



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 Territory Governments

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.

1.04. 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.

1.10. 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

2.03. 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.

2.05. 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.

2.08. 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*)

2.10. 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.

3.11. 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*).

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

4.07. 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*)

4.10. 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

4.14. 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

4.17. 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*)

4.20. 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 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*)

5.06. 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*)

5.09. 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.

5.15. 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 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.

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*)

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*)

8.16. 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*)