

**ASCENSION ISLAND
GOVERNMENT**

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

10:30 on Wednesday 20 August 2025 at the Courthouse

MEETING SUMMARY

Present: HH Simon Minshull, Administrator
Director of Resources, Peter Thomas
Crown Counsel, James Twigg

Councillor Ethan Bally
Councillor Eugene Bennett
Councillor Michael Ellick
Councillor Thomas Hickling
Councillor Alan Nicholls
Councillor Laura Shearer

In attendance: Head of the Administrator's Office, Martin Hogg
Director of Conservation & Fisheries, Tiffany Simpson [Agenda
item 4 only]
Clerk to Council, Georgina Wilson,

Apologies: Councillor Thomas Barnes

1. Welcome

The Administrator Simon Minshull welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending. The Administrator introduced the new Crown Counsel James Twigg.

2. Approval of Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Formal Council meeting held of 17 July 2025 and published 28 July 2025 were accepted, and in accordance with the Council Rules, were agreed by Council members.

3. Matters Arising

Matters arising were addressed via the action's tracker. There were two topics on the tracker which were to be discussed during the meeting.

- **Medium-Term Financial Plan:** This is discussed in Agenda Item 5
- **Food Security:** This is discussed in Agenda Item 7

4. Wildlife Protection Ordinance Amendments

Tiffany Simpson, the Ascension Island Government (AIG) Director of Conservation & Fisheries (DoCF), gave an overview of the Wildlife Protection Ordinance and explained how it is used to protect the endemic and native species located on Ascension Island, or within the Marine Protected Area (MPA) of Ascension. It currently lists 70 different species. The DoCF proposed amendments to key wording to enhance species protection. A review of the species list was undertaken to ensure all known endemic and critically endangered species were included. The DoCF also proposed the addition of minimum size requirements for landing Blue and White Marlin, Swordfish and Sailfish to ensure compliance with ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna) regulations. ICCAT also recommended the addition of highly migratory species of sharks and rays to ensure Ascension protected these animals under international agreements.

The DoCF advised that a range of endemic invertebrates had been added to the list that are critically endangered or are anticipated to be added to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species in the near future. ICCAT recommended AIG consider adopting a minimum size length as a measure for limiting sailfish mortality. Councillor Bennett enquired to the addition of Sailfish with a Lower Jaw Fork length (LJFL) under 160cm and noted that ICCAT did not currently have a recommended minimum LJFL listed for Sailfish. He noted that a US Federal rule exists and requested clarity as to why a minimum size limit was being proposed by AIG without a formal recommendation from ICCAT. The DoCF advised that the UK and EU do not have a minimum size length for Sailfish but the US has set a minimum size LJFL of 160cm, and Gibraltar has set a minimum size length of 100cm.

The Administrator asked if other Overseas Territories (OTs) had similar size requirements or restrictions such as St Helena, or whether Ascension Island would be the first OT. Discussion was had on other LIFT limitations, noting the US regulations of 160cm and Gibraltar's LIFT size of 100cm. The DoCF agreed to research and advise councillors on what other OTs have implemented, so that a comparison could be made.

Councillor Shearer asked if ICCAT had suggested a time frame to formalise their recommendations. The DoCF confirmed that a meeting in September may lead to a further update by the end of 2025. Councillor Shearer commented that if AIG left this recommendation off the update to the ordinance, then they may have to revisit it to add it in future. Councillor Nicholls noted a few minor updates required for the draft which the DoCF agreed to amend in the final draft. DoCF confirmed the Moray Eel is not on the protected species list. The Administrator asked if the proposed amendments could be highlighted in the text to make it clear which new species has been added to the list. The Administrator thanked the DoCF who then left the meeting.

5. Medium Term Financial Plan

Peter Thomas, the AIG Director of Resources (DoR), explained AIG's operational budget commitments for 2025-2026 and that additional infrastructure projects, unless funded externally would increase the budgetary deficit. The AIG has reserves to meet this budget deficit, but if the deficit is not addressed, reserves will be depleted over approximately four years. The DoR emphasized the need for AIG to maintain reserves to cover unexpected expenditure. The DoR highlighted a need to begin implementing actions to address the budget deficit, commenting that Councillors' roles in considering recommendations in AIG's Medium-Term Financial Plan to address the budget deficit were important, due to the impact it would inevitably have on the community, local businesses and employing organisations. The DoR asked Councillors to consider four areas for implementation with AIG generating additional revenue by raising the rates of Corporation Tax, customs duty on alcohol and tobacco, entry visa fees and AIG's marine charges. Customs duty would also be extended to include vape products.

Councillor Bennett raised concerns that shops and small businesses were already struggling and any additional increase in freight charges would negatively impact those businesses. All other Councillors agreed with this concern and indicated that the potential impacts of any increase to freight handling charges needed more consideration before freight charges should be increased. Councillor Bennett encouraged AIG to consider identifying internal efficiencies to support savings, after which discussion took place on other areas where AIG could reduce expenditure to address its budget deficit. The DoR agreed that AIG should consider all areas where it can address the budget deficit and was keen for ongoing engagement between Councillors and AIG officers for ideas to be discussed.

Councillor Bennett and Councillor Nicholls asked why the US Base was exempt from paying certain fees and customs duties. The Administrator advised that under the Bahamas Agreement, there were specific exemptions for the US Base.

Councillor Shearer recommended that councillors meet to discuss all proposed ideas and rank them in order of priority as part of the medium-term financial planning exercise.

Councillor Nicholls noted that the spending power of the community had reduced due to the rise of food and utility costs, and that it is clear that there are people on Island struggling.

Councillor Nicholls asked what the UK government's view was on the way AIG is trying to raise additional funds. He noted that Ascension Island had benefitted from European Development Funding (EDF) in the past for large projects, but it was determined that there was no substitute since the UK left the European Union. The Administrator noted that there were cross government funds that AIG can access, including the Foreign, Commonwealth, and

Development's (FCDO) Overseas Territories Project Fund, of which AIG has received £800,000 for 2025/26. There were also opportunities to also access some European funding but confirmed there was no direct replacement for the EDF.

Councillor Shearer also expressed concern that putting more financial pressure on individuals could cause them to leave and suggested increases to the Business Levy be considered. Councillor Bally asked if there had been any discussion on the tax brackets, and if there had been a discussion to reduce the stress on those on the lower tax bracket. The DoR confirmed that AIG had identified this as an area for review, and that personal taxation could be considered in the future.

Councillor Bennett raised a question on supply of AIG's Hydroponics produce to the Royal Air Force (RAF) Base. The Administrator confirmed that Hydroponics currently supply the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI) for their restaurant, but do not supply the RAF/Ministry of Defence (MOD) mess hall.

6. Update to the Road Traffic Ordinance

The Administrator explained that AIG has identified inconsistencies in the alignment of some maximum speed limits and road signs with Road Traffic Ordinance (RTO) 1984 (Revised Edition of the Laws, 2017). Councillors discussed potential changes to the wording of the RTO to allow for general provisions for speed limits. Councillors also discussed a potential increase in the length of time visitors and short-term contractors could drive on overseas licences before needing to obtain an Ascension Island driving licence, potentially raising the current restriction from three months to four months (the length of average RAF detachments on Ascension). The Administrator confirmed that additional clarity is required in the ordinance and advised that AIG would prepare draft amendments to the legislation to be presented at a future informal meeting for Councillors to consider.

7. Food Security Update

The Administrator introduced a memo on food security and opened the floor to Councillors to raise questions.

Councillor Nicholls asked about contingency planning in the event a food store was to close. The Administrator advised, that a plan would be developed., and discussion was had on ways to introduce other product ranges or supply routes to the island. Councillors noted their meeting with the Retail Manager of Seafish Chandlery Ltd and the Head of South Atlantic Operations of the NAAFI was constructive and enabled them to understand the challenges that the retailers face, Councillors wanted to find ways to work together to identify solutions to help the shops and the community, and committed to keep open and regular dialogue with the Retail Managers to support their businesses.

Councillor Bennett explained that he had been in contact with the chairperson of the Fishers Association about providing fresh fish to the Chandlery and was awaiting a response.

Councillor Shearer explained that from the meeting with the retailers, it was noted that two containers of food were removed to prioritise MOD accommodation units. She felt that food should be prioritised over all other items. The Administrator explained that the Falkland Island Resupply Ship (FIRS) is a MOD supply vessel, and that cargo changes were not made clear until the ship had already left port. The Administrator explained that AIG will continue to raise food security concerns with the MOD and the FCDO.

Councillor Bennett asked about the performance of AIG's Hydroponics operation, enquiring about cost effectiveness and why there are issues with supply of certain products. The Administrator advised that AIG would provide Councillors with data on crop yields. The DoR also advised that AIG would, once it is available, share the Green Overseas consultancy report on the subject with Councillors.

Councillor Nicholls asked if island organisations could work more collaboratively under the One Island Vision to reduce the cost of shipping of fresh or frozen goods, by filling the chilled containers to maximise cost benefits. The Administrator advised that AIG have encouraged retailers and organisations to work together to share costs. It was agreed that food security would remain on the Action Tracker, and regular updates would be provided to councillors.

8. Public Holidays 2025 – King's Birthday

The Administrator explained that AIG is waiting for the St Helena Government to publish the public holidays for 2026, and this will be presented to councillors once it is available. The Administrator explained that Councillors would be asked to agree on a date for a public holiday to celebrate the HM The King's Birthday and noted that the previous council had suggested Friday 14 November 2025, his majesty's actual birthday.

9. Any Other Business (AOB)

There were eight items of **other business**.

- 1) **Policing on Ascension Island:** Councillor Shearer raised concern on the number of police currently working on island and highlighted the lack of continuity of police officers. The Administrator advised that the Royal Saint Helena Police Service faced staffing issues both in St Helena and on Ascension, and was to resolve the recruitment issues and to find long term staff.
- 2) **Pet Cemetery:** Councillor Bennett raised the concern that the Pet Cemetery located at Deadman's Beach was full and asked if AIG could extend and improve the site. The Administrator advised Councillor Bennett to complete a Councillor Enquiry Form so a formal response could be provided.
- 3) **Airfreight to Ascension:** Councillor Bennett enquired if there was a way to increase the frequency of airfreight with the twice weekly Airbridge flight from the UK. The Administrator advised that the FCDO was consulting with the Universal Postal Union, to look at ways Ascension Island and Tristan Da Cunha can be listed as separate addresses so when people place orders online, this would allow orders to reach Ascension quicker and easier. The Administrator explained that there are limited options for air freight to be increased because cargo space was at a premium on the southbound Airbridge, noting that non-MOD cargo/freight is given a low priority.
- 4) **Fuel station offering car-related products:** Councillor Bennett asked if the facilities at the island's fuel station could be used to offer small basic car related products such as light bulbs, wipers, cleaning products etc. Other more bespoke products such as car tyres could also be offered and orders placed through AIG. The Administrator said AIG would take this under consideration.
- 5) **Minimum stay requirement for visitors traveling between the UK and St Helena:** Councillor Hickling asked why the minimum visit period for visitors travelling between the UK and St Helena was set at three weeks. The Administrator advised that travelling through Ascension Island to St Helena was not a commercial air route. The commercial route to St Helena is via South Africa, with the Airlink service underwritten by the UK/St Helena governments.

The 10 seats AIG is allocated on each Airbridge flight to and from the UK is for on island employees, their dependants and official/private visitors. The three-week stay requirement was introduced after the Airbridge resumed to make clear that any visitors travelling via Ascension to or from St Helena are doing so primarily as part of a visit to a family member or friend or for work duties. This is also necessary to ensure that AIG complies with the terms of the agreement governing civilian access to the Airbridge. The Administrator advised that the time period would be reviewed with the Governor's Office to see how the restriction is being applied, but that a reduction in the minimum stay requirement was unlikely.

- 6) **Tender process for the Georgetown pool:** Councillor Hickling asked if there was an update on the tender process for the Georgetown Pool. The Administrator advised Councillor Hickling to complete a Councillor Enquiry Form so that a formal response can be provided by AIG.
- 7) **Regularisation of the Fire Service:** Councillor Nicholls asked if there had been an update on the regularisation of the fire service. The Administrator advised that there has been discussion with the RAF and MOD regarding a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the fire service. AIG has a letter of cover, stating that the MOD will provide a fire service to the Island when needed, while a formal agreement is finalised.
- 8) **Joint Ministerial Council (JMC):** Martin Hogg (HoAO) asked councillors to discuss and decide which two Councillors would attend the JMC to represent the island. Councillors agreed to inform the Clerk to Council and it was later agreed that Councillor Barnes and Councillor Shearer would attend.

10. Proposed date of next meeting

- Formal Meeting 16:30 on Thursday 11 September 2025
- Informal Meeting 10:30 Thursday 09 October 2025

The Administrator thanked all the councillors and the meeting closed at 12:52

Georgina Wilson
Clerk to Council