

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

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Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1630 on Thursday 25 February 2021 at the Court House

MEETING SUMMARY

Present:	HE Dr Philip Rushbrook, Governor HH Sean Burns, Administrator Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel	Councillor Andrew Ellick Councillor Alan Nicholls
In attendance:	Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries	Apologies: Gareth Morris, Director of Resources Councillor Kitty George

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked HE The Governor Dr Philip Rushbrook for attending, particularly in person. The Governor thanked the Administrator and conveyed how helpful the extended visit to the island has been, allowing the opportunity to meet with Employing Organisations, Councillors and the wider community.

The matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker and current topics discussed were as follows:

- **Animal Welfare [pets]:** This would remain on the tracker until more information was known about the future flight schedule.
- **Illumination of Flags:** The Administrator requested a detailed update from the Director of Operations and Facilities on any progress made, as well as a detailed timeline schedule that can be circulated to Councillors.
- **Single-use Plastics:** Progress has been postponed due to conflicting priorities, the Administrator also noted that the Policy Officer would soon be on annual leave.
- **Street Lighting in Georgetown:** The Administrator reported that all replacement street lights arrived in December 2020, with 5% of the installation having been completed so far. Councillor Ellick recommended that the timers on existing street lights are reviewed as some lights are not coming on until around 2200hrs. The Administrator requested that a detailed update and timeline schedule be provided from the Director of Operations and Facilities to Councillors. Further discussion was had around the responsibility of the street lights and the Coronation Peak generator.
- **Plan telephone conference regarding the Blue Marine Foundation Endowment Fund:** Meeting planned for Thursday 04 March 2021.
- **Liaise with EO's regarding liaison officer support for employees during quarantine:** Update provided to Councillors on Wednesday 24 February 2021 [via email].
- **Confirm hospital ventilator capacity:** Additional update provided to Councillors on Wednesday 24 February 2021 [via email]. Further discussion was had around the process and the amount of time it takes when refilling oxygen tanks.

The HoAO provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension. 519 first doses had been administered as of the 24 February 2021, equating to 59% of the eligible adult population. The HoAO explained that the interval period between first and second doses will be between four to twelve weeks, with the first of the second doses being organised in three weeks' time. Further conversation was had regarding the possibility of any restrictions being lifted following a successful vaccination roll out and the Administrator added that decisions will be based on science. The movement of passengers between St Helena and Ascension will be considered following a successful vaccination programme in St Helena however it was emphasised that there will be no immediate changes especially from other destinations. Councillor Ellick suggested that the requirement of a COVID-19 vaccination could be introduced as part of entry control to Ascension Island. The Administrator explained that whilst this is something to be considered in the future, due to the vaccine not being freely available to the global population,

this is currently not viable. Councillor Ellick requested an update on when the Airlink is likely to resume its service between Ascension, St Helena and South Africa. HE Governor Rushbrook reported whilst there was no date for the restarting of the Airlink, the use of Titan is only a temporary solution until the return of Airlink, adding that the financial implications of using a chartered service is not sustainable.

The HoAO provided an update on the **runway project**. He confirmed that the offloading of the aggregate and sand had not taken place yet due to a number of reasons. The Administrator added that the Biosecurity requirements was not one of them. Further discussion was had around the positioning of barges and pier head access and Councillor Ellick emphasised the importance of supporting the runway contract with ideas where possible and the contractors should be encouraged to listen to those from the local community who were familiar with the infrastructure and sea conditions. The Administrator agreed and explained that the AIG are fully supporting the runway contract with multiple meetings each week. In response to a request for additional working hours, Councillors Nicholls and Ellick recommended not authorising additional working on a Sunday to allow a day of rest for the contractors and Georgetown residents. Councillor Nicholls asked if light dues were being applied to the runway project vessels and the Administrator agreed to provide an update at a later date.

The Director of Conservation and Fisheries provided an update on the implementation of the **MPA management plan**. The DoCF began by thanking Councillors for their time leading up to today's meeting in going through documents, meeting informally and providing constructive feedback. The DoCF explained that community and Councillor involvement is essential to ensure a management plan that meets the needs of the community as well as the MPA. Councillor Ellick expressed his contentment with the plan. Councillor Nicholls requested that one of the maps be considered for change, replacing it by a more graphically detailed one, Crown Counsel and DoCF agreed to consider the options. The Management Plan states that no large-scale commercial fishing will be allowed anywhere in the MPA and Crown Counsel explained the rationale on how large-scale commercial fishing is defined in the draft legislation to accompany the plan. The policy goal is to prevent large numbers of fish being removed from the MPA. The definition in the legislation prohibits fishing for export for sale elsewhere as the limited market on Ascension means that it would never be economically viable to fish large numbers of fish for the domestic market. Crown Counsel confirmed that there will be no impact on the ten kilogram fish allowance per person allowed for exportation to Saint Helena or other countries. Further discussion was had around future development in the MPA and how this would require an environmental impact assessment to be carried out, but could be permitted by the Administrator if there was no damaging impact or the development is critical to the island. The DoCF explained the small change of wording in objective two following consultation where it now reads as 'supporting' social and economic activities, rather than 'promoting'. Conversation was had around the governance structure through multiple groups, with agreement that the Administrator will invite experts suggested by the DoCF onto the MPA Scientific Advisory Committee. Other MPA oversight committees would be made up of people living on Ascension including a Youth Committee of 11-18 year olds.

Councillor Nicholls requested clarity around the financing of the MPA. The DoCF explained that AIG had already been given £150,000 to cover management costs in FY 2021/22. The UK Government Blue Belt Programme would be able to transfer an additional £150,000 as soon as the Council recommends MPA implementation. A further £150,000 should be available from the Blue Belt Programme following the outcome of the November Spending Review, but budget allocations have not been finally confirmed yet. DoCF will seek an email from the Blue Belt Programme about the likelihood of securing the third £150,000 in time to return to the Formal Council meeting on Monday 01 March 2021. DoCF will contact Councillor George between now and then, and offer to discuss any concerns or issues she has around the MPA Management Plan and legislation.

The HoAO confirmed the **by-election** polling day will take place on the 04 March 2021. Councillor Ellick emphasised the importance of the community of Ascension coming out to vote and further discussion was had around the Electoral Register and voting turn out in previous years.

There were no items of **other business**:

The meeting closed at 18:00

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council