How implementation of international legislation actually works.
- Models of legislation (based on a clear purposes and good science) which can be developed flexibly for individual territories (recognising that the different legislative frameworks in each mean that automatic application of a standard template is not usually an option).

This was developed further in the legislation workshop, The importance of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as a broad framework agreement was recognised. Multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) have many benefits as well as costs. There was general agreement that harmonisation and consolidation of existing bio-diversity conservation legislation was a priority within the Overseas Territories. Account must be taken of the local capacity to enforce legislation.

Some types of assistance and information to consider were:

- Identification of MEAs whose objectives and provisions were applicable and relevant to each Territory.
- Provision of scientific and legal advice necessary to underpin the decision on joining a Convention and to support effective implementation.
- Drafting legislation (and a legal consultant might be asked for advice for a number of OTs, especially with new MEAS)
- Assistance with management and enforcement, including reporting requirements.
- Financial assistance and access to funds.

DETR offered to compile a list of resources relating to the implementation of MEAs including key websites and newsletters.

The Offices of Attorneys General could communicate directly with each other and share experiences.

Enabling legislation being developed in one territory could be circulated to others to facilitate the drafting process. The administrations of Overseas Territories could jointly engage legal expertise.

Preparation of UK national reporting requirements under the MEAs could be harmonised, for example through a common format or by one territory collating the information on a regional basis.

Invasive species

"Invasive species are the second greatest threat to global bio-diversity after habitat loss, and the primary threat to bio-diversity in many small island developing states" (UN Environment Programme).

Priorities are:

- What are the known invasive species in each of the UK Overseas Territories?
- What is known about the severity of their impacts?
- Determine the key invasive species known to be affecting the biological diversity of the UK Overseas Territories, as well as current gaps in our knowledge.
- Identify existing preventative or curative mechanisms, and additional steps which might be taken to manage invasive species.
- Begin to clarify the importance of invasive species compared with other conservation issues in the UK Overseas Territories.
- What measures are in place to prevent the introduction of potentially invasive species, or control of existing invasive species?
 - Predictive (e.g. early warning system)
 - Preventative (e.g. quarantine or legislation)
 - Curative (e.g. physical, chemical and biological)

Monitoring progress

How do we check that what we have agreed to do is getting done?

Some things should happen in the next few weeks. The UKOTC Forum holds its AGM (here at London Zoo) on the evening of 9 September. The Forum will invite Government representatives to this. Anyone else is welcome. All coming to the AGM should be ready to give a progress report on areas in which they are involved; and in a format which can be easily passed to others in the Overseas Territories and in the UK.

There will be a further opportunity for an update in late November when the Forum and Government have their regular half-yearly meeting. Overseas Territories governments and NGOs are welcome to attend. Comments, concerns, and ideas for discussion at this meeting should be passed by mid-November to the Forum or the FCO.

In September 2000, we understand that there will be a major environmental conference in Gibraltar. Many of us will meet there, and this will provide another opportunity to record and encourage progress.

Many OTs felt the need for some way of assessing the effectiveness of their environmental policies, such as a 5-yearly "State of the Environment" review (for which help may be needed from agencies in the UK, such as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee).

In the meantime, we look forward to the Forum's new database/web-site being established (with the FCO support indicated by the Minister). This will enable much work which *A Breath of Fresh Air* has identified as being essential, to develop with greater openness and consultation and to be shared far more effectively than has been the case up to now.



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"OVERSEAS TERRITORIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT"

SPEECH BY FCO MINISTER OF STATE, MR. GEOFF HOON MP, TO THE CONFERENCE 'A BREATH OF FRESH AIR', LONDON ZOO, LONDON, TUESDAY 29 JUNE 1999

Today marks a new step in the Government's commitment both to the environment and to the Overseas Territories. It is the first ever meeting jointly organised by the Government and the non-governmental organisations on environmental issues in the UK's Overseas Territories. That is why the title of this conference 'A Breath of Fresh Air', is so appropriate. I believe the title was your suggestion, Mr Chairman: thank you.

First, let me set the scene. Britain has thirteen Overseas Territories spread around the globe. They are typically small island communities with populations ranging from over 60,000 in Bermuda to the 54 people of Pitcairn. Our links with the territories are often of long standing. We share a common heritage and our histories have been closely interwoven, in some cases for hundreds of years. The territories include an enormous diversity of communities, cultures and resources and environments. We value that diversity.

On 17 March this year the Foreign Secretary announced to Parliament the results of a major review of the relationship between the United Kingdom and its Overseas Territories. That policy document's title was 'Partnership for Progress and Prosperity.' It says a lot about the strength of our past partnership with the territories that they want to remain British. But for any partnership to flourish it must move forward. The White Paper charts how we see the partnership with the territories evolving. It is a turning point in our relations with the territories, the start of a partnership appropriate to the 21st century.

The British Government is committed to modernising the structures and practices involved in the governance of the territories. As the White Paper makes clear we want to do this in consultation with the governments of the territories. So we plan to improve the political dialogue with them. But partnership is a two-way street. It brings with it mutual obligations and responsibilities.

One of the most forward-looking parts of the White Paper sets out our concerns and policies for the conservation and management of the environment in the Overseas Territories. When presenting it to Parliament, the Foreign Secretary said that a new FCO fund for environmental issues in the Overseas Territories had been established. That provides 1.5 million pounds to be spent over the next three years.

The White Paper said that we hope to develop an Environmental Charter with the Overseas Territories. We see this as based on a partnership approach between the local governments, the UK and environmental NGOs in the territories and in the UK. We hope the Charter will provide a framework for developing policies on the environment in an open and inclusive spirit. This will also provide a firm basis for the effective implementation in the Overseas Territories of appropriate multilateral environmental agreements to which the UK is a party.

The White Paper also announced that DFID would provide additional assistance to support poorer Overseas Territories in addressing global environmental concerns. And the DETR's Darwin Initiative has been a source of support for the Territories' rich biodiversity.

Four projects approved in the latest Darwin round will be close to the hearts of many of you here. One is on the status and distribution of the plants of the Falkland Islands. One is on invertebrate diversity and threats from introduced species on Gough Island - now, like Henderson Island, a World Heritage site. In this fine setting at the Zoo, I must also remind you that it was work on Gough Island in the 1950s which laid the foundation for the hugely distinguished scientific reputation of the Zoological Society's President, Sir Martin Holdgate. Then there is a key infrastructure project on biodiversity conservation and protected areas in Anguilla. Finally, there is the project for biodiversity management around the Ramsar wetland site in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

These projects reflect the richness of habitats and species in the Overseas Territories, and our commitment to support and develop this heritage. Many parts of it are of global significance.

I have deliberately not said 'preserve', because that is too narrow a perspective.

First, the environment matters for the daily lives of those in the Overseas Territories. Fisheries, tourism, traditional crafts and medicines, agriculture, education and, above all, the self-identity of the territories and those who belong to them - these all depend crucially on a healthy environment and a commitment to sustainable development. Livelihoods and the quality of life can be enhanced or impoverished by how we treat the natural world.

Secondly, some of the territories have a history of centuries of environmental degradation. Many have lost numerous habitats and endemic species. Of course, we cannot recreate the original environment with no human interference. Even as remote and apparently pristine an environment as Henderson Island had been shaped by former Polynesian settlers. They were there for several centuries before descendants of the Bounty mutineers started to visit it.

But some recovery is still possible. A good example is St Helena, whose settlers have a commendable history of realising, earlier than was generally true in the UK itself, how devastating the loss of native habitats and the introduction of alien species could be. Some of St Helena's own endemic plants have dwindled to a few specimens. Now - with excellent support from Kew Gardens - a programme is firmly in place to use these plants to grow more of the island's endemic flora. We must hope that the ghost of a Corsican general will soon be walking in glades very different from what he described early in the last century as 'this accursed island'!

I now wish to focus on specific areas of our work together.

We said in the White Paper that we hoped to see our joint commitments to the environment in the Overseas Territories set out in an Environmental Charter. It could indicate the responsibilities of the various stakeholders and also reflect wide areas of shared or complementary activities. We have not convened this conference to negotiate the text of the Charter. HMG does not come with preconceptions, but we hope for a fruitful exchange of views which will help take the process forward. There will of course then need to be discussions with all the governments of the Overseas Territories, several of which were unable to be formally represented at this conference. But if by tomorrow evening we have been able to form some clear ideas of what we would like the Charter (or Charters) to contain and how to make it work, we shall have achieved a great deal.

The stakeholders are, of course, not just governments. In environmental matters, it is a great strength in Britain - and increasingly in the Overseas Territories as well - that so many non-governmental organisations and committed individuals contribute so much in the way of enthusiasm, expertise, time and resources to the care of the environment.

We in government do not wish to be prescriptive about how an Environment Charter is drawn up. It will need to reflect the enormous diversity of problems and resources. And that is what those of you from the Overseas Territories generally know about far better than Ministers or officials in London. It would be foolish to expect to handle things the same way in Bermuda as in Pitcairn. Bermuda is one of the most densely populated territories on earth with skilled and diverse human resources and a flourishing economy. On Pitcairn, it can be a challenge to put together a crew for the island's longboat.

So, differences must be recognised and must be respected. But one thing is common to the UK and all the territories. A proper regard for sustainable development and the environment form a key part of good government.

When it comes to the environment, it is not just governments that must make hard choices. Companies and individuals must make hard choices as well. Farmers, fishermen, hoteliers and tourists all profoundly affect the natural environment through their daily actions. Good waste disposal arrangements for a tourist complex can be costly. But poor systems can pollute and destroy the coral reefs tourists come to enjoy. It may seem that we have almost completely lost what Mark O'Connor called (in one of the poems you have just heard):

'... that Aboriginal trick, to leave the land beyond their life untouched.'

Yet the person whom Mark praised was no original Australian but an English beachcomber who had the luck to rent one of the world's best tropical islands for half a crown a year and who preserved several of the species on it from extinction.

So, environmental issues are typically at the centre of politics - the allocation of scarce resources between competing claims. There will always be difficult and controversial issues. Let me mention some examples:

- Should Sombrero Island become a launch site for commercial satellites?
- What is the best way to preserve the central mangrove wetlands in Grand Cayman?
- How should South Georgia be managed?
- Why has the UK's ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity so far only been extended to cover four overseas territories?
- Should the Chagos archipelago be made a World Heritage Site?
- Should St Helena and Pitcairn get airstrips?

We know these are difficult issues. On such issues the Overseas Territories are entitled to look to the UK as a whole (not just government departments) for assistance. But improved support is certainly not a substitute for the overseas territories tackling controversial issues. They should not be able to say to the UK: 'We did not get the support we were entitled to expect.' But it also matters that stakeholders in the UK should not be able to say to the overseas territories: 'Yes, it was a difficult decision, but in taking it you did not observe acceptable standards of transparency and public accountability.'

Good environmental policies mean combining good standards and adequate resources. The resources needed to support good environment work in the Overseas Territories are considerable. Some will come from the governments of the territories themselves; some from various departments in the UK. Help must also come from companies (like those which provide telecommunications, tourism and transport services), from research bodies and from NGOs. That help might come in the form of policies which are kind to the environment; but we also hope that many will find it in their own interests to sponsor environment projects in the overseas territories.

Let us use this conference to discuss and work out sensible and realistic priorities in areas for which we are responsible. Each of us will do this far better if we have already taken into account the concerns, skills and priorities of other stakeholders. That should ensure that the way we do our work can add to the value of work done by others. And it will spread knowledge of good practice (including how to avoid the mistakes already made by others).

Our own guidelines for using the FCO's new overseas territories environment fund are evolving. We want to take away from the conference your thoughts and ideas for how best we should allocate it.

There is one proposal we can agree to immediately. It is supported by the Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands and is an urgent request for temporary support to the TCI National Trust. We are happy to agree to it, recognising the importance of maintaining continuity in the Trust's work.

There is another proposal which needs developing, but which we are keen to support. The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum is planning to develop an electronic database network. This would make reliable information on the environment in the Overseas Territories readily accessible to a wider range of users.

Those for example trying to eradicate rats will be given fast access to lessons from similar work done elsewhere. Teachers will get lively material directly relevant to the experience of their students. Legal draftsmen will be able to get directly in touch with international experts on environmental law.

The project could help underpin much environmental work in the Overseas Territories. It is a major enterprise which will develop over several years; we hope it will attract considerable outside support. However, the Forum have sensibly designed the project in a modular way, so that the first results will become available early and the rate of development can be matched to available funding.

Some of the details still need to be agreed. Doing so will be an urgent priority for us following the conference. But we are ready to provide substantial support for this project.

I hope all of you here will give the Forum the benefit of your own experience as their work develops. Their members have led the way in creating wider awareness of the precious - and vulnerable - natural heritage of the Overseas Territories. Indeed this conference is one of the delayed effects of Sara Oldfield's 1987 report 'Fragments of Paradise'. I am confident that the Forum's new initiatives will greatly increase the effectiveness of all our environmental work with the Overseas Territories.

We need to cooperate better to save the diverse habitats in the overseas territories. By 'we' I mean several groups: different UK departments, different parts of Overseas Territories' governments, many environmental NGOs. I also mean companies, the academic world and the media. A key aim of this conference has been to bring together those who value the natural assets of the Overseas Territories. Your presence here shows this purpose being met. It is now for all of us here to use these two days well.

I hope this conference will truly be 'A Breath of Fresh Air'. I have great pleasure, Mr Chairman, in declaring it open; and I look forward to welcoming you all to a reception at the Foreign Office this evening.

[UKOTCF Chairman's reply](#)

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Welcoming response to the Minister (Mr Geoff Hoon, M.P.) by Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chairman UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

It is always pleasing to be able to start by passing on congratulations. I can report very positive first reactions from the Forum's member organisations, both in the Overseas Territories and in the UK, to the environmental sections of the White Paper.

As you, Minister, noted, it has taken a while to focus on Overseas Territories and the environment. This is no reflection on those holding responsibility at present, either at political or official levels. Indeed, following the change of government, the creation of a new Overseas Territories Department and the strengthening of the Environment, Science and Energy Department of the Foreign Office were doubtless designed to help give priority to these important issues. We in the Forum have developed good working relationships with these departments, with Governors and Governments in the Territories, and indeed with other relevant Government Departments. (We look forward to building stronger links with yet more.) This has meant that officials have been able to call frequently on the Forum's expertise, and its network of member organisations in the Overseas Territories and UK — working together to further conservation in the Territories.

It is well known that, even a year ago, the NGOs which form the Forum were unhappy about the omission of the environment from the Government's initial policy statements on the Overseas Territories. We tried to be constructive in our comments as to what needed to be done. It is really pleasing to note how genuinely open the government has been in consultation, and how rapidly it has been able to review the situation. By March of this year, the environment formed a major — and widely commended — chapter of the White Paper on the Overseas Territories.

Among the aspects we welcomed particularly in the White Paper were:

- the highlighting of the tremendous wealth of biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories as unique assets to, and responsibility of, the Territories themselves and the UK;
- the recognition that this biodiversity is valuable to many aspects of the economy as well as in its own right;
- the recognition of the role of NGOs alongside governments in working for the maintenance of the natural environment;

Despite the reputation that NGOs love to kick government, we actually prefer to co-operate whenever possible — especially when the challenges and opportunities are so great that they require all our combined efforts. Of course, we will not always agree — indeed, I would be a bit worried if we did! However, in these days of joined-up government, perhaps we should speak also of grown-up relationships. This conference is a fine example of that. If we are able to put our minds together — UK and Overseas Territories; governments, NGOs and others — then we have a better chance of solving many of the difficult challenges.

In a sense, this is at the core of the Environmental Charter, which is to be developed in wide consultation. It will be important to ensure that it becomes a working tool to facilitate the safeguarding of the UK Overseas Territories' unique heritage. As you so rightly note, it will be important to integrate environment and sustainability into all aspects of forward planning, as indeed is being striven for in UK itself. If there is wide agreement on responsibilities and common standards, life will become much easier for administrators, politicians, NGOs, business and others. Effort will not be wasted on detailed planning on proposals which are clearly inappropriate. Perhaps more importantly, it will assist resources from all these players being deployed on appropriate developments, which are environmentally sustainable, respect local cultures and give benefits to local people, whether in terms of income or quality of life.

I can confirm that the NGOs will play their part. We estimate that UK environmental NGOs in our Forum contribute of the order of £500,000 per year on conservation in the UK Overseas Territories. This does not include resources gathered and deployed by our member NGOs based in the Territories. Nor does it include the exchange of information, skills and expertise between Territories, as well as with UK NGOs.

This last point is a key. The White Paper recognises that its objectives will require the efficient acquisition and handling of a huge amount of information from diverse sources. The need for the Forum's database project has been identified in both UK and the Overseas Territories for a number of years, because it is fundamental to underpin many other activities, which would be impracticable or less cost-effective without it. However, we need to help get this started, and I am delighted that you, Minister, have confirmed your readiness to provide substantial support as a matter of urgency following this conference, as well as the encouragement to potential outside supporters.

This project, in common with all the Forum's work, is designed to help our partners in the Overseas Territories conserve — and raise their capacity to conserve — their unique heritages. Can I therefore welcome also the announcement of the important support to the Turks & Caicos National Trust.

Conservation projects in the Overseas Territories often involve partnerships between governments and our member NGOs in the Overseas Territories, with financial and/or expertise support from the Forum network in UK and UK Government. Many are illustrated in the displays in the rooms next to this hall. This is an excellent model for this conference, and the follow-up work which will be required in the continuing process to put into practice the excellent concepts in the White Paper.

Finally, Minister, the Forum network in the Overseas Territories and the UK looks forward greatly to continued constructive and productive working together with UK and Overseas Territories Governments in the future. So, we had better get to work on this conference now. Thank you for getting it started.



Delegates from a Breath of Fresh Air Conference



Nick Ross - Geoff Hoon MP - Mark O'Connor - Mike Pienkowski



Lain Orr - Mike Pienkowski - Nick Ross - Geoff Hoon MP - Mark O'Connor



*Suzie Francis
President Montserrat National Trust*



*Sheila Brown Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Natural Resources, BVI*