

**ASCENSION ISLAND  
GOVERNMENT**

Clerk of Council's Office  
Ascension Island  
South Atlantic Ocean  
ASCN 1ZZ



[siobhan.stewart@ascension.gov.ac](mailto:siobhan.stewart@ascension.gov.ac)

+ (247) 67000 ext. 100

[www.ascension.gov.ac](http://www.ascension.gov.ac)

## **Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council**

**10:00 on Monday 22 June 2023 at the Courthouse**

### **MEETING SUMMARY**

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

In attendance: Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries  
Tiffany Simpson, Marine Team Leader  
Adam Sharp, Invertebrate Project Coordinator  
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council  
Carl Mackerras, Head of the Administrator's Office  
Matthew James, Crown Counsel

Apologies: Councillor Kyla Benjamin (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, Dr Tiffany Simpson and Dr Adam Sharp and thanked them for attending and providing an update to Council on the protected areas consultation.

**Expansion of the National Protected Areas network:** The Director of Conservation and Fisheries (DoCF) confirmed that following a period of public consultation between 23 May 2023 and 19 June 2023, a formal response has now been published. The three new Nature Reserves were 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. The DoCF 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%, especially given that there are currently no protected areas dedicated to Ascension's endemic invertebrates or plants, and the recent commitments made at COP15 where the global aim of reaching 30% protected areas on both land and sea was set. Further discussion was had regarding potential conflicting land use. However, it is expected that a workable solution can be found in both relevant cases.

The DoCF explained that protected areas are often used as a measurement of biodiversity success, ultimately attracting external funding to facilitate continued research. Management plans for the existing protected areas also formed part of the public consultation. The plans provide a detailed comprehensive plan for each site, addressing the objectives, threats and actions needed to address those threats over a five-year period. The DoCF highlighted the importance of active management of the protected areas, ensuring the protection of species only found on Ascension Island that are facing credible risks from climate change and non-native species.

The DoCF reported that during the public consultation, engagement regarding the formal designation of parking areas, camping sites and BBQ areas took place. The existing National Protected Areas Regulations restrict these activities to designated sites within the National Park and Nature Reserves, and the intention is to designate all sites currently used by people to encourage the community to get into nature safely, without inadvertently breaching the regulations.

Councillor Nicholls requested clarity on the motivating factors behind the expansion of current protected areas and the introduction of new protected areas. The DoCF pointed out the aim of reaching 30% protected areas on both

land and sea was a global target and not something Ascension had to slavishly meet. The global target had provided the impetus to review Ascension's protected area network and address any deficiencies, such as the poor representation of sites for invertebrates and plants. The proposed new network of protected areas represents a true reflection of the areas with the highest conservation value on the island and the fact that it only amounts to 27% of the land area is not a cause for concern as it is the result of a well-evidenced and systematic review specific to Ascension. The Invertebrate Project Coordinator (IPC) provided an overview of the endemic invertebrate fauna in Ascension, highlighting that Ascension currently has around 30 endemic species of invertebrates. However, unlike the endemic and native seabirds and nesting habitat of the native turtles around Ascension, there are currently no dedicated protected areas for these unique invertebrates. Councillor Nicholls encouraged further public engagement on these invertebrates as many people don't know what is actually being protected. The IPC confirmed that an animated film is currently being circulated over several social media channels that provides further information on Ascension's endemic invertebrates. Further discussion was had regarding the next steps, from recommendation of the policy, to the formal approval and implementation of the subsequent legislation. It was agreed that a formal recommendation would be sought from Council at the next formal meeting of council.

**New Biocontrol Agent to Tackle Mexican Thorn:** The DoCF confirmed that following a period of public consultation between 03 and 31 May 2023 a formal response has now been published. The DoCF said that the next step would be that the DoCF makes a formal recommendation to HE the Governor, along with the accompanying risk assessment. The risk assessment will be made publicly available, following quality assurance checks with DEFRA [Department of Environment and Rural Affairs] in the UK. Further discussion was had regarding the host range testing that has been completed, where Ascension specific plants were tested. Councillor Shearer requested that the minutes from a recent meeting where the topic of the *Evippe* Moth was discussed in great detail be made available to the public. The DoCF confirmed that the document would be made publicly available.

The Head of the Administrator's office gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the project is now in its final stages of completion with the arrival of the demobilisation ship expected in the coming weeks, with completion expected by the end of July 2023. Councillor Nicholls requested that the areas being used for large equipment storage around Georgetown be reinstated following the demobilisation.

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

- i. **FCDO/MOD Officials Visit:** The HoAO confirmed that the FCDO and MOD Senior Officials visit is forecast to take place from 03 to 05 July 2023 where constituent views on the future of Ascension will be sought, through Councillors, with the view to making recommendations to ministers. Councillor Nicholls noted that the visit was very short and highlighted the importance that an informed decision be made in relation to the future of Ascension.
- ii. **Attorney General Visit:** MJ offered his thanks on behalf of the Attorney General, David Ballantyne, for the warm welcome from Councillors during his recent visit to Ascension, noting that he found the visit incredibly helpful and productive.
- iii. **JMC November 2023 dates:** Councillor Nicholls informed his fellow Councillors that he has recently received an email requesting Councillors steer on suggested dates for the JMC in November 2023. The dates proposed were either 01-02 November or, 14-15 November 2023. SM requested that Councillor Nicholls share the email with him.
- iv. **Gibraltar National Day:** Councillors Nicholls informed his fellow Councillors of Gibraltar's invitation to elected members to nominate a delegate from Ascension to visit Gibraltar in September 2023 to join in celebration of both their national day, and to commemorate their first referendum where in 1967 the people of Gibraltar voted overwhelmingly to remain British. Councillors were invited to consider whether they wish to nominate a delegate to attend in person, or whether virtual attendance would be preferred. The Administrator highlighted the benefits of having a pre JMC meet with fellow OT's and confirmed that a decision was required by 30 June 2023.
- v. **Feral Donkeys:** Councillor Nicholls requested an update regarding the issues previously raised in relation to the Feral Donkey population in Georgetown. The Administrator confirmed that a Public Notice asking that people living in Georgetown refrain from feeding the donkeys has been redistributed. Crown Counsel explained that significant work has previously gone into proposing various options for the management of the feral donkey population in Ascension on several occasions, with the outcome remaining the same. Councillors were invited that should they wish the issue of animal control to be raised again, it can be added to the next informal agenda. It was agreed that the previous report and background would be distributed to Councillors for information.

- vi. **Availability of eggs and butter:** The ADoR reported that the AIG are working closely with the Chandlery to assist where possible in the supply of Eggs and Butter.

The meeting closed at 11:10

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk to Council