

**ASCENSION ISLAND
GOVERNMENT**

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

10:30 on Monday 22nd May 2023 at the Courthouse

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Simon Minshull, Administrator
Catherine Leo, Acting Director of Resources
Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Kyla Benjamin
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Laura Shearer

In attendance: Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries
Tiffany Simpson, Marine Team Leader
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council

Apologies: Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office (overseas)
Matthew James, Crown Counsel (overseas)
Councillor Douglas Miller (overseas)

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending.

There were currently no actions on the actions tracker.

The Administrator welcomed Dr Diane Baum and Dr Tiffany Simpson and thanked them for attending and providing an update to Council on several conservation topics. The Administrator acknowledged that Dr Tiffany Simpson will be taking on the role of Director of Conservation and Fisheries from late July 2023.

Expansion of the National Protected Areas network: DB explained that currently 19.5% of Ascension's land area is designated within a Protected Area across ten sites, recommending that this be increased to 27%. Three new Nature Reserves are proposed alongside expansions to the existing Letterbox and North East Bay Nature Reserves to include sites where endemic invertebrates, plants, and nesting seabirds are located. A period of Public Consultation will begin on 23 May 2023 and will end on 19 June 2023. During this time a number of public meetings will be held to discuss the proposed expansion and management plans, as well as articles in the Islander and social media posts to maximise public engagement. DB reported that should these areas be designated as proposed, it may attract greater external funding. DB requested that should Councillors receive any feedback from their constituents to let her know so it can be included in the formal response. The Administrator requested clarity on how the proposed changes may affect any beach huts within those areas. DB explained that the Beach Huts at North East are already within the existing boundary, however DB clarified that within the draft [Ascension Island Beach Nature Reserves Management Plan 2023-2028](#) it states that there will be a presumption in favour of allowing repairs and upgrading to the existing, functioning beach huts. However, there will also be a presumption against permitting the development of new beach huts or restoration to the two most derelict beach huts at North East, with the management plan proposing that these two beach huts be removed to reduce the risk to public safety and potential for pollution. DB confirmed that LOP holders are also being consulted on whether this will impact their operations. Councillor Nicholls asked whether the Scaly Cricket was endemic to Ascension Island, DB confirmed they are. Further discussion was had regarding the global aim of reaching 30% protected areas on both land and sea, although Ascension was only aiming for 27% it was felt this was proportionate and a true reflection of the areas with a conservation interest within.

New Biocontrol Agent to Tackle Mexican Thorn: DB reported on the public consultation currently taking place to seek the public's views on the introduction of a biological control agent, a moth called *Evippe*, to slow the spread of Mexican thorn on Ascension. It was agreed that a separate meeting would be arranged with Councillors to discuss the proposal in more detail.

DB provided an update on the recent **Darwin Grant applications** that have been approved, with a completion date of March 2024. DB explained that by applying for smaller grants it is hoped that the projects will be more efficient given the limited resources on Ascension. Further discussion was had regarding the eradication of rats on other small islands around the world and the challenges the conditions on Ascension would present for a successful rat eradication attempt here.

The Administrator reported that the **House of Commons** has launched a new enquiry into the UK's relationship with the Overseas Territories in the 21st Century. The Administrator explained that the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) is seeking views on how the UK Parliament and Civil Service engages with the Overseas Territories and across different Government departments; how their interests are represented in UK Parliament; and how the rights of British overseas citizens are protected. It was agreed that a collated response would be submitted following a period of Public Consultation through June and July with a deadline for final response from Councillors of 04 September 2023.

Councillor Shearer and Councillor Nicholls provided an update following their attendance at the **Joint Ministerial Council (JMC)** in London that ran from 10 May 2023 to 12 May 2023. Councillor Shearer provided an overview of both days, listing topics covered and highlighting the excellent opportunity the JMC provides for elected representatives of Ascension to meet with UK Government Ministers to discuss issues of common concern whilst celebrating the Island's unique relationship with the UK. Both Councillors' Nicholls and Shearer also noted the productive bi-lateral meeting that they had with The Right Honourable Lord Goldsmith.

The Administrator provided a brief update and back ground to the declaring of Public Holidays on Ascension Island highlighting the schedule in the Public Holidays Ordinance where the official Public Holidays are listed. Whilst the official birthday of His Majesty the King is listed as a statutory Public Holiday, the Island Council may give directions for this day to be observed on another day. Whilst previous years have seen the QBP celebrations and public holiday be observed in June, this year Overseas Territories are being given the option to celebrate in either June or November. Councillors were requested to canvas their constituents as to whether they would like the Public Holiday for the official birthday of His Majesty the King to be observed on either Monday 19 June 2023 or Monday 20 November 2023.

The Administrator gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the project is nearing its final stages of completion with the arrival of the demobilisation ship expected in the coming weeks. Following the arrival of this ship the large equipment currently being stored in the boat yard and immediate surrounding area will be emptied again. The Administrator confirmed that an official opening of the runway is expected to take place soon after.

There was one item of **other business**:

- i. **Road Markings:** Councillor Kerry Benjamin reported that constituents have recently reported a lack of road markings across the island, in particular the Travellers straight. The Administrator requested that Councillor Kerry Benjamin submit a Councillor Enquiry Form to allow for a full and considered response.

The meeting closed at 11:35

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk to Council