



## 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 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### Conclusions and recommendations – extract of recommendations to UK Government

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.

1.07. 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.

1.09. 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.

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

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.

2.05. 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.

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**

3.02. 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*)

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

### **Legislation, EIAs and Policy**

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*)

### **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*)

4.23. 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**

5.06. 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.

5.11. 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.

6.05. 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**

6.08. 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.

## **Main topic 7: Funding mechanisms – tourism and alternatives**

### **Alternatives to Tourism**

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*)

### **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.

## **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*)

8.10. 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*)

8.16. 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*)