

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

Clerk of Council's Office
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Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1700 on Thursday 20 May 2021 at the Court House

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Sean Burns, Administrator
Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources [by phone]
Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office [by phone]
Councillor Andrew Ellick
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Kitty George
Councillor Douglas Miller
Councillor Nicholas John

In attendance: Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council
Caitlin Thomas, Clerk to Council
Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries

Apologies:

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked the Director of Conservation and Fisheries, Dr Diane Baum for attending to provide an update to Council following the recent public consultation period on inshore fisheries. The Administrator also welcomed Caitlin Thomas who will be covering the Clerk to Council role from June to August 2021.

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.
- **Single-use Plastics:** Progress has been postponed due to conflicting priorities, however, the policy officer will provide an update with a timeline for the next meeting ahead of the COP26 meeting.
- **Street Lighting in Georgetown:** To be addressed within the Public Works Committee going forward.
- **Connection Issues with telecommunications in Court House:** Options continue to be explored whilst consulting experts to explore if any equipment currently in place can be kept and incorporated with the new equipment expected to arrive on the August FIRS.
- **Flight details over the festive period:** Discussions continue with Titan and SHG. In the meantime Titan have said a second shuttle is possible but there will be additional charges on top of the regular costs as an additional night would need to be spent on St Helena. Further discussion was had regarding the impact of delays and the financial risk associated.

The Director of Conservation and Fisheries (DoCF) provided an update on the **Inshore Fisheries Management Strategy consultation response**. The DoCF began by explaining that the variety of methods used to ensure maximum engagement with the public and the response levels from each. The DoCF explained that the proposed next stage is to form a working group of Cllrs and officials to consider the feedback received and develop further detail on the strategy. Further discussion was had regarding the anonymous feedback questionnaires. Cllr George emphasised the importance that the strategy has the full support of the local fishing community taking a methodical approach to each stage, ensuring both the advantages and disadvantages are understood and addressed. Further discussion took place regarding the challenges in getting maximum public engagement.

Cllr Ellick thanked the DoCF for taking the time to deliver the public meetings, explaining that he had received feedback from constituents that they would like to see the issue of sharks discussed. The DoCF confirmed that there will be a public meeting in around two weeks' time to cover the topic of sharks specifically. Further discussion was had regarding addressing both the topic of sharks and the inshore fisheries strategy separately. Cllr George reported receiving a comprehensive written response from a local constituent; the DoCF requested that the response be forwarded on for consideration. There was some discussion around responses from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's). Cllr John proposed that consideration be given to the control measures in place for spearfishing when scuba diving as opposed to snorkelling and the damage that may be caused to the lobster populations in small areas.

Cllrs were asked to consider the formation and membership of an Inshore Fisheries Working Group. The role of this group will be to scrutinise and refine the strategy and its implementation through legislation. Cllrs fully supported and agreed to the formation of the working group.

The Administrator thanked the DoCF for attending and providing an update to Council.

Crown Counsel (CC) provided an update on the **Employment Law Reform** and a discussion was had regarding a memo that was sent out to Cllrs last week. Apologies were made on behalf of the CC for not distributing the documents sooner. The CC explained the intention of the documents was to remain as informative as possible without being overly lengthy. The Administrator highlighted that the recommendation sought from Council was so that the employment Ordinance becomes law. It was decided that the existing working group would meet to discuss the legislation before the next formal meeting. Cllr John raised concerns that he has been unsatisfied with certain aspects of the policy and would therefore require further time to digest the information given. Cllr George expressed concerns that further delays should be avoided regarding the subject. The Administrator agreed and reminded Council that this matter had already been voted on twice and there was a clear mandate to take the legislation forward. It was confirmed that the working group would be convened to discuss the legislation.

The Administrator explained that the annual **Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council (JMC)** is due to take place at the end of this year, bringing together political leaders from the Overseas Territories and UK Ministers. It was agreed that following the Policy Officer's attendance at the first Sherpa meeting on 10 June 2021, an update will be provided to Council.

The Administrator provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension. The Administrator explained that by the end of May 2021 it is expected that 95% of the eligible adult population will have received both doses of a COVID-19 vaccination. Further discussion was had regarding the Ascension / St Helena travel corridor and potential alternative vaccinations for under 18 year olds following Public Health England's approval. The Administrator reported on a reduction in capacity within Bradley's camp from 40 rooms to 29, however, alternative pre-approved isolation facilities are being explored. The Administrator thanked HE Governor Rushbrook for his lobbying to ensure Ascension Island, Saint Helena and Trista da Cunha were added to the UK's Green List.

The Administrator provided an update on the **runway project**. He confirmed that the offloading is progressing with the first breaking of ground taking place as planned on the 03 May 2021. There was no change to the current planned completion date of October 2022.

There were several items of **other business**:

- i. **Starlink:** Cllr George raised on behalf of constituents the topic of Starlink, following further discussion it was agreed that the subject of licensing would be explored by the AIG.
- ii. **Dumping of fish carcasses at the pier head:** Cllr George raised concerns following recent reports that the contents of the fish bin were thrown into the ocean to entice the sharks at the pier head. Conversation was had regarding the challenges of making it a criminal offence. It was agreed that the CC would explore options and provide feedback to Cllrs.
- iii. **Maintenance and Inspection of Hospital Equipment:** Cllr Ellick requested an updated on the inspection of hospital equipment, specifically the X-ray machine and any other specialised equipment. It was agreed a CEF would be submitted.
- iv. **Naval Flagstaff:** Cllr Nicholls requested an update on the Naval Flagstaff. It was explained by Cllr George that the man basket which is to be used in conjunction with the Manitou required an inspection.
- v. **Cllrs meeting with School Children from Two Boats School:** On behalf of year five and six classes Cllr John reported that littering appears to be a growing issue on the island. Further conversation was had regarding legislation and voluntary teams who are planning clean up days.

The meeting closed at 18:40

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council