



PRESS RELEASE

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Territories Take up Oceans, Plastics and More

Minister for Environment and Climate Change John Cortes has co-chaired a meeting of the Council of Environment Ministers of the U.K. Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies held in Douglas on the Isle of Man. The meeting was hosted by the Isle of Man Government, whose Minister for Environment the Hon Geoffrey Boot co-chaired the two-day meeting.

Thirteen territories were represented, and discussed a wide range of issues centring around the Environment. These included Climate Change, severe weather events, sustainable development, biodiversity, renewable energy, funding, Brexit, plastic pollution and the protection of the oceans.

The Council was joined on the second day by officials from three U.K. Government departments, including Mr Ben Merrick, Director Overseas Territories at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Dr Gemma Harper, Deputy Director for Marine from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and Mr Huw Davis, Deputy Head of UNFCCC Negotiations representing the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Dr Therese Coffey, joined the meeting by Skype. This was the first time that a UK Minister has directly participated in a meeting of the Council, which was originally set up in Gibraltar in 2015.

The aim of the Council is to bring together Ministers and equivalents and senior officials from all the UK overseas jurisdictions in order to work together to improve environmental governance and sustainable development, and to engage the UK Government as appropriate. Increasingly also, and particularly at this meeting, the role of this collective, with representation from across the globe, in making a difference at a global level, was emphasised. In particular as most of the territories are islands or near-islands, the importance of the oceans was highlighted. The Council agreed to support efforts to reduce plastic pollution, and to promote environmental protection in those British territories that do not have permanent human habitation. These include the British Indian Ocean Territories around Chagos, and in the Atlantic they include South Georgia, the South Sandwich islands, and the British Antarctic territory. Taken together, this gives the UK



responsibility for hundreds of square kilometres of ocean, including some of the world's major coral reefs and a large section of southern ocean.

Considerable progress towards the aims was made at the meeting, including an invitation extended to the Ministers from these territories to contribute towards the UK's position on the environment at the forthcoming Commonwealth Summit in London.

While at the Meeting, the representative from Turks & Caicos, the Hon Minister Ralph Higgs, on behalf of the people of Turks & Caicos, personally thanked the people of Gibraltar, through Minister Cortes, for the help sent to the island at the time of the hurricane at the end of last year.

The event also included a visit to the Isle of Man's Parliament, the Tynwald, and to the Island's Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture.

While on the Isle of Man, Minister Cortes took the opportunity to meet with the Island's Minister for Education, the Hon Graham Cregeen. The Isle of Man is embarked on a school building programme, having recently built a primary school with a comprehensive school to follow, and has recently reviewed its examination system, and so matters of mutual interest were discussed, with the possibility of future exchanges to be explored.

Editors Notes:

1. The meeting was hosted by the Government of the Isle of Man.
2. The Secretariat to the meeting as provided by the UK Overseas Territories conservation Forum (www.ukotcf.org)
3. The Overseas Territories that participated were Bermuda, Turks & Caicos, Montserrat, Gibraltar, Tristan da Cunha, Falkland Islands, Ascension and Pitcairn. The Crown Dependencies were Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark.