Third UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministerial Council Meeting, Isle of Man, February 2018

Statement

1. The Environment Ministers (or their equivalents or representatives) of 13 of the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs/CDs), met in Douglas, Isle of Man, on Tuesday 6th and Wednesday 7th February 2018. This was the third in a series of Environment Ministerial meetings, the first having been held in Gibraltar in 2015, the second held in Alderney in 2017. The territory environment leaders invited UK Government Ministers for the second day of the meeting in order to discuss with them directly a range of topics relating to our precious environments and for them to share in our ambition to protect them for future generations. They were pleased to welcome the presence of senior officers from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, representing their ministers, and for a discussion by remote technology in one session with Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. We thank Mr Geoffrey Boot MHK, Environment Minister of the Isle of Man, for convening and hosting the meeting, Dr John Cortés, Environment Minister of Gibraltar, for continuing to provide support for the meetings as co-chair, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) for helping to organise the meeting, and the Government of the Isle of Man for their hospitality, including excellent meals and a familiarisation tour of relevant areas.

2. Welcoming the presentation on Ramsey Bay, Isle of Man, where collaborative working produced an area which benefits both fisheries and environmental protection, territory environmental leaders recognised that environmental protection generally benefits from economic activity based on this interest, and funding need not always come from grants but may be generated locally.

3. The territory environment leaders welcomed new Ministers and Councillors to their 3rd meeting, to build on the success of the first two meetings of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council, so as to develop further the benefits and economies of joint and collaborative working, and develop common priorities and approaches in discussions with UK Government. They recognised the great range of differences in the economies of individual UKOTs and CDs, but that they have in common extraordinary biodiversity that is a shared responsibility under international conventions – something of which UK and the territories should be proud.

4. Collectively we hold a truly staggering amount of biodiversity, which provides us with many goods and services, e.g. fishing, tourism, storm protection, renewable energy supply. In terms of endemic species (those which occur nowhere else in the world), proportions of other species supported, sensitive ecosystems and threatened species, we hold even greater importance than that of metropolitan Britain. This biodiversity has served to underpin sustainable livelihoods in our inhabited UKOTs/CDs for many generations. Biodiversity provides also the potential to underpin continued and raised living standards and employment in such areas, especially through, for example, sustainable tourism. These natural assets need both safeguarding and management, in order to support the features that provide the attractions on which sustainable tourism can be based, and which also maintain the quality of life and culture of local communities.

5. About 90 endemic species occur in mainland Britain, compared with 3300 known so far in the UKOTs. About 75% of those formally reviewed are globally threatened, and most of those not yet reviewed are likely to be similarly threatened. By including the territories, the United Kingdom's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is the fifth largest in the world, at 6,805,586 km^2. The total reef area inside the UKOTs mapped by the Millennium Mapping Project is 4,712 km^2, making the UK the twelfth largest reef nation of the World[1]. UKOTs support more penguins than any other nation on earth, holding an estimated 36% of the world's population of southern rockhopper penguins and 34% of gentoo penguins[2], as well as several other species. Terrestrial ecosystems include some of the rarest habitat types on the planet. Many are particularly biodiverse, including Montserrat's Centre and Soufriere Hills, and Diana's Peak on St Helena, which holds at least 119 endemic invertebrate species.

6. The Governments of the UKOTs, indicating their commitments to conserve threatened globally important biodiversity and support those communities who wish to continue sustainable livelihoods based on traditional uses of biodiversity, have chosen to be included in various international environmental agreements. Environmental programmes, geared towards supporting effective biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, are vital. As such, UK and UKOT governments agreed a partnership approach to integrating environmental aspects into all sectors via their Environment Charters, signed with the United Kingdom in 2001 or, in one case, approved separately. The Environment Charters arise from the 1999 White Paper *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity* [3] in which the UK Government outlined its expectations for good governance in the Overseas Territories by encouraging these measures, which are needed for the preservation of the environment, the promotion of high standards of financial accountability, respect for human rights and compliance with the rule of law. The 2012 White Paper *The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability*[4] stressed that it built on the 1999 White Paper. We return to this topic later in this statement.

7. The CDs and those few UKOTs without an Environment Charter make essentially the same commitments which arise from international agreements in which they are included. They are committed to protect and enhance biodiversity, with most the CDs having Biodiversity Strategies in place, with accompanying action plans.

8. For these reasons, the territory environment leaders have come together to discuss challenges and to support positive environmental action through this series of Environment Ministerial Council meetings. Since our last meeting, there have been some discussions between some of the leaders of the UKOTs and CDs and the UK Government over 'Brexit'. We have seen unprecedented hurricanes severely impacting on infrastructure, utilities and local economies in several of the UKOTs. External funding for new initiatives to tackle priority natural environment matters that the territory environment leaders have identified previously (see e.g. Statement from Alderney meeting 2017 and recommendations from 2015 Gibraltar conference), e.g. unsustainable development, invasive species and the impacts of climate change, is still a challenge. The EU was a source of considerable funds for some, both in terms of resources, technical advice and funds for infrastructure.

[1] Sheppard, C (Ed.) (2013) Coral Reefs of The United Kingdom Overseas Territories
[2] http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/ukots-stocktake_tcm9-369597.pdf
[3] http://www.ukotcf.org/pdf/WhitePaper99full.pdf
[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/14929/ot-wp-0612.pdf

9. The relationship with the UK is materially different between the UKOTs and the CDs, with the CDs and certain UKOTs not currently expecting UK funding for these matters; therefore, it is important to be clear that the commentary with regard to funding expectations and obligations refers to some UKOT and UK relationships. There is a broad range of financial situations as between the UKOTs.

10. The territory environment leaders welcomed the response received from Lord Ahmad, FCO Minister with responsibility for the UKOTs, following the Alderney meeting in April 2017. The Overseas Territory environment leaders were pleased that he is overseeing an increase in funding for terrestrial and marine projects in the UKOTs through the Darwin Plus programme, other support through the Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CCF) and for continued support for UKOTs in international fora. The Darwin Plus Initiative continues to be one of the only sources of funding available to the UKOTs. The territory environment leaders received a review of progress on the other points raised in their 2017 Statement and the Recommendations of the UKOT/CD Conference in Gibraltar 2015, which the territory environment leaders support. They look forward to UK Government responses

11. The importance of these meetings of Environment Ministers was reiterated in the Joint Ministerial Council meeting in November 2017, which stated: "[…] *We emphasised the importance of work in the Territories on climate change adaptation and mitigation and collaboration between the Territories to share best practice on environmental management and climate change issues, including through the annual meetings of Territory environment ministers*". [5]

UK's Departure from the European Union

12. The UK's exit from the European Union will have a significant impact on many of the UKOTs and CDs. The Overseas Territory leaders have been party to discussions with the UK Government, both as part of the Territories Joint Ministerial Council on EU Negotiations (JMC- OT-EN). The CDs have held discussions with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which have included representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Department of International Trade, Treasury and the Department for Exiting the European Union.

13. Gibraltar, like Great Britain & Northern Ireland, is within the EU and, as this ends, Gibraltar will be affected in the same way as Britain itself, but will also face other challenges. These are related particularly to the way in which the environmentally and other damaging acts by a neighbouring country have hitherto been moderated most effectively through common membership of the EU. Ending this will necessitate increased diplomatic support from UK, with associated costs. The territory environment leaders urge UK Government to support, as a matter of urgency, the facilitation of Gibraltar's inclusion in other international agreements which will help to offset this loss.

14. The other UKOTs are not within the EU but will suffer various problems, losing their status as Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) of the EU. As OCTs, the UKOTs are eligible to apply for various forms of funding from the EU, including major technical assistance, infrastructure funds and environmental funding. Furthermore, the access to EU trade and information is of major economic benefit to UKOTs. A substantial amount of direct funding also goes to UKOTs, this having major indirect effects on the environment. Gibraltar also receives funding as a part of the EU.

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663983/Joint_Ministerial_Council_2017_-_Communique.pdf

15. The relationship between the Crown Dependencies and the EU is enshrined in Protocol 3 of the UK's 1972 Accession Treaty: the Islands are essentially within the Single Market for the purposes of trade in goods, but are "third countries" (i.e. outside the EU) in all other respects. The Channel Islands are outside the EU VAT area and the WTO, whilst the Isle of Man is within both. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man have a close relationship with the EU in many different fields – not simply those covered by the formal relationship under Protocol 3, including certain maritime matters. They choose also to implement selected EU legislation with an international dimension or to apply the standards on which it is based, for example sanctions, asset-freezing, anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism. The Crown Dependencies are not in the EU and are not OCTs. However, there have been cases in which their natural environments have benefited both financially and through facilitated cooperation. This is because EU policies recognise that conservation measures need to take account of neighbouring countries, for example for effective ecosystem-conservation or to address the needs of migratory animals. With UK's departure from the EU, the potential for such collaboration and financial support will be much reduced, and the opportunity to strengthen partnerships between the UK, UKOTs and CDs will become more important. In addition, continued access to the nearest ports, supplies, sales of fishing products etc, are important to all CDs, especially for some of the smaller Channel Isles located adjacent to France. Access to seasonal workers, plus UK, EU and third party country markets currently accessed through EU trade arrangements are similarly of importance for the CDs.

16. The territory environment leaders discussed, separately amongst the UKOTs and CDs, the challenges they face as a consequence of UK's departure from the European Union, notably for the UKOTs to access technical support on a variety of environment matters, particularly in the renewable energy sector and on much needed sustainable development (particularly those in receipt of Official Development Assistance (ODA), as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), e.g. Montserrat, Pitcairn and St Helena).

17. In addition to recognising the fact that UK Government resources to UKOTs need to be increased in the present situation, the territory environment leaders agreed that UK's departure from the EU would remove major funding opportunities for some, relating to the main EU budget (Gibraltar), the EDF (several UKOTs) and, potentially for all inhabited UKOTs, relating to renewable energy, sustainable development and biodiversity – only recently achieved after many years of lobbying (including the Voluntary Scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of the European Overseas "BEST"). As recognised by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee[6], the UKOTs will need additional funds from UK Government for environmental conservation to replace these lost resources, as well as the opportunity to agree with UK Government more cost-effective and appropriate procedures for determining the allocation of UK public funds to projects. Given the UK Government is the signatory on behalf of territories, at the request of the territories concerned, of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international agreements, some UKOT environment leaders would welcome dialogue with UK Government on how to address current levels of resources, which are inadequate and low when compared with other EU Overseas Territories.

[6] House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee. The Future of the Natural Environment after the EU Referendum. Sixth Report of Session 2016–17. HC 599, 4 January 2017.
House of Commons
Environmental Audit Committee. Marine Protected Areas Revisited. Tenth Report of Session 2016–17. HC 597, 25 April 2017

18. The relationship between the UK and the EU differs for each territory, as does their relationship with neighbouring countries, e.g. through trade agreements with French and Dutch Overseas Territories or members of, for example, CARICOM. The territory environment leaders urge the UK to maintain these important links with the EU and its member states with overseas entities.

19. Some Overseas Territories environment leaders, again, ask that the UK help seek out and investigate arranging eligibility to other funds, such as those for which it is a major contributor, e.g. the International Climate Change Fund and the Global Environment Facility, which could help UKOTs to meet UK Commitments under UNFCC and CBD. The territory environment leaders ask also that HMG make provisions for those UKOTs not currently signed up to the UNFCC or CBD, but which have been progressing towards them.

20. The territory environment leaders remind that, whilst the departure from the EU may have an impact on potential sources of technical expertise and financial resources, it could present an opportunity for the UK to be a greater champion of its UKOTs and CDs, particularly on the international stage through the support it gives them to mitigate and adapt to climate change and the innovations they are making. For example, if energy-relevant EU policy is to be grandfathered into UK law, updated and enforced, then the UKOTs (especially Gibraltar) and Crown Dependencies should be consulted fully. The UK should continue also to fund UKOTs regarding climate science and the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, including through the National Environmental Research Council (NERC). It is pleasing that NERC's Environmental Evidence for the Future (EEF) has included UKOTs in their recent consultation discussions on future redeployment of resources. EEF aims to: "*pave the way to addressing crucial challenges and exciting opportunities that present from the UK leaving the European Union, including optimising sustainable environmental management and ensuring the resilience of our ecosystems and the quality of our water and air*."[7]

21. The territory environment leaders further remind that the smaller UKOTs and CDs noted that they require clear lines of access to UK Government institutions and additional attention, as they have few institutional resources of their own to ensure the representations best needed to ensure that their interests are protected.

22. The territory environment leaders supported those UKOTs and CDs which currently export environmentally sustainable products to the EU in looking to UK Government to ensure that this economically important trade can continue effectively.

23. In July 2017, the House of Lords European Union Select Committee held an evidence session on the implications of 'Brexit' for the UKOTs. Chief Ministers, Premiers and representatives of eight UKOTs appeared before the Committee giving evidence on: the impact of 'Brexit' on the Overseas Territories; possible benefits for the Overseas Territories arising from 'Brexit'; engagement with the UK Government through the Overseas Territories JMC; and the potential impact 'Brexit' could have on the Overseas Territories' future political, economic, constitutional and cultural relationship with the UK.

24. This led the House of Lords Committee Chair to write to 'Brexit' Secretary of State, David Davis, in September 2017, outlining some of the evidence. It noted the economic and technical expertise

[7] http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/partnerships/crosscouncil/eef/

awarded as part of the UKOTs' unique relationship with the European Union[8]. Premier of BVI, Orlando Smith, was reported as pointing out that: "*in common with some other Overseas Territories, BVI benefited from EU horizontal programmes to protect and develop its 'very significant and very rich' biodiversity. He noted that EU support was helpful in terms of environmental infrastructure development and alternative energy. For instance, an EU-supported project was proving valuable in repairing a damaged beach and reef in the most tourist-oriented part of the island. He stressed the importance of EU funding in boosting the quality of the BVI tourism product on each of its many islands*."

25. The Committee report indicates Premier Donaldson Romero of Montserrat as noting that: "*Every cash injection, especially that from the EU* [via the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of Europe Overseas (BEST) initiative as received also by other UKOTs]*, formed a 'significant percentage of our capital budget' and made a 'huge difference', by allowing the Government of Montserrat some autonomy and flexibility in deciding what priorities should be addressed, and to plan over a period of time*."

26. Councillor Leslie Jacques (Pitcairn) noted the regional cooperation that was starting to develop on a wide variety of issues in the South Pacific and *"it is rather disappointing that we are just starting to develop this relationship and now suddenly it is probably going to end ... to lose all that for us would be quite catastrophic*."

27. In relation to the EU's European Development Fund (EDF), St Helena had been able to gain access to "*the thematic component of the 11th EDF, which will fund projects to reduce the risk from climate change and disasters, and to promote sustainable energy*."

28. The House of Lords European Union Committee supported our Alderney Statement in 2017, and by implication, our discussions again here in the Isle of Man, by saying "*We also note the significance of BEST funding in supporting biodiversity. In the event that the Overseas Territories are no longer eligible, after Brexit, for receipt of such funding, will you commit to extending the Darwin Plus initiative to address this shortfall?*"[9]

29. In October 2017, the UK Government response to the House of Lords Inquiry on the impact of 'Brexit' on the CDs[10] recalled that "*The UK Government and each of the Crown Dependencies signed an International Identity Framework Agreement in 2007–2008. In these agreements, the UK committed that it will not act internationally on behalf of a Crown Dependency without prior consultation and that, where the interests of a Crown Dependency differ from those of the UK, the UK will seek to represent those interests when acting in an international capacity. The framework agreements also affirm that the Crown Dependencies and the UK will work together to resolve or clarify any differences which may arise between their respective interests. The UK Government will continue to honour these agreements and we are committed to getting the best possible deal for all British jurisdictions when we leave the EU."*

[8] https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/eu-select/Correspondence-2017-19/11-09-17-Overseas-Territories-letter-to-David-Davis-MP.pdf

[9] https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/eu-select/Correspondence-2017-19/11-09-17-Overseas-Territories-letter-to-David-Davis-MP.pdf

10 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmjust/423/423.pdf

Funding requirements

30. In the context of meeting UK/UKOT joint commitments to conventions, including the Aichi Targets, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Environment Charters, successes in protecting biodiversity/ecosystems are joint successes of UK and UKOTs, and ones of which both parties can be proud. To help with these where needed, the UKOTs share limited resources via the UK Government's Darwin Initiative, which has a dedicated funding stream, Darwin Plus, for the UKOTs. These funds are not available to the CDs, except for CD institutions for undertaking work in the UKOTs. The scheme is administered by LTS International and funds come from three UK Government departments: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Department of International Development (DFID) and Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). This fund is so important because the status as UKOTs means that the territories are ineligible for many international funds due to the close links with the UK. Darwin Plus is the only way in which many territories are able to fund projects with an environment focus. Darwin Plus is the successor to both the previous part of Darwin Initiative spending on UKOTs and the FCO/DFID Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), itself the successor to FCO's Environment Fund for Overseas Territories (EFOT), all arising from the 1999 White Paper.

31. The Overseas Territories environment leaders considered barriers to accessing effectively available environmental funding, including climate funding, which to some UKOTs will be vital if they are to reduce dependency on imported fossil fuels. Most territory environment leaders considered that it was important that the territories should have the main voice in determining where and how cross-territory funds available should be spent so that this could be related to agreed priorities, and that the territories should not have to compete for the allocation of such funds through an assessment process external to them and largely removed from local knowledge. Further discussion with UK Government is needed on how this might be done.

32. The environment leaders expressed concern that, whilst there is no legal impediment to some funding from the UK National Lottery being used in support of the environment in UKOTs, policies and procedures of the Lottery funding bodies effectively prevent this. The UKOT environment leaders welcomed the earlier attempts by NGOs and FCO to change this situation and wish to engage directly with the Department of Culture, Media & Sport and the Lottery bodies, ideally with the support of other bodies to change this situation.

33. Recognising the major challenges to Caribbean and North Atlantic UKOTs from hurricanes, as well as the continuing challenges to Montserrat more than 20 years after the start of the volcanic eruptions, the territory environment leaders, noting the financial and logistic impacts on those NGO and governmental bodies responsible for safeguarding the natural environment on which much economic activities depend, recognised the urgent need for a disaster management fund.

34. Many of the territories are well used to working with a variety of international partners including many non-government organisations, UK Government agencies etc. For many territories with small populations, this is the only viable way to make progress in biological research and conservation. The key NGO bodies experienced in helping filling this vital role need funding so that they can deploy their skilled volunteer and paid personnel in helping the territories and raising and empowering local capacity. These partnerships need to maintain their approach in ensuring that knowledge is transferred to territories at every opportunity so that territories can retain their intellectual property and build expertise locally. This is the only way to ensure long-term continuity.

35. Territory environment leaders welcomed the update from Pitcairn in relation to item 13 in the Statement from their Alderney meeting in 2017. They welcomed the continued support that Pitcairn had received from the EU in respect of the Renewable Energy Feasibility Study and its report recommending the introduction of a solar power system which would provide 90% of the Island's energy needs, as well as the EU agreeing to provide two-thirds of the required funding of NZ$ 1.2m, under the EDF 11 Pacific Regional Envelope, to replace the current expensive diesel generators. Pitcairn is, this month, seeking the balance of funding for this project from DFID, and the territory environment leaders hope that this will be successful, thereby allowing the introduction of renewable energy to Pitcairn, with obvious benefits to both its economy and environment.

36. Whilst we all need to make use of current resources in the most efficient way possible, the territory environment leaders recalled the presentation by Gibraltar at their previous meeting about accessing large climate funds and the major challenges in this (see also 41, below); they agreed that there are other funding sources that warrant considering and urge the UK Government to help to explore these where appropriate. In particular, the UKOT environment leaders urged UK Government to remove constraints which impede inward investment in some territories.

37. Some UKOTs have had success with visitor taxes ear-marked for environmental work and funds set up for land purchase in habitats which are rare but threatened. It was useful for those territory environment leaders considering these to talk with those who have implemented such initiatives in this forum to learn from their experience, including the drafting of legislation and operational matters. The UKOT environment leaders noted that previous encouragement to this approach from UK Government has, in recent years, moved towards a more negative approach to such hypothecated funds, and called for a return to the earlier positive view.

38. The Overseas Territories environment leaders agreed to continue investigating the potential for UKOTs jointly to seek support from international funding sources / commercially-based bodies. The territory environment leaders agreed also to investigate the possibility of obtaining support from some of the aid funds currently supporting Caribbean projects, e.g. CARICOM, to contribute to a UKOT environmental small grants programme.

Building resilience to climate change impacts

39. 2017 has, for many of the UKOTs, mostly notably Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands and, fortunately to a lesser extent, Montserrat, been a reminder of the damage that can be sustained to small economies as a result of extreme natural disasters, as experienced also in many UKOTs previously e.g. Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands and others. Resilience to further anticipated extreme weather events (storms which would once have been once in a lifetime are becoming more frequent) was acknowledged as an integral part of the rebuilding exercise. Healthy ecosystems can play a major role in this and we have explored this during our discussions.

40. The territory environment leaders discussed the need for resilience to be built into the assistance supplied to the UKOTs, and recognised the role that healthy ecosystems can play in minimising risk and damage.

41. The territory environment leaders were pleased that UKOT personnel will be included in the delegation to UNFCC CoP, but the Paris Agreement's ambitious goals can be reached only if appropriate financial flows, a new technology framework and an enhanced capacity building framework are put in place. Climate finance refers to local, national or transnational financing, which

may be drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing. Climate finance is critical to addressing climate change because large-scale investments are required to reduce emissions significantly – but, equally as important to the UKOTs, it is important for adaptation, for which significant financial resources will be required to allow them to adapt to the adverse effects and reduce the impacts of climate change. The territory environment leaders again ask HMG to help gain a clearer understanding of green financing alternatives and to help territories by taking a role in providing as well as facilitating access to green funds, for both climate-change and biodiversity-conservation purposes.

42. The territory environment leaders welcomed the announcement, following the meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council in London in November 2017, by the Minister of State for Climate Change and Industry, the Hon Claire Perry, that the UK would in future include a representative from the Overseas Territories at COPs of the Paris Agreement. They decided that they would plan to rotate the representation, possibly moderated if, for any particular meeting, the agenda proves particularly relevant to one territory or region.

Involvement in international fora and extension of Multilateral Environment Agreements

43. UK Government makes, and is ultimately accountable for, international commitments made on behalf of the UKOTs, including Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. Territory environment leaders confirmed that the decisions as whether or not a territory is included in UK's ratification should be a matter for the territory concerned, and that, if asked by a territory government to include it, or not include it, in a convention, that request should be fulfilled. Territory environment leaders noted also that the level of administration and reporting for a territory to meet convention requirements should be scaled to that territory's size and not necessarily to the scale of Britain itself.

44. The territory environment leaders are heartened by the response from Lord Ahmad, which stated that the UK takes very seriously responsibility for Territories' representation at international meetings. The Overseas Territories environment leaders look forward to continuing invitations from the UK to participate in these meetings, which they see as important to them as members of a global community.

45. A system needs to be put in place to ensure that UKOTs and CDs are consulted before participation in Conferences or Meetings of the Parties of Agreements in which they are included, and encouraged by UK to participate in discussions at the COP/MOPs. Whilst this has improved in recent years and is very efficiently co-ordinated by DEFRA and JNCC for some agreements (e.g. CITES), there is less communication on others, and a more systematic approach would be useful.

46. In 2021, the UK Government and UKOTs will celebrate 20 years of the existence of a series of Environment Charters created for most of the UKOTs, and signed by both the governments of these territories and UK Government. They aimed to reflect the responsibilities of each party towards the environment. However, this responsibility applies equally to the relationships between UK and those territories which do not have Environment Charters. One of the core elements of the Charters is a set of Commitments by each territory government. These Commitments were not created under the Charters, but the latter brought together existing commitments under other international measures. The other core was a set of corresponding Commitments by UK Government to provide support. After 20 years, the Charters still hold true in terms of their ambition for the environments of the UKOTs. It would seem important to celebrate the achievements and progress in meeting the

commitments as set out in the Charters in the context of other global standards. To some extent, the basis of this has been done by the work of the UKOTCF, in their "*Review of performance by 2016 of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in implementing the 2001 Environment Charters or their equivalents and moving towards the Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Targets*", which the territory environment leaders endorsed at the preceding meeting in Alderney.

47. The territory environment leaders recognised the problems posed by plastic waste, particularly to the marine environment. As largely island jurisdictions, this is a problem particularly relevant to the UKOTs and CDs, and the leaders support moves to reduce the negative impact of plastics.

48. The territory environment leaders identified a need for UK Government to develop a coordinated approach to engage with them on major environmental issues and with good continuity, save for those areas where territories retain constitutional authority. At present, this is spread across several UK Government departments and many individuals who tend to change post frequently, with consequent risk of lack of adequate corporate memory.

49. The territory environment leaders welcomed the best practice amongst the territories in relation to integrating environmental aspects into physical development. This includes early involvement of environmentalists with developers, facilitated by government, and timely and open environmental impact assessments.

50. The potential value of an online system for sharing experiences of physical planning and environmental interactions, reinforcing discussions at their previous meeting, and encouraged the Government of Gibraltar and UKOTCF to explore.

51. The territory environment leaders noted the difficulties that the smaller UKOTs and CDs had with developing and enforcing appropriate environmental policies. They typically have few civil service resources of their own. They also have little access to external resources. It would be useful if a common pool of resources were available.

UK Commitments and UKOT priorities for safeguarding our precious natural resources

52. The Overseas Territories environment leaders welcomed the current additional "Blue Belt" funding for extensive marine protection around oceanic territories and recognised the current campaigns surrounding this, particularly in the uninhabited territories, for which the UK is responsible. Whilst large marine protected areas with no-take zones are an important tool for sustainably managing marine resources, we heard many examples, including from the Isle of Man, where different approaches, such as fishery management zones within Marine Protected Areas, are often also having a good outcome for marine biodiversity, as well as maintaining local livelihoods. The territory environment leaders welcomed Tristan da Cunha's ambition for sustainably diversified fisheries. The UKOTs would welcome more accessibility to this funding to help effective marine conservation also in the less remote UKOTs.

53. The territory environment leaders note that the UKOTs without permanent human populations may lack local voices to interact with the administrations appointed by UK Government. The territory environment leaders discussed these UKOTs, decided on maintaining a watching brief and looked forward to discussing further. They expressed a common feeling with them, and commend the efforts of NGOs to achieve conservation measures. A particularly prominent example over the last few years has been the major operation of removal of introduced rodents from South Georgia by the

South Georgia Heritage Trust. The territory environment leaders recognise too the efforts of the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands in undertaking, with the help of the Government of Norway, the parallel removal of introduced reindeer. The territory environment leaders welcomed the forthcoming project to rid Gough (in the Tristan da Cunha group) of introduced mice which threaten the uniquely important seabird colonies there.

54. The Overseas Territories environment leaders welcomed also the restoration of environmental education back into eligibility for UK funds, including Darwin Plus, by the UK Government, as recommended by conservation practitioners in the UKOTs at the Gibraltar *Sustaining Partnerships* conference in 2015. This will help ensure that territory communities are engaged with the efforts of hard working conservation practitioners, furthering local knowledge of these unique but fragile environments, and fostering a sense of responsibility for their preservation.

55. The Overseas Territories environment leaders agreed that changes need to be consulted upon and considered in respect of the size of project funds. EFOT and early OTEP were primarily small-project funds. They made possible, usually by combining with voluntary work, a great deal of highly cost-effective progress on small issues or piloting work which could beneficially be applied on a larger scale to address major conservation issues. There is a need too, for funding for medium-sized and/or longer duration projects, for species-recovery programmes, ecosystem restoration, organisational capacity development, etc. The territory environment leaders welcomed therefore the recognition of this need in HMG's 2009 *UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy*. However, whilst such larger (but not longer) projects are now possible, they are resourced from the same total funding previously limited to small projects. Inevitably, this will mean fewer small projects, despite their excellent track record.

56. There are few opportunities for UKOTs conservation practitioners to meet face-to-face in order to discuss some of the challenges we face in our territories, and for the small teams involved to come together as a critical mass. In the past, the UK Government has supported the working conferences for conservation practitioners (organised by UKOTCF), as an opportunity to share experience and skills; this has led to maximising cost-effectiveness of project funds. These conferences are highly valued by the UKOTs/CDs. The territory environment leaders, as UKOT/CD Environment Ministers or equivalents, were involved in the most recent of these, held in Gibraltar in 2015. The territory environment leaders saw first-hand the value of such conferences and welcome others in the future. While the first four such conferences were largely funded by UK Government, this funding was then ended, against the wishes of UKOTs. The resulting long gap was ended by HM Government of Gibraltar, which funded most of the 2015 conference (supplemented by a much smaller grant from Defra). The Overseas Territories environment leaders therefore encourage UK Government to provide funding for future UKOTCF-organised conferences, as is the wish of the territory environment leaders and the UKOTs as a whole. It will become increasingly important to share resources and expertise, as some of this may become unavailable as a result of leaving the EU, which is addressed more generally above. (We should not overlook the potential benefits to UK-based people in attending such meetings. Ideas and experience can flow both ways, and may be especially applicable to smaller communities in the UK.)

Appendix: List of Ministers and other lead representatives participating

Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK, Isle of Man

Hon. Prof John Cortés, Gibraltar

Mr James Dent, States of Alderney

Mr Paul Veron, Guernsey

Deputy Steven Luce, Jersey

Dr Richard Axton, Sark

Hon. Walton Brown, JP, MP, Bermuda

MLA Teslyn Barkman, Falkland Islands

Hon. David Osborne, Montserrat

Councillor Michelle Christian, Pitcairn

Councillor Russell Yon, St Helena

Hon. Ralph Higgs, Turks & Caicos Islands

Councillor James Glass, Tristan da Cunha