

**ASCENSION ISLAND
GOVERNMENT**

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

10:00 on Thursday 6th February at the Court House

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Simon Minshull, Administrator
Director of Resources, Peter Thomas
Acting Attorney General, Matthew James [Remotely]
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Laura Shearer

In attendance: Head of the Administrator's Office, Carl Mackerras
Director of Conservation & Fisheries, Tiffany Simpson
James Bell, CEFAS [Agenda item 3 only]
Lianne Jackson, CEFAS [Agenda item 3 only]
Emma DeFriex, Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
[Agenda item 3 only]
Fiona Benjamin, Acting Clerk to Council

Apologies: Councillor Kerry Benjamin
Councillor Gordon Worthington
Councillor Kyla Benjamin [Overseas]

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Matters arising

Matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker as follows:

Pets on the FIRS: The Head of the Administrator's Office explained that AIG has now received confirmation from the RAF Commander of the Ascension Island Base [CAIB] that restrictions were imposed via a K&N policy and not a BFSAI-led decision. BFSAI will not prevent the carriage of animals on the FIRS and that carriage of pets will remain subject, as always, to FIRS spare capacity. Following this confirmation, the item can be removed from the Action Tracker.

Future Vet Visit Plans: The Head of the Administrator's Office confirmed that AIG are working with the Falklands Islands Senior Veterinary Officer to agree a suitable time for a visit, which is currently hoped to take place by 31st March 2025.

3. UK Government's Blue Belt Programme

Tiffany Simpson, Director of Conservation and Fisheries explained how the Blue Belt (BB) Programme is hugely beneficial to the AIG Conservation Directorate's work on Ascension Island, and that a number of positions are funded by the programme. A scientific team are visiting to help develop a workplan for the next year and to ensure that the Directorate's strategic plan going forward is aligned with the ongoing support that BB can provide. The visit also gives them a chance to meet the Directorate's team, understand the local environment, what the challenges are and discuss options on going forward.

The BB team, James Bell, Lianne Jackson & Emma Defriez gave a presentation to Councillors on the UK's BB Programme work to date.

The BB Programme is the UK Government's flagship international marine conservation programme, working with the UK Overseas Territories (UKOT) to assist in creating and maintaining healthy and productive marine ecosystems. The programme is central to the UK Government's ambition to lead action to tackle the serious global problems of overfishing, species extinction and climate change.

The BB programme began in 2017, with 7 UKOT members; Ascension Island was one of them. Now there are 11 Overseas Territories embedded in the programme.

From 2017 – 2025 the main highlights and achievements on Ascension were:

- Strengthening governance and management frameworks
- Understanding and protecting biodiversity, and building resilience to climate change
- Supporting compliance and enforcement
- Sustainable Fisheries Management

A strength of the BB Program so far has been its adaptability, responding to unique contexts, changing circumstances and emerging needs. BB work will support local skills and leadership capacity to help UKOT's sustain and manage their own initiatives in the long term. This reduces dependency on external support and fosters self-reliance. Empowering local leaders and communities enhances the ability to drive change and make informed decisions that benefit the territories. BB will expand support for capacity building and training and will facilitate skills and knowledge sharing between UKOT's and international experts. All the while supporting UKOT leadership and engagement in global dialogue, by direct funding to UKOT's and sustainable financing assistance. Innovative technologies will be used more to solve oceanic challenges and by using local knowledge and addressing the needs of diverse, vulnerable and marginalized groups, the programme will be able to support more comprehensive and widely accepted solutions and impacts.

On Ascension, future BB work plans will see:

- Review of the Marine Management plan for 2026 – 2030
- Potential Scientific hub development
- Development of a fisher engagement strategy and support for inshore fisheries legislation.
- Development of a Schmidt Ocean Institute proposal for a research cruise focusing on vents and seamounts
- Continued IUU Surveillance
- And continued technical support for local marine roles.

It was emphasised that the continued IUU Surveillance within the Ascension Marine Protected Area (MPA) areas is important especially with vessels that are sighted within or in close proximity of the MPA boundary.

Councillor Alan Nicholls questioned how frequently illegal fishing took place in the Ascension MPA and was advised that the Ascension MPA is serving its function. The MMO monitor commercial fishing vessels that used to operate in the MPA but confirmed that they are now operating outside the MPA boundary. It was noted that not in Ascension, but in other OTs, the MMO have worked with the Royal Navy and requested if nearby vessels could transit in or around the MPAs as a visual defence tactic.

Councillor Alan Nicholls questioned the overall financial position of BB Programme and the amount spent on each Overseas Territory. The BB team confirmed there isn't any specific allocation of money for each territory and they are working closely with the Director of Conservation and Fisheries to develop a comprehensive work plan which will be submitted to the programme board for consideration. The overall BB budget of £8 – 9 million a year is shared amongst the Overseas Territories. Discussions took place regarding the future of the BB Programme and it was confirmed that the overall funding outlook is positive for the next four years under the current government with few concerns in the near future regarding finances.

4. Two Boats Painting Project

Director of Resources (DoR) explained that a tender exercise was carried out for the Two Boats Painting Project but this did not lead to a contractor being awarded. A project review suggested it may be feasible for the project to be carried out in-house. DoR explained that AIG would look to employ short term painters/handypersons on a 6-month contract and also authorise paid overtime work by existing AIG Staff. The

intention was to advertise initially for household status applicants. It was anticipated that this proposed method would be considerably cheaper than contracting the project externally. It could not be guaranteed that AIG would receive applications for up to 6 staff on household contracts, and should this be the case, temporary single status positions would be advertised. Undertaking the works in this way would ensure AIG would have direct control of the project delivery.

5. Single Use Vapes (prohibition of Sale) Ordinance

The Acting Attorney General (AAG) explained that the public consultation on the new Ordinance to prohibit the sale of single use vapes was undertaken in December and that no comments were received from the public during or after the consultation period. Draft legislation has been completed and will be shared to Councillors for their views and comments.

6. Medium Term Financial Planning

The DoR provided a summary to Council of the progress made to-date in developing the Ascension Island Government's (AIG) Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the next 5 years. The DoR explained there were 40 potential ideas for Councillors to discuss and consider. DoR explained that each idea had been categorised into one of three categories: **Category A)** Options to implement, **Category B)** Ideas to be developed for potential implementation, and **Category C)** Ideas requiring further research, and feasibility assessment. Councillor Nicholls referred to the overall picture of the MTFP, and asked what happens if it does not deliver sufficient savings via the options identified. DoR said there are no additional options, if AIG doesn't deliver savings then the AIG reserves would be completely exhausted. Discussion took place regarding the MTFP and the Administrator commented on the importance of the MTFP to implement the necessary financial changes. Councillors queried contributions received from employing organisations and whether they could be extended to include others, including the US Government. The Administrator said the US Base's status was covered under the Bahamas Agreement., Councillor Shearer raised concerns regarding AIG taking on additional projects, and queried if more project managers had to be employed. DoR explained that AIG was working closely to assess the impact of overstretch.

7. Any other business

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

- i. **UK Members of Parliament Visit to the Falkland Islands:** The Administrator thanked Councillor Nicholls for forwarding the email regarding the all-party Parliamentary Group visit to the Falkland Islands. The Administrator asked Councillors to confirm if they would be available to meet the Westminster MPs during their southbound transit through Ascension.
- ii. **Delayed FIRS:** The Administrator explained that the latest date he had for the Falkland Island's Resupply Ship was from the K & N Schedule and that was 23 February. A Public Notice will be issued once final confirmation of the revised arrival date is received.

8. Proposed date of next meeting

Formal Meeting 16.30 on 19 February 2025	[Finance]
Formal Meeting 16.30 on 20 February 2025	
Formal meeting 16:30 on 13 March 2025	[Finance]
Formal meeting 16:30 on 20 March 2025	

The meeting closed at 11:07.

Fiona

Fiona Benjamin
Acting Clerk to Council