



UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island entities

By Zoom

13th to 16th October 2025

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. At each UKOTCF conference (from 1999) participants have been encouraged to contribute towards conclusions and recommendations. Some of the uses of these include, but are not limited to:

- Advising on UK reports to CoPs of international conventions etc
- UK Parliamentary inquiries and spending reviews relating to the UKOTs and CDs
- UK calls for evidence on matters relating to UKOTs & CDs
- Provision of briefings on UKOT/CD matters including to UK MPs, Ministers, officials etc
- Funding bids requiring background and scene-setting
- Encouraging funding from other sources
- Communications material based on conference (e.g. newsletters, blogs, websites etc)
- Informing UKOTCF's own actions and those of other organisations/institutions

Starting from a blank page at the conference would not make the best use of time. Instead, the conference is used as an opportunity to share work, discuss ideas and provide a critical mass of persons coming together to highlight progress and opportunities while at the same time providing a clear summary of achievements, future needs etc. Over the past 20 years, our conferences have evolved to meet these and other needs.

Through its own work, including working groups, meetings, projects, preparing publications etc, UKOTCF maintains contact with those working on environmental matters in the UKOTs and CDs between conferences.

For our last couple of conferences, UKOTCF recruited

voluntary teams, one for each topic, to draft conclusions for that topic. Copies of an evolving series of these drafts were widely circulated in the months before the conference and the comments used to refine the drafts. As a consequence, the final draft could be approved rapidly at the conference.

This year's topics were developed via consultations within the UKOTCF network over the last couple of years. The recommendations are grouped under the topics, in the order that we expect the topics to be addressed in the conference.

This year, we have streamlined further this process of developing recommendations, by having one team to develop recommendations across all topics. The drafting team includes UKOTCF Council members and other senior officers, together with others invited to bring in a full range of territories and wider expertise. We invited persons from almost all territories, and acceptances meant that the final team included persons from Ascension, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Isle of Man, Jersey, Montserrat, St Helena, Sark, Turks & Caicos Islands, as well as some who had worked in Alderney, Anguilla, British Antarctic Territory, Cayman Islands, Chagos Islands, Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, Guernsey, Pitcairn Islands, South Georgia and Tristan da Cunha. These included personnel from government, NGOs and other conservation practitioners.

This year, we aimed to limit the total number of recommendations to about 20, and rather fewer addressed to any one category of organisations.

In June 2025, we circulated this draft to everyone registered for the conference since registrations had opened in April 2025, for comment. A second draft, taking account of all comments, was circulated for comment in early August to all by-then registered. A third draft, taking account of the few further comments affecting only small points in two draft recommendations, was circulated for comment in early September to all by then registered, and again in late September to all who had registered since the first circulation of this draft. The

fourth draft, dealing with these comments, was circulated to all by-then registered in the conference booklet, in early October, over a week before the conference. No comments were received on this.

Confirmation of the acceptability of the recommendations was confirmed in the relevant sessions of the conference.

We thank the drafting team and all those who commented in any of the rounds of consultations.

The recommendations sought to draw consensus from the conference participants 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 online discussions 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. The main target-type of each recommendation is in bold italics.

Recommendations

Main topic 1: Sharing Experiences across territories

A. Territories are advised to learn lessons from each other in techniques for conservation, and to develop closer conservation-based relationships with neighbouring countries – to encourage shared learning and technical exchanges. [*Conservation workers and authorities in Territories*]

B. NGOs and their networks are important to UK Government because they help deliver its international commitments, through expert help with some issues that UK Government may lack the capacity to address alone. FCDO is advised to re-strengthen its relationship with NGOs and partners working with the UKOTs, including UKOTCF which, for example, it used to invite, alongside other territory and umbrella bodies, to brief Governors-designate and FCDO's own personnel, and to networking events such as linked to the annual Joint Ministerial Council. [*UK Government*]

Topic 3: Achieving Biodiversity & Sustainability targets

C. Conference asks UK Government: to ensure that it consults official and NGO bodies in the UKOTs and CDs at the start in planning conservation policies, rather than at the end when positions are already firm and time short;

and to invite and support UKOT and CD representation as part of UK delegations to COPs. [*UK Government*]

D. Policy mechanisms that recognise formally, and incorporate, local expertise and community-generated data into environmental governance frameworks, ensuring that conservation actions are contextually appropriate and socially inclusive, should be supported. Biodiversity and sustainability targets should be clear, concise, meaningful, tailored to the situation, but be mindful of broader, international targets. When governments develop new policy, whether Multilateral Environmental Agreements or Local Biodiversity Action Plans, accurate targets can help to ensure that the policy delivers what it is intended to do, and fit-for-purpose monitoring protocols are needed also. Policy development should consider also the reporting requirements as most territories have little capacity for lengthy and time-consuming reporting. [*UK & Territory Governments*]

E. Any project should have a range of targets, including those which are specific to project outcomes, but which also prompt the organisation to ensure that delivery is being achieved, funding is sufficient, that policies are appropriate and that senior management has a stake in the outcome. Targets should be ambitious, but achievable without overly relying on factors outside of the control of the practitioner. Where partnerships exist, targets should assign clear responsibility to the person(s) or organisation(s) who are responsible for delivery. Appropriate budgets (where applicable) should be set, over a multi-year time-scale (when long-term targets are set) to ensure delivery over an extended period of time. Funding for staff must be sufficient to ensure longevity and continuity of staff through the duration of the targets. This ensures that projects do not fail due to poor planning and resource-provision. [Project-managers and their senior colleagues]

F. Territories should ensure that they know which of their species and habitats need protecting and recovery/restoration and, ideally, all endemic species should be IUCN Red-listed. All at-risk species and habitats should at least be integrated fully into National Biodiversity Strategies or, ideally, have focused individual Action Plans/Strategies that are adequately resourced. To achieve this, Territories should have sufficient baseline-data, covering species of animals and plants, habitats and land-ownership. [*Territory Governments*]

G. UK and Territory governments should provide the financial resources and other support necessary to acquire good data and maintain good records of species, habitats, threats and applied conservation work in the Territories. [*UK and Territory governments*]

H. For Territory residents to be able to invest in alternative energy, green-energy equipment needs to be affordable; so Territory Governments need to incentivise this and reduce tax on these imported products. [*Territory Governments*]

I. Our Territories are so small that blue-carbon has been seen to be a better option than some others, but quantifying suitable areas through mapping projects is required first and then there is the need for ongoing monitoring to assure that these sites are still performing as suitable blue-carbon sites – so resources must be allocated to this. *[UK & Territory Governments]*

J. Island and ecosystem restoration programmes should be highlighted as currently one of the most important conservation measures. It should also be highlighted that effective restoration can be extremely complex and requires a long-term commitment of funding, staff-capacity, resources and monitoring. *[Conservation-managers, NGOs and governments]*

Topic 5: Using technology and data to guide conservation

K. Conference notes some Territories' success in using technology to overcome some challenges in conservation, including: remote sensing, satellite-imagery and drones, particularly with the addition of multispectral image-processing to help management of protected areas, including identification of land-clearance monitoring and ecosystem-health (e.g. spread of invasive species or plant-disease); and DNA to identify unknown plant-species. Environmental DNA (eDNA) and bioacoustic surveys have the potential to be useful in conducting more routine biodiversity-monitoring or biosecurity-surveillance. *[Territory governments and NGO land-managers]*

L. Conference notes successes in the deployment of conservation detection dogs across the UKOTs, expanding on work started in South Georgia. Uses include avoiding arrival of invasive species, and finding nest-sites of critically endangered species, such as rock iguana and sea turtles (in Cayman) so that hatchlings can be placed in protected facilities until mature enough to resist predation. Thermal drones are also a new technology that can assist with tracking animals, particularly those that form colonies – but in hot countries there are challenges with the heat-signals and the ground temperature, so more work in this area is needed. *[Conservation-managers]*

M. Use of combined approaches gets the most out of available data, showing the value of sharing data and technical expertise to add value to analyses and give long-term benefits. Technological advancements make more accessible novel approaches, such as genomic tools and spatial modelling. Care should be taken when introducing novel techniques as they may be complementary to traditional monitoring rather than a replacement methodology. Side-by-side validation can help determine whether new technology provides consistent results in long-term monitoring. *[Conservation-managers]*

Topic 6: Identifying and preparing for future challenges and opportunities

N. Horizon-scanning for potential known and novel threats has been undertaken and may continue to be useful for governments and NGOs *[Territory governments and NGOs]*

O. Knowledge-sharing of current problems, future risks and support opportunities between governments and with NGOs and neighbouring countries is essential to learn from experience and best practice. *[Territory governments and NGOs]*

P. Emergency funding for active responses to critical threats, whether from invasive non-native species, natural disasters and or human or animal pathogens should be identified and provided ahead of any real-time issues or in the immediate aftermath. Known challenges, e.g. resilience to sea-level rise, and adaptation to extreme heat-events, such as the impacts of climate-change, must be addressed before they reach problematic levels. *[UK & territory governments]*

Q. Governments, including with corporate funds, should be forward-planning for opportunities to restore nature, including opportunities such as strategic land-purchases for nature reserves, to linking existing sites through the development of habitat-corridors; they should ensure that new development does not compromise existing good practice, including by purchase of private land in Protected Areas to return this to public ownership, or preferably, to the inalienable ownership afforded in National Trust Ordinances where these apply. This idea can be expanded to incorporate networks of protected areas for terrestrial conservation as well as for linking Marine Protected Areas. *[Territory governments]*

R. Good climate-models are powerful tools when designing, managing and communicating the importance of protected areas. Their use can help maintain the biodiversity of the islands for the future. Sharing data and information across projects can increase greatly the robustness of the models. Modelling climate-change can be very helpful by looking at historical data and predictions within a very local scale – so real change can be seen across small islands and then identifying what ecosystem-services areas are providing, then using this as a justification for protection as national parks or for development restrictions. This can be cross-referenced with local weather-data and ground-truthed satellite-imagery. *[Territory governments]*

Topic 7: Resourcing Conservation

S. As agreed in the Environment Charters, the UK Government must support the UKOTs in: joining UK's ratification of international environmental agreements protecting species and ecosystems; reaching international targets for biodiversity including the Global Biodiversity Framework Targets (GBF) and the Sustainable

Development Goals in UKOTs and CDs; the designation and management of Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance and World Heritage Sites; and in shared high ambitions in combating and adapting to climate-change. Attention is drawn to the inability of CDs to benefit from UK-sourced funding. **[UK Government]**

T. Conference asks that both the Darwin Plus and Blue Belt funding programmes be maintained (the latter with increased open access by non-government organisations that provide so much technical and practical support) as, without these, nature conservation in the UKOTs would be extremely restricted. Even with the maintenance of these schemes, sources of conservation funding for the UKOTs remain limited compared to the UK. Therefore, Conference also strongly recommends: the establishment of an equivalent “Green-Dot” funding scheme for the conservation of terrestrial wildlife (which includes most UKOT endemics); open access to Lottery funding for UKOT conservation projects; and exploring opportunities to support research through UK Research Institute (UKRI) funding. **[UK Government]**

U. UK Government is asked to reduce bureaucracy in the environmental project application process and make some criteria less rigid to take account of the very different situations of the UKOTs. UK Government is also asked to extend support for building on projects that are proving successful, rather than requiring funded projects to be totally innovative. Also, territories have pointed out that the time-limit of one year, or less, of Darwin Local grants does not allow for the time-scales needed for decisions in UKOTs (many of which follow UK slow practices of former decades). A restoration is needed of support for umbrella and networking bodies of which UKOT and CD bodies are members/associates, e.g. by funding conferences organised by umbrella bodies as well as crucial networking (on par with EU COST actions and to which UKOTs now have limited access). **[UK Government]**

V. Corporate businesses and conservation NGOs are encouraged to use tools for example, EcoMatch, so that environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments can be met by effective conservation actions in support of the most internationally important biodiversity for which UK and its Territories are responsible. **[Corporate businesses and conservation NGOs]**

W. Generating revenue from services has potential - park rentals for events, filming and photography, and a range of products and merchandise, including clothing, water-bags, stuffed toys etc. Branding items also market the organisation’s image and unique species and habitats. **[Territory NGOs]**

X. Conference advises all to remain alert to the pressures on ministers and officials in those several territories whose main source of government income is from taxes accruing from the built development of land; and that this can be a perverse incentive against implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and environmental conservation, despite the natural environment being a key asset supporting the economies. **[UK and Territory Governments and NGOs]**

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