



PRESS RELEASE

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Environment Ministers from the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies meet to plan for the future of their wildlife post-Brexit

Representatives from 11 UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs) from as far afield as Bermuda, Pitcairn and the British Virgin Islands travelled to the Channel Island of Alderney to discuss the future of the environment in their jurisdictions, and 2 others joined by conference call. The event was co-ordinated by non-governmental organisation the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) and was hosted by the Government of Alderney, one of the smallest of the UK's Crown Dependencies. Delegates were formally greeted on Wednesday evening and Tuesday morning by the island's president Stuart Trought at the Braye Beach Hotel and Island Hall.

The meeting, on 27th and 28th April, tackled a diverse range of issues including the potential impacts of Brexit and the subsequent changes to UK laws, through to climate change and the need to share the limited resources available to these often-isolated territories.

The UKOTs and Crown Dependencies all have their own identity and governing structure, with no representation in the UK Parliament; however they all form part of the nation-state of the UK. The exact relationship between the UK Overseas Territories (UKOT) and the Crown Dependencies (CDs) with the UK differs for each, though the UK is generally responsible for defence, international relations including international conventions, and also reserve powers in respect to their legislation. Combined, the UKOTs and CDs are home to a far greater concentration of endemic (found nowhere else) and endangered species than any other part of the UK. There are thought to be over 100,000 native species, 300 of which are thought to be endemic species restricted to a single location.

This is only the second meeting of its kind, the first having been hosted by the Government of Gibraltar in 2015. The aim of the meeting is to develop the benefits of joint and collaborative working, and discuss common priorities and approaches to negotiations with the UK Government.

The meeting was chaired jointly by Victor Brownlees, Alderney's Chief Executive, and Dr John Cortés, Minister for the Environment of Gibraltar. The meeting has been made possible by the work of the UKOTCF, a UK-based NGO dedicated to ensuring conservation across these far-flung



jurisdictions. The event was co-ordinated on island by the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT), UKOTCF associate and the 47th member of the British Wildlife Trusts partnership. Delegates also had an opportunity to discover the wildlife of the island, including a close up visit to the most southerly colonies of the northern Gannet in the British Isles and the largest puffin colony remaining in the English Channel.

Alderney, a community of just 1900 residents, offered to host the meeting in recognition of the need to improve communication between the UK's remote outlying communities. The Islands resident's welcomed the delegates and hosted the ministers and on Thursday evening at an informal dinner in the grounds of a Roman Fort known as the Nunnery which sits on the Island's South Eastern coast, the nearest point of the British Isles to the Continental mainland just eight miles away.

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Dr John Cortes, Minister for the Environment, Energy and Climate Change, said: "The meeting proved extremely useful in ensuring that the different territories share experiences and coordinate efforts in moving the environmental agenda forward cohesively."

Victor Brownlees (Alderney's CEO) said of the importance of the meeting "We were delighted to welcome our friends and colleagues from the UK Overseas Territories and fellow Crown Dependencies. That Alderney is the host of such a high level meeting is a measure of the importance we as a community attach to preserving our distinct and special island home. I enjoyed sharing experiences and learning how we can work even more closely together across the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in preserving and celebrating our distinct environmental heritages."

Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chair UKOTCF commented "UKOTCF is the only body solely concerned with conservation and environmentally sustainable use across all UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Especially in our 30th anniversary year, we were honoured to have been asked by Territory governments to organise the meeting, as a result of these years of bringing conservation practitioners together to pool resources and share experiences. We congratulate Alderney for hosting it in a fantastic setting for holding 2 days of discussions. UK and its family of territories should be proud of striving to fulfil their world responsibilities for protecting this uniquely important heritage."

Notes to Editors

Some points discussed

A full statement is being checked by the delegates, but some of the points discussed include:

Environmental coordination and access to international conventions

- The environment is the lifeblood for many Territories.
- Some UKOTs/CDs may be small in terms of population, but not in terms of environmental value. There are increasing pressures of climate change, habitat-loss and human-



introduced invasive species on the unique species and ecosystems depending on the UKOTs/CDs.

- Regarding matters concerning the environment, it can be hard to pin down the Departments and individuals in UK Government who should be consulted. Rapid Ministerial changes further aggravate the situation. UKOTs/CDs need better coordinated responses from HMG, improved access to green finance, and access to international environmental international conventions, such as the Paris Agreement on climate.
- Environmental consequences for the territories of UK leaving the European Union
- Dealing with 'Brexit' takes up time and diverts governments from their own programmes. This applies also to UK Government. Dealing financially with 'Brexit' has an indirect impact on the environment by diverting money away.
- 'Brexit' is not an excuse to put everything on hold – there is no excuse for stopping environmental protection.
- Funding
- A number of good projects have been funded by UK Government, but the concern is the direction of travel in terms of allocation of funding in relation to priorities, which are better assessed by people who know the Territories.
- There are various sources of funding which need to be explored further, but EU funding for UKOT conservation must be replaced.
- Sharing resources and knowledge; environment and physical planning
- Using the Environment Minister meeting structure is a starting point – together, CDs/OTs can work on planning common strategies and targets.
- Sharing knowledge and intelligence is hugely important and further ways to do this must be found. The UKOTCF-organised conferences of conservation practitioners, most recently in Gibraltar in 2015, are valuable and need to continue.
- UKOT/CDs are able to react to things much faster than larger jurisdictions.

Climate Change

- The commitments under the agreement are there and this is something that the UKOTs/CDs should be actively looking to. They must join forces and get out there and make their voices louder, and learn from each other as well. They need to send a strong message of what they can contribute to the overall picture together.
- Young people in particular understand the environment, and governments must be encouraged to push the environment side of things for them as the future. Raising awareness



generally is key and one needs to give people a way to buy in.

For further information, please contact - Roland Gauvain (+44(0) 7781 415 468 / manager@alderneywildlife.org) or UKOTCF Chairman Mike Pienkowski (+44(0) 777 8841 233 / m@pienkowski.org)

List of Ministers and other lead representatives attending

Dr Richard Axton, Chairman of Council, La Société Sercquaise, on behalf of Sark Agriculture and Environment Committee of the Chief Pleas [Administration] of Sark

Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK, Minister of Environment, Food & Agriculture, Isle of Man

Deputy Barry Brehaut, President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure, States of Guernsey

Mr Victor Brownlees, Chief Executive, States of Alderney

Mr Chris Carnegy, UK Representative Tristan da Cunha, on behalf of the Island Council

Mrs Michele Christian, Divisional Manager, Environmental, Conservation & Natural Resources, Government of Pitcairn

Hon. Dr John Cortés, Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy & Climate Change, Gibraltar

Hon. Claude Hogan, Minister of Agriculture & Environment, Montserrat

Deputy Steven Luce, Minister for the Environment, Jersey

Hon. Kedrick D Pickering MD, Deputy Premier & Minister for Natural Resources & Labour, British Virgin Islands

MLA Michael Poole, Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Falkland Islands (remotely)

Hon. Sylvan Richards MP, Minister of Environment, Government of Bermuda

Councillor Mrs Pamela Ward Pearce, Chairman of Environment & Natural Resources Committee, St Helena (remotely)

(A technical fault prevented the remote participation of Mrs Michelle Fulford Gardiner, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Tourism, Environment, Heritage and Culture, Turks & Caicos Islands)

N.b. Alderney, its islets and waters contain more than 2% of the World's northern gannet population, nationally important populations of seabirds including storm petrel and numerous UK scarce or rare species of flora including large areas of heathlands and fauna including over 800 species of moth.