



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 – extract of recommendations to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

In this document, 'UKOTs' means UK Overseas Territories, 'CDs' means Crown Dependencies, and 'territories' means UKOTs & CDs. The paragraph number (from the full document) and 'R:' precedes 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

1.03. 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.

1.10. 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*)

1.12. 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

2.05. 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.

2.10. 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.

Main topic 3: Facilitating local leads in conservation

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.

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

Education, Awareness and the role of Natural Capital

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*)

4.04. 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*)

Legislation, EIAs and Policy

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

Expertise/ Data

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*)

4.16. 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

4.21. 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 infrastructure 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*)

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

Restoration: Terrestrial

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*)

5.05. 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*)

5.09. 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*)

5.15. 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)

6.03. 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 SCTLTD 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.

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

Restoration of Marine Ecosystems

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](#)*

Main topic 7: Funding mechanisms – tourism and alternatives

Alternatives to Tourism

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*)

Rethinking Tourism

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*)

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

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*)

8.11. 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*)