



Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World:

UKOTCF's 6th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states

By Zoom
2nd, 3rd, 9th & 10th March 2021

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

Throughout our series of conservation conferences for UKOT and CD practitioners, the UKOTCF network members have been keen to reach conclusions and recommendations to progress conservation, rather than just learn from an interesting series of talks, posters and discussions. Over the past 20 years, our conferences have evolved to meet these and other needs. In this conference, we adopted a method used for our 2015 conference in Gibraltar, *Sustaining Partnerships*. Our only qualification of that is that the conclusions and recommendations from that (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences/sustaining-partnerships-gibraltar-2015/>) were a bit too long.

Essentially, the challenge to meet was that, to develop clear recommendations from within a short conference is extremely difficult. The solution developed in 2015 was to start the discussions well before the conference. Accordingly, the conference organisers invited expected participants from across all 21 UKOTs and CDs, as well as a few helpers from outwith these, to take part in one of 8 teams, each considering material relevant to one of the 8 main topics (each of which had been decided from a consultation process across the practitioners involved in conservation in the UKOTs and CDs). We are pleased to report that invitees from all but one of the smallest territories (who were suffering from over-load for other reasons) agreed. (And people from the “missing” territory are helping the conference in other ways.)

Each team had two main initial sources of material to draw from:

1. Abstracts and ideas about possible conclusions and recommendations supplied, as requested, well in advance by most of the speakers; and
2. Conclusions and recommendations from the 2015 conference relevant to the topic. (It was not required to include all of these, because they still stand alone, some having been implemented, a few fully, and some not.)

The teams worked on this, by email and Zoom meetings over two months. Their initial drafts were circulated to those already booked for the conference and all others of whom the conference organisers were aware as likely to participate in the conference. Thanks to those who supplied comments.

All comments were collated. The opportunity was taken then to remove some of the overlap between topics. (The overlap was deliberate because of: the high inter-relatedness of integrated conservation; our wish to avoid issues falling through the gaps; and to secure different viewpoints.) The topic teams then looked again at their revised texts to refine them and incorporate any points arising from posters (whose submission deadline had passed by then), as well as further points from talk authors, to produce a second circulated draft. This was circulated to all booked conference participants and comments invited. We thank all those who supplied comments on this and earlier drafts. We then took account of that round of comments to produce a second full draft. This was circulated to conference participants and comments requested.

On the basis of the comments then received, we produced a third draft and circulated this to participants a few days before the first day of the conference. We invited any further comments and indicated (as we had with the second draft) that we were planning to invite the conference to confirm the conclusions and recommendations of each section at the start of the general discussion in each main session. In fact, no

further comments were received before the conference or, indeed, before the last day of the conference nearly two weeks later.

The conclusions and recommendations sought to draw consensus from the conference participants (and some others) involved in conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, but it should be noted that not all points apply to all Territories, such is the diversity among the Territories and the unique challenges they face, in addition to those shared. In all cases, the recommendations are just that, from a gathering of experienced, informed and concerned persons and organisations. We try to indicate to whom each recommendation is directed, whether this be UK Government, territory governments, NGOs, funding bodies or others. Clearly, they are not binding on any of these bodies, even where the body concerned has personnel participating in the conference.

In this document, ‘UKOTs’ means UK Overseas Territories, ‘CDs’ means Crown Dependencies, and ‘territories’ means UKOTs & CDs. ‘C:’ precedes conclusions and ‘R:’ draft recommendations. The categories of persons or organisations to whom the recommendations are addressed are indicated by *bold italics*.

Main topic 1: Progress (or otherwise) in reaching environmental targets

1.01. C. Strategic approaches to conservation are impossible without assessments of progress towards objectives.

1.02. C: Environmental Charters are legally binding agreements between UKOT Governments and UK Government. The latter has committed to assist the former in implementing the Charters. UKOT/CD Environment Ministers or their equivalents have endorsed collations of information (by UKOTCF) from officials and civil society on progress in implementing these and the international agreements, such as Aichi Targets, their updating expected in 2021, and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the Charters bring together, and have called for UK Government to fund this work.

1.03. R: As called for by UKOT/CD Environment Ministers’ Council, *All* should encourage these UKOTCF compilations of information on progress in implementing commitments (under Environment Charters and international conventions, including Aichi Targets and SDGs), and *territories* should engage (using the model of minimum time required of territory personnel, as for 2016). As called for by the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council, *UK Government* should provide the modest financial support needed to enable these by the bodies, such as UKOTCF, who have experience, knowledge and ability to contribute skilled volunteer effort to undertake these – especially now, 20 years into the Environment Charters (2001) and in a year of major reviews of biodiversity and climate-change approaches.

1.04. R: *Territories* should be ambitious (as some already are) to meet (and set) international standards and commitments, and *UK Government* should help and support this.

1.05. R: Those *territories not yet included in UK’s ratification of international conservation conventions, or with further needs to be met* for conventions in which they are included, such as designating Ramsar Sites, are encouraged in their efforts to progress these. *UK Government and others* need to take UKOT & CD needs into account in negotiating future target-setting in the context of international biodiversity and climate-change.

1.06. R: *Territory governments* should put in place and implement appropriate and effective legislation requiring Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for all major developmental proposals. EIAs should meet best-practice standards and be transparent and open and to independent experts and the public in a comprehensive, accessible and non-technical manner, with adequate time for consideration and comment. They should include references to natural disaster risks and responses. Government-funded projects should not be exceptions and need to require EIAs, rather than ignore the need because the money has already been provided. A full EIA should always be required or vulnerabilities will be inherent in the system. There should be proper enforcement mechanisms, and governments should allocate the resources needed to review these and to monitor and endorse conditions if approved. Legislation should make provision for the role of NGOs in the assessment process. It would be worth considering “fit-for-purpose” approaches, that are robust, but not necessarily so resource-hungry that the system is set up to fail due to lack of resources. (See also 4.07)

1.07. R: To meet its Commitment to ‘Promote better cooperation and the sharing of experience between and among the Overseas Territories and with other states and communities which face similar environmental problems,’ **UK Government** should explore cost-effective and best use of resources to facilitate sharing of information: for example, funding of UKOTCF conferences, promoting cooperation and sharing of experience/expertise via well-established networks. As recognised by the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council, these offer opportunities to share best practice and actions of other territories, such as the Cayman Islands National Conservation Law, the St Helena Peaks Implementation Plan and Isle of Man’s assessment of progress in their strategy actions, having consulted key stakeholders and implementing organisations. The **Territories** can then review whether they could further develop their own approaches.

1.08. C: UKOTs/CDs are of disproportionate importance relative to UK for endemic taxa, and there are benefits to cataloguing this and Red-listing species for particularly vulnerable flora and fauna. This will go a long way towards a science-led decision-making approach.

1.09. R: **UK Government and other funders** should give more recognition of UKOTs’/CDs’ importance in terms of endemic taxa, and provide support for increased resources and capacity for surveying and taxonomic work, and for conservation assessments (e.g. Red Listing) and appropriate conservation actions. In addition, they need a better understanding of territories and conservation challenges there, as well as importance of partnership working. For example, the facilitation and assistance roles fulfilled by NGOs, including UKOTCF, which for some territory bodies are essential for taking on innovation work and brokering relationships between the different parties for specific issues/ actions (including via organising conferences like this event and the write-up which, in turn, will help take things forward).

1.10. R: A comprehensive checklist of environmental needs should be developed for all territories, with funding targeted preferentially to fill gaps. This should not be a whole new exercise, but based on existing initiatives, such as the UKOTCF series of reviews of progress against Environment Charter Commitments and Aichi Targets; reviews of legislation; local reviews; information collated (but not published) as part of the EU Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the EU Territories (BEST). (**UK Government and other funders; Territories; UKOTCF**)

1.11. R: **UK Government**, in recognition of its shared responsibility for UKOTs’ environments and to meet its international obligations, should include provision in the Environment Bill, going through Parliament, a clause that UK Government should support UKOTs in setting their environment targets and encourage them to do so.

1.12. R: **Territory Governments and NGOs** should conduct research (including assessments of status of species and their habitats) to inform the development of localised biological indicators that can be used to measure progress towards targets.

Main topic 2: Engaging people; the wider benefits of conservation and healthy ecosystems

2.01. C: Environmental Education in schools, but especially for adults, is one of the most important elements of environmental protection and management – and therefore is critical to resiliency and managing the risk of runaway climate-change. We cannot afford to leave it to the next generation to resolve the problems that today's profligate lifestyles are creating; we have to act with urgency, now. Online resources provide an unparalleled opportunity for small communities, tying special species and natural features in with a local sense of identity and heritage. This can greatly assist in conservation efforts, because locals take ownership. There could be value, in all directions, of exploring communications between UK initiatives (such as Student Organising for Sustainability, Teach the Future) and experience in the territories (see, e.g. www.ukotcf.org.uk/environmental-education/wonderful-water/).

2.02. R: The topics under discussion are not difficult to identify in the curriculum taught in British and international schools (and there is already a section on Commonwealth, but not UK Overseas Territories in the former), so it would be really positive to see UKOTCF and others resourced to produce teaching and learning resources for teachers (in UK and elsewhere) to use that utilise UKOTs for context and scenarios relating to actual work taking place there. (**UK Government**)

2.03. R: **UK & Territory governments** have a critical part to play in wide public education and climate-change adaptation and must be convinced to act with speed to implement their international commitments to

regulate polluters and support measures which will halt the biodiversity crisis and mitigate climate change, through funding NGOs and other partners to escalate a transition to a green economy.

2.04: C: NGOs play an extremely important role in public awareness-raising and environmental education, but have limited and often unpredictable funds for this work. NGOs are normally very effective with their limited resources, frequently relying on a lot of volunteer effort. However, resources are needed to support their CEPA (Communication, Education and Public Awareness) programmes.

2.05: R: Attempts should be made to integrate climate-change adaptation topics into National Curricula and the mass media at all levels, bearing in mind the importance of media and social networks to engage wider public, as well as use of more conventional means. Environmental Education materials need to be curriculum-linked, easily understandable and accessible to everyone. There is a need to reach the whole of society, as well as schools. Adults need to be educated about the impact of their consumer choices and children need to be educated in how to adapt to a changing world. (**UK & Territory Governments; NGOs**)

2.06: R: **UK & Territory governments and NGOs** should note and act on the importance of training for teachers and the development of educational material (including on natural disasters and resiliency), as well as the value of specific education officers on environmental issues.

2.07: C: Economic evidence of the value of the environment can make the case for investment in conservation activities which maintain and enhance the value that the environment provides. Short-term recovery which does not focus on sustainable environmental management to build resilience and ensure the long-term viability of island economies will result in both environmental and economic decline in the longer term. Decision-making should be based on evidence of the environmental, social and economic implications of any environmental impact. Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta's Review, The Economics of Biodiversity, commissioned by HM Treasury, is a recent example recommending this.

2.08: R: Economic evidence of the benefits that the environment provides (*i.e.* environmental statistics as produced in natural capital accounting) should be produced and used as evidence within policy and planning decision-making to manage the environment and its ability to support sustainably territories' prosperity and well-being. (**UK & Territory Governments**)

2.09: C: The diversity of the UKOTs and CDs (resources available, socio-economic circumstances, level of self-governance *etc*), and the gross under-funding by UK Government – which spends 10,000 times less per endemic species in the UKOTs than in Britain itself, and nothing on the CDs, should be considered by the UK when planning research and conservation initiatives. A standard approach is rarely appropriate and, to be effective in most territories, solutions need to be developed from within territory experience, with local buy-in. Quantifying the monetary and non-monetary value of ecosystem services (*e.g.* water-supply, storm-protection, tourism underpinning, terrestrial food and material supplies, fisheries) and integrating these into policy-making are important

2.10: R: International agreements, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the CBD Aichi Targets, suggest some solutions to the world's most pressing problems. **People at all levels of society**, especially those with information and knowledge, must press **Governments, communities, the press and private industry** to act now to implement those commitments.

2.11: C: As noted in the 2015 conference closing session, we have “got to get local champions,” and we need also national and international champions (as in UKOTCF's current championing initiative). We need also to address the challenges of education and access to career opportunities to grow local champions. Territories do not have equal access to UK further educational opportunities. There is limited scope and high costs to send students off for tertiary education or work experience.

This has been made worse now UK Government has ended involvement in the EU Erasmus educational exchange scheme. We need to come together more to provide a supportive framework for personal and professional development on and off territories – and we can build networks of exchanges and exposure to develop and share learning and experience (see also Topic 8). Enabling mechanisms for quick sharing issues and needs, email and social-media groups and online meetings have been lent on heavily during the Covid crisis to allow general discussion, fermentation of ideas, and the ability to nip in and out of issues at need. This has helped many of the existing leads/champions cope and communicate.

2.12: R: **UK Government** should ensure that its replacement to the EU Erasmus educational exchange scheme of equal benefit – and should include specifically UKOTs.

Main topic 3: Facilitating local leads in conservation

3.01. C: Following Brexit and Covid-19, we in inhabited territories (including: Governments, NGOs, farmers/land-owners, research community – both local and international, wider society) are all going to need to work together, in partnerships and across all sectors and at all levels, to develop locally owned priorities, and rely even more heavily on nature to rebuild the economy – further complicated by the global influence of climate-change. Territories have not been able to access the type of schemes open to UK land-owners, *e.g.* conservation/restoration projects alongside farmed or forestry land, including water-management to prevent flooding risk or planting trees. We are marginalised as territories and need to be treated like the UK citizens that we are. The crisis threatened by Brexit and Covid-19 also has an effect of masking the realities of ecosystem-decline and climate-change. We are seeing increasing numbers of ‘get rich quick’ schemes, which have no environmental/ecological function built into them, coming to the fore to service the government’s desire to respond. It is crucial that we find a national voice (including via this conference) to represent the threats the UKOTs and CDs face as islands and the importance of natural resources in sustaining them and responding.

3.02. R: Projects in which local NGOs and their long-term supporting NGOs combine to empower local people in territories to take responsibility for conservation action are worth support from ***UK Government & other Potential Funders*** funds for several years in resourcing the technical guidance and project officers needed to draw in this huge and well-directed voluntary effort.

3.03. R: Government investment, in looking at new approaches which are non-polluting, would pay dividends – such as: peatlands-management and carbon-farming (planting to stop erosion for offsetting finance); developing habitat restoration targets; exploring what it would take to be carbon-zero and investing in the nation’s natural sites to stop them quite literally blowing away. There is the need to get the UK to recognise the UKOT and CD resource as part of the combined UK response to these issues. (This has been tried repeatedly but, given the scale of the looming issue, perhaps a joint effort between jurisdictions would establish a pathway for doing this?) (***UK Government & Territory Governments; NGOs***)

3.04. R: ***Civil society organisations and individuals*** should:

- Ensure engagement and provide hands-on learning about restoration for our future leaders through running youth groups who enjoy the outside world;
- Create stepping stones for wildlife – where it can flourish;
- Recognise and celebrate nature’s gems;
- Restore habitats to safeguard important sites;
- Work in partnership;
- Get informed and encourage local community input on public consultations on new developments that would impact on nature. (***NGOs; Territory Governments***)

3.05. R: ***Local conservation leaders, including governing bodies and NGOs***, should engage continually in efforts to maintain community motivation regarding long-term conservation projects and important local areas for biodiversity etc. This is important to ensure community interest does not fade over future generations and also facilitates greater community support for possible future conservation projects.

3.06. R: ***Conservation leaders*** need to utilise effectively science communication to engage younger generations. Young people are often alienated by overcomplicated messages, and effective communication in layman terms is important for ensuring continued investment in conservation projects over future generations, and inspiring young people to become involved in local conservation efforts.

3.07. C: Stewardship roles can be shifted from the public to the private sector by incentivising good behaviour with green certifications, competitions and publicity.

3.08. C: Some territories expressed the view that it would be valuable to identify some specific issues that territories could seek funding to be addressed via UKOTCF or though developing joint projects the latter. For example, one area some territory organisations are interested in developing further is looking at what is, in effect, ‘scientific ecotourism’ (or pairing up of volunteer expertise with local needs) which could generate some extra person-power and other resources into projects.

3.09. C: More capacity-building in-country on how to protect from new invasions and to conduct invasive species removal is needed. Bringing in overseas volunteers and consultants can be costly and sporadic; so, in some cases without continuous management, species can get reintroduced and are not quickly addressed as the local capacity does not exist to remove them. However, by their very nature, eradication projects are

finite and, depending on the nature of the territory, the project and the methodology, bringing in external experts or facilitators may actually be a cost-effective solution.

3.10. C: Ecotourism is a viable way to diversify a local island economy that is heavily dependent upon, for example, fishing as there is definite interest in local stakeholders, but they will need significant business expertise and financial support if the transition is to be successful.

3.11. R: Undeveloped (or under-developed) islands/areas could, in some situations, be ideal locations for ecotourism businesses, but only if they are designated and protected for the natural ecosystems, and any such business uses are regulated, monitored and enforced for environmental sustainability. (*Territory Governments*).

3.12. C: Local conservation efforts could potentially benefit from eco-tourism which is directed at facilitating hands-on practical conservation experiences for visitors such as tree-planting as part of a locally planned initiative.

Main topic 4: Coping with recovery after hurricanes and natural disasters by building resilience

Education, Awareness and the role of Natural Capital

4.01 See 5.15

4.02. R: Well-designed models are important to show stakeholders risks, making them real for people – from policy makers to public. (*Territory governments; NGOs*)

4.03. C: It is vital to keep intact ecosystems (*e.g.* dune, wetlands, forest and “bush”), noting also the huge value of natural capital as a storm protection and other ecosystem services.

4.04. R: The valuation of habitats, *e.g.* sand-dunes, wetlands, including mangroves, other forest and “bush”, needs to be assessed so that this can be added into discussions with policy makers. (*Territory governments; NGOs*)

4.05. C: Restoration, where it can be done, is important – but it is not just planting, but what you plant and how you look after them.

4.06. C: Note the value of events such as open days, outdoor classes, camps and competitions; and of being flexible and open to change.

Legislation, EIAs and Policy

4.07. R: It would really help if there was environmentally robust planning legislation to back up safe development. Impacts are often at a much wider scale than just around a single site or development, this has planning and policy implications and needs to be understood. (See also 1.06) (*Territory governments*)

4.08. R: Building Codes and Physical Planning Acts should factor in climate change (and [semi-]natural disasters) as a means to build resiliency (*Territory governments*)

4.09. R: *UK Government* should fund a model that addresses the needs of territories for sustainable development planning.

4.10. R: *UKOTs, UK Government and NGOs* need to underline the value of Environment Charters.

4.11. R: Longer-term funding is needed for projects that cannot reach their potential in 3 years – *e.g.* tree-growing and other recovery projects. A better mechanism would be for successful projects to be able to run for the time-frame necessary. Sustainability cannot be built in a three-year cycle for habitats that take 30 years or more to come to fruition. There is a need also to overcome the stalling of implementing policy after the project developing it ends. (*UK and Territory governments, and other funders*)

Expertise/ Data

4.12. C: It is important to bear in mind that island people know their surroundings, history and the need for resilience well already, so that there is a need to tie the science into the connection between human and natural resiliency.

4.13. C: It is important to partner with others, including the use of UK, regional and local expertise to improve technical and scientific knowledge and leverage the expertise of Commonwealth Secretariat, UNEP, and other multilateral institutions. Models and use of remote sensing are transferable and possible to run multiple times to monitor conditions and any restoration activities.

4.14. R: There is a need for good quality biodiversity data for decision-making and monitoring progress. Good documentation is vital, including secure storage of data and photographs and potential for off-island storage. (*Territory governments; NGOs*)

4.15. C: Note the problems created by short-term nature of projects (and responses to natural disasters) which build up experience and capacity which is subsequently lost, and the potential role here an organisation with a long-term interest and experience (some territories suggesting UKOTCF).

4.16. R: Develop a checklist of environmental infrastructure and needs, for example sustainable development plans, habitat and ecosystem mapping, legislation (and disaster planning protocols). (*Territory governments; NGOs*)

Wider Resilience

4.17. R: Enhanced food security is required – but needs to be achieved in a sustainable way without excessive land-clearing and agro-chemical use with consequent run-off (environmentally sustainable farming). (*Territory governments; those producing food*)

4.18. C: Ways are needed to tie environmental, social and civil resilience together. (For example, storm-damaged houses can take a long time to fix and, especially derelict housing, may be easier to rebuild. Hurricane shelters need to be up and ready, and regularly checked.)

4.19. C: How seriously are the governments taking sea-level rise and increased and stronger storm-events? Do they know how serious it is and how it will impact them? – Some clearly do, but no Caribbean island has declared a climate emergency. How do we get the Territories to set long-term visions and policies for the Environment to 2050 and beyond?

4.20. R: *Territory Governments* should ensure robust recovery and restoration strategies for terrestrial and 'blue' carbon ecosystems, as well as habitats that provide resilience to the impacts of climate change, are included in Territory-led plans for climate change adaptation and mitigation to be communicated at the CoP26 Summit (in line with the Joint Ministerial Council's 2020 commitment: "By the time of the COP26 Summit, each government endeavours to communicate a territory-led plan for climate change adaptation and mitigation, which contributes towards global carbon emission reductions.") Conservationists and NGOs should work with Territory Governments to ensure these ecosystem recovery and restoration strategies are implemented within the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

4.21. R: A need to work with UK Government to develop and support nature-based solutions on-island to help increase resilience. For example, how much mangrove and sea-grass restoration is achievable across the Caribbean, and what are the needs of peatland and kelp forests in the South Atlantic? More understanding is needed into the status and distribution of natural capital provided by terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems, (*UK and Territory governments, NGOs, other funders*)

4.22. R: *Territory governments and NGOs* should recognise the need to conduct rapid climate change vulnerability assessments (e.g. NatureServe Climate Change Wizard) of threatened and endangered species across the UKOTs to identify species most at risk to climate change; and should create or update species action plans to include climate-change risks, with associated mitigating actions aimed at increasing climate change resiliency.

4.23. R: Conservationists should point out needs for action – identify the issues, establish realistic and achievable (not box-checking) targets, establish assessments that will be reported against, secure resources and then do them. Measures should be of long-term impact and not artificial ones to match short grant cycles. The scale of the problem is regional, rather than individual country-based and needs a regional plan to maximise benefits for all. Grey and green solutions, especially to coastal areas, need to be understood and implemented wisely. [Green infrastructures are naturally occurring ecosystems that perform significant functions in terms of flood-defence, water-purification, coastal stabilization etc., e.g. sand-dunes, mangroves). Grey infrastructures are man-made defences, e.g. sea-walls, water-purification plants, which perform these functions.] (*NGO and governmental conservationists, UK and Territory governments, and other funders*)

4.24. C: Future generations. What do we want our grandchildren to be able to experience and have access to? We need to change decision-makers' minds: how to look at common good, rather than lobbyist or those who have the most influence? Investments may not be going to those locally based.

Main topic 5: Nature-based solutions for the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration: Terrestrial

5.01. C: Coastal and wetland habitats provide critical ecosystem services and biodiversity values, such as regulation of flows, regulation of wastes, cultural values, nutrition, reduction of erosion, other ecosystem services, critical habitats for spatial and temporal species populations, and rare, threatened, endangered and endemic species. However, throughout the territories, these habitats have been degraded and lost as a result of ill-advised and/or unregulated land-based development, increasingly severe tropical cyclones due to global climate-change, and extraction of natural material. (see also Topic 6)

5.02. R: Natural ecosystems (e.g. sand-dune formations, mangrove communities, coral reef ecosystems and other wetland habitats) provide significant value in terms of coastal protection and should all be assessed for potential ecosystem restoration. (*Territory governments; NGOs*)

5.03. C: Invasive alien species represent a leading threat to biodiversity and ecosystem processes in the territories, and ecosystem-scale impacts are being realised in some territories as a result of invasive species, increasing frequency and severity of tropical cyclones and other causes attributable to global climate-change. For example, the invasive pine tortoise scale *Toumeyella parvicornis*, coupled with sea-surge inundation and wildfire have reduced the population of Caicos Pine *Pinus caribaea* var. *bahamensis* (the National Tree) by as much as 97% in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) is causing similar losses in the marine environment in the West Indian UKOTs.

5.04. C: Eradication of invasive species can result in significant gains in biodiverse and resilient habitats, bringing endangered species back from the brink of extinction and revitalizing other critical species populations, but cultural implications of eradication projects and their economic benefits must be given due consideration.

5.05. R: Restoration projects are not one-time, static operations but must be seen as long-term, continuous and adaptive as new threats emerge. *Territory Governments* should develop early warning and rapid response systems at the local and regional levels to prevent introduction and spread (*i.e.* biosecurity). It is essential, when carrying out any control or eradication of invasive species, for the biosecurity measures to stop any re-introduction (including education of visitors) to be in place before the control/eradication work begins to avoid the introduction of new threats to ecosystems and biodiversity. (*Territory governments, NGOs*)

5.06. R: Resources must be made available for the management and eradication of invasive alien species, where these are possible, and appropriate methodologies used according to the specific context. (*UK & Territory governments; other funders*)

5.07. C: Balancing ecosystem and human needs requires deliberative intention in order to avoid unforeseen consequences. For example, mosquitoes as a human disease vector may need to be controlled in human population centres; however, they are also an important larval source of food for many avian species.

5.08. C: Rewilding, which broadly refers to helping ecosystems to restore themselves, has captured contemporary conservation and public attention, particularly in Europe, where it has taken on several forms and definitions. Funding for ecosystem restoration remains a major impediment across territories; however, rewilding can be one of the most cost-effective and climate-resilient means of restoring island and other ecosystems.

5.09. R: *Governments and NGOs* should participate proactively in ecosystem management, and seek partnership with *private sector entities* where appropriate.

5.10. R: Public consultation and stakeholder-involvement must be given priority when developing goals and methodologies for restoration projects. Public awareness campaigns should also be implemented to explain the motivation behind projects. (*Territory governments; NGO and governmental conservationists*)

5.11. R: *UK & territory Governments* should ensure that there is clear policy in place on ecosystem services and biodiversity to underpin standards and requirements.

5.12. C: More capacity-building is needed for invasive species management, ecological restoration and development and implementation of nature-based solutions. Holistic and integrative management practices can deter unforeseen consequences associated with the control of invasive species and habitat restoration efforts.

5.13. C: Habitat restoration can be costly; therefore, an ecosystem modelling approach can help to identify and prioritise sites for restoration that offer the greatest benefits in terms of coastal protection and enhancement of ecosystem services and biodiversity values.

5.14. C: Despite catastrophic ecosystem and biodiversity losses attributable to invasive species and global climate change, some ecosystem management techniques, such as *ex situ* seed-storage, *in situ* propagation and breeding of threatened species, habitat restoration, and a wide variety of species and ecosystem specific analyses can serve to conserve species and habitats for future regeneration.

5.15. R: Ministers and senior officials of ***Territory & UK Governments*** need regular briefings from ***NGOs and other local ecological experts*** on threats to ecosystems (including from natural disasters), legal commitments, local biodiversity issues, progress on existing restoration projects, and opportunities for future work.

Main topic 6: Nature-based solutions for the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration: Marine

Urgent Issue No 1: Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD)

6.01. C: Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) was detected in TCI in 2019, and has spread throughout the archipelago as well as regionally to other UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) including British Virgin Islands and Cayman Islands, and has been reported from Montserrat. It is a fast moving, lethal disease (average of 80% colony mortality within highly susceptible species within a small number of weeks) and is reducing the viability and functionality of coral reef systems. This poses risks to blue economies, biodiversity, livelihoods, tourism and climate resilience of affected Caribbean UKOTs.

6.02. C: The Turks & Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF) has been monitoring SCTLD since 2019, with recording of up to 90% success rate across multiple coral species using rigorous citizen-based science, and support and build SCTLD expertise within network of Caribbean UKOTs. The report outlined the seriousness of the threat, the need to follow best science in treatment of the disease and the urgent need for funding.

6.03. R: To enable ecosystem restoration, ***Caribbean UKOT governments and NGOs*** need to consider establishment of land-based facilities to grow stony corals to preserve genetic samples and eventual repopulation of reefs (environmental conditions permitting), learning lessons from established best practice within Caribbean UKOTs and the region, and ***UK Government and other funders*** need to support.

6.04. R: ***Caribbean UKOT Governments and partners*** yet to observe SCTLD should develop monitoring systems specifically focusing on two of the most highly susceptible species; *Meandrina meandrites* (Maze coral) and *Dendrogyra cylindrus* (Pillar coral), or whichever of the highly susceptible species are most common in the particular area.

6.05. R: Actions of NGOs which deliver important conservation work and support territories in meeting management objectives ***should be acknowledged, supported and enabled by local and UK governments***. Partnerships, either informal or via Memoranda of Understanding or Co-operation are often effective, both for under-resourced NGOs and Government Environment Departments.

6.06. R: ***UK Government/UKOTs/UKOTCF and partner organisations*** need to explore opportunities for strengthening existing SCTLD expertise in Caribbean UKOTs and promoting local and regional collaboration immediately.

Urgent Issue No 2: Extending the Blue Belt Programme

6.07. C: Since 2016, UK Government's Blue Belt Programme has worked with UKOT departments, local communities, NGOs and civil society to support protection and sustainable management of more than 4.2 million sq. km across the waters of Ascension Island, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Pitcairn Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, British Indian Ocean Territory and British Antarctic Territory. Funding for this initiative is set to expire in March 2021, risking turning these sites into an international network of 'paper parks,' while also preventing the expansion of the programme to other UKOTs.

6.08. R: **UK Government** must urgently commit funding to support the continuation and expansion of the Blue Belt Programme in 2021-22, and ensure the programme is fully-financed for the remaining years of the current parliament (decision required immediately).

- This will provide marine managers from the Blue Belt UKOTs the necessary financial and technical support to bring about effective and locally-led protection and sustainable management of their large-scale MPAs.
- Expansion of the Blue Belt Programme to other UKOTs where required could be critical in supporting post-Covid recovery. Safeguarding vital biodiversity and enabling ecosystem recovery will sustain blue economies of tourism and fishing, enable sequestration of 'blue carbon', and improve Territories' climate resilience against increasingly frequent and stronger extreme weather events.

Restoration of Marine Ecosystems

6.09. C: With the continuation of deteriorating ecosystems, there are a number of common barriers to enabling ecosystem restoration, including variously financial/technical infrastructure resources, planning, stakeholder engagement, remoteness of locations, poor legislation and limited enforcement. Focusing on the nature of ecosystem restoration can provide solutions to improving restoration efforts.

6.10. R: In better planning ecosystem restoration projects, **project managers** should:

- Take an ecosystem approach to determine inter-linked issues rather than solving a singular issue. This may elicit an underlying unknown problem that needs resolving first to build a better foundation to successful restoration of an ecosystem. *Example from BVI - Cane Garden Bay has experienced beach erosion; education and awareness have been key issues, with implementation of rain gardens used as a small solution to these issues.*
- Where possible, build on historical and successfully completed projects to see what outstanding problems still exist. If the project received funding in the past, there is a track record with something to build upon. *Example from BVI – The [TCOT Project](#) (2004) & [Sustaining Turtles, Environments, Economies & Livelihoods Project](#) (2020-23)*
- Redesign a project as though it were a business in which you have to better communicate, market, negotiate and sell the overall goal of the project to "buyers" - *Example from BVI - [The Turtle Encounters Project](#)*

Engaging stakeholders in Marine Ecosystems Restoration

6.11 C: Through the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme (BOPP), the Government of Bermuda, in partnership with the Waitt Institute and the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences, is developing a comprehensive ocean plan for Bermuda's 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone. One of the Programme's main goals is to develop a Marine Spatial Plan (MSP) which will minimize conflict among ocean-users, manage the Island's marine resources, and designate 20% of Bermuda's EEZ as a network of no-take marine protected areas (MPAs). Group facilitators were vital. It took concentrated efforts to engage stakeholders, with one-on-one engagement often necessary. The model employed worked well for those sectors with known users but was challenging for recreational activities, particular where there were no associations or clubs in which to seek members.

6.12. C: Overarching models of stakeholder engagement may not fit all sectors, especially for recreational activities, so multiple approaches are necessary; social networking may be useful; and flexibility is key.

6.13 C: Management of Marine Protected Areas will require adapting spatial planning paradigms developed in terrestrial and coastal settings to enable necessary and effective management.

Main topic 7: Funding mechanisms – tourism and alternatives

Alternatives to Tourism

7.01. R: Many territories are offshore finance centres with the benefit of resident financial experts but this has not been pursued to advise on sustainable financing for protected areas. The Territories should capitalise on this industry to assist with the creation and management of endowment funds. Case studies include the Bahamas Protected Areas Fund, which was created in 2014 to ensure sustainable financing.

<https://bahamasprotected.com/> (*Territory governments*)

7.02. R: **Territory governments** should increase national expenditure on protected area management; this could be funded by the creation of an environment levy. At present BVI charges a Tourism and Environment tax which is paid only by tourists upon entry, but this does not include cruise-ship passengers, due to pre-existing fee agreements that are for set terms. If every resident in the BVI paid just \$50 annually, at 30,000 people that would be \$1,500,000! The rationale is that the environment provides many ecosystem services that benefit the entire community.

<https://bvi.gov.vg/media-centre/environmental-levy-takes-effect-september-1>

7.03. R: **Territory Governments** should establish a dedicated Conservation Fund, which could include also elements of the funds noted above in 7.01 and 7.02, and grants should be approved and recommended by an independent board, with majority representation from civil society bodies experienced and actively involved in conservation. (This could be linked to the value of natural systems and the impact of natural disasters, and cite previous examples). (**Territory governments; NGOs**)

7.04. R: **Commercial enterprises** should contribute each time a protected area or threatened species appears in their adverts in order to raise money for protected area conservation, where the properly interpreted outreach education value does not provide such contribution.

7.05. R: **UK government** could forgive debts of the UKOTs by debt-for-nature swaps while mandating local investment in protected areas. This applies to UKOTs where UK loans have been issued, for example disaster relief loans after the 2017 hurricane season.

7.06. R: While ensuring core-funding is maintained, UK grants must provide funds for research/development, fulfilling international agreements signed *etc* and non-profit organisations doing the work on the ground. (**UK government**)

Rethinking Tourism

7.07. C: Deep, authentic and lasting community engagement is crucial to sustaining communities and sustainable tourism. Clear understanding of the value of sustainable tourism by the local community, the government, the travel industry, NGOs, and other stakeholders is critical when sites become over-reliant on tourism. Recognition should be given for the work our conservation organisations do to reinvest tourism-related revenue in social and environmental projects for the public-good, and the need to help these organisations to be resilient. Changes to the local economy that expand the financial base and support protection will require government cooperation.

7.08. C: Strategic plans developed with the expectation that tourism visits would continue at pre-Covid-19 levels and trends will require adjustment.

7.09. R: **NGOs working in and for the territories and territory governments** should come together to develop cross-territory sustainable tourism guidelines/certification programme for tourism operators (for example, dive operators, tour guides, *etc.*), and take advantage of the IUCN publication *Guidelines on development in sensitive areas*. Such a certification programme will have wide recognition and could prove to be more successful than single-territory certification schemes. NGOs can play a key role in building capacity and training. There are already case-study projects in this area which could trigger this process, but crucially we need to look at how to rebuild sustainable tourism in the light of Covid and developing models and putting NGOs in a key position in tourism delivery over the next few years. (**NGOs, Territory Governments and Potential Funders**)

Can UK Government grant-funding be made more effective for UKOT conservation?

7.10. R: Where **UK government agencies** are undertaking work in UKOTs, they should be more open to speaking with other stakeholders, especially NGOs, in order to avoid duplication of efforts, and they should recognise that local bodies do not have spare capacity and need their work in the project to be built into project budgets.

7.11. R: Local knowledge is essential in project-development and grant decisions. UK Government agencies were not funded by earlier UK Government grant funds for UKOT conservation, but they are now. **UK Government** needs to reverse its recent tendency to divert the use of traditional sources of grant-funding from cost-effective and experienced local and supporting UK NGO bodies to support instead UK government agencies and institutions, some of which are not experienced with some territory situations, however experienced they may be generally, and pay more regard to experience and proven success in the UKOTs, especially NGOs. **UK Government** should revert to concentrating grant-funding on conservation

bodies in the UKOTs and their umbrella body, with less to other UK bodies, with less knowledge of UKOTs, such as research institutions and consultancies. This would also be more cost-effective.

7.12. R: Greater readiness is needed to fund projects which need to take place in stages over several years, even if individual grants need to be limited to only 2 or 3 years. (*UK Government; other funders*)

7.13. R: Funding is needed for small projects (and, if these are too time-expensive for *UK Government* to manage, provide modest funding for an NGO to manage cost-effectively for them).

7.14. R: Funding is required for the necessary support work that UKOTCF has struggled to keep going without *UK Government* support (e.g. collation and reviews of progress in implementing international Conventions, including Aichi Targets and Environment Charter commitments; inter-territory liaison/collaboration, including periodic conferences for conservation practitioners; facilitation of international designations).

7.15. R: *UK Government* funding applications need to be less bureaucratic and repetitive, and consideration of projects should not take many months more than the time for application preparation. The assessments should be by those with UKOT project-running experience and not based on box-checking scores.

Funding models for remote UKOTs

7.16. C: Other potential funding models should be explored:

- Blue carbon
- Bonds based on natural capital/biodiversity

The endowment fund model is particularly suitable for remote islands which want to have an MPA, but cannot necessarily fund it through eco-tourism and entry fees.

Main topic 8: Plugging the gap: innovative approaches and capacity-building

8.01. C: Lack of capacity is a continuing handicap to implementing biodiversity conservation in the territories. The loss of skilled people, exacerbated by the churn of two- or three-year projects or funding cycles, hampers a sustainable, long-term approach to conservation. Conservation remains poorly funded in the territories. The end of access to EU funding will potentially worsen the situation.

8.02. R: Biodiversity management should be established as a permanent cycle into which projects fit. A purely project- or programme-based approach risks unacceptable churn rates; any projects within the cycle run by regional or wider organisations should ensure data, research and know-how should be owned by the territories themselves. (*UK and territory governments; other funders; NGOs*)

8.03. C: Access to available funding can require detailed and labour-intensive applications. The development of adequate technical capacity to formulate persuasive applications in a highly competitive environment is essential. Augmenting local capacity through regional and wider institutions, whether government or third sector, is essential, though that should not be at the cost of developing and maintaining capacity within the territories. Competition, even among and within UKOTs, for the same small pot of money results in many losing out, particularly those who lack the technical capacity adequately to seek funding, and many needs going unmet. NGOs, such as UKOTCF, can provide a critical role providing technical assistance to territories to help access funds and can help the evolution of networks within the territories and dependencies themselves, as well as at a regional and global level.

8.04. C: Most territories have a strong volunteer ethos, developed from school onwards. The role of civil society in conservation is vital. But that does not mean the burden of conservation work should fall on the voluntary sector, and there should be career options for those wanting to pursue careers in conservation/green jobs.

8.05. C: Innovative approaches and new technologies, such as using UVAs/drones in remote areas, give access to new data, can reduce the people-hours needed, and can provide quick data-collection across various terrains and allow for access to data after expeditions. Provided that this is part of well-designed work, resulting in proper analyses, this could reduce costs, and training in these should be available for conservation workers across all territories.

8.06. C: The continued development of research and higher education establishments across the territories, which extend and strengthen research capacity, should be seen as a key element of conservation efforts;

8.07. C: Capacity-building in areas of surveying, monitoring, data analysis, data-management and science communication are key to meeting the needs identified in 4.13 and 4.14. True capacity-building is not just training – it is retaining the knowledge gained from the training within the organisation, as well as keeping the trained person in post/involved in the programme.

8.08. C: Continuity should be striven for. Long-term data-sets using the same methods year-after-year, even the same people doing the survey, are incredibly valuable.

8.09: C: The underlying social and cultural issues that contribute to conservation concerns are often not obvious. Developing in-territory people to lead on projects is more effective than importing consultants for this reason. Partnerships between overseas experts working in territories and local organisations who can provide guidance is crucial. (links to Topic 3)

8.10. R: Further development of volunteer work will be vital in overcoming capacity gaps. Volunteers should feel valued, and encouraged and supported in producing high quality practical outputs as well as citizen science work. This will require funding, and the development of suitable management structures. (**UK Government and other funders**)

8.11. R: Integration of citizen-science can increase community engagement with conservation management by enabling direct involvement in the management process. A topic of significance beyond the territory concerned (*e.g.* pollinators) can increase external buy-in, and enhance the project's status more widely. (**Conservation bodies**)

8.12. R: Projects designed from the outset with structured student and volunteer participation can enable/unlock long-term opportunities for both participants and the organisation running the project. The inclusion of experienced volunteers, or those able to make a long-term commitment (so that they can learn on-the-job), has been shown to deliver long-term conservation objectives. (**Conservation bodies**)

8.13. R: The incorporation of citizen-science in projects requires careful management, and recognition that, to be of value, it can be resource-intensive. Managers under time-pressure may well prefer to do something themselves rather than to train, monitor and correct volunteers. But this must be balanced against the need for capacity-building, and appropriate resources should be built into projects to enable that. A system of 'quick response' volunteers can be valuable. Develop territory-specific needs list (as some territories and UKOTCF have been working on), rather than 'cookie-cutter' capacity-building, as territory needs differ. It can be better to use a few well-trained volunteers with focus, commitment and special skills. (**Conservation bodies**)

8:14. R: Keeping focus on core goals and what decision-makers need (ask them what they need), rather than necessarily outreach products, art, and purely academic research, is key if the work is to really contribute to change – *i.e.* through policy, changes in behaviour, legislation etc. (**Conservation bodies**)

8:15. R: Be realistic from the outset about your current and future capacity to run programmes and projects. Can your work only ever be a 2-year project staffed by volunteers? Work within your means (including voluntary ones). (**Conservation bodies**)

8.16. R: Linking organisations help the UKOTs/CDs make the best use of science and other information for decision-making, when local government or NGO staff may lack technical expertise in the focus area. Whilst the UK government has international responsibility for environmental issues in the UK Overseas Territories (House of Commons Audit Committee 2013), in practice that responsibility is devolved to the territories themselves. There is, therefore, little or no overall coordination, or mechanism for sharing expertise. The absence of any coordinated approach to environmental work means that a territory can waste resources in addressing problems to which solutions have been found elsewhere, and can fail to identify issues which others have seen as priorities. The further development of a loose, consultative structure of mutually-reinforcing institutions, along the lines of the UKOTCF with its regional working groups, is a priority. Further support and recognition by UK government, as well as territory governments, would help. (**UK & territory governments; NGOs**)