



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

**16:30 on Thursday 11 September 2025 at the Courthouse**

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** HE Nigel Phillips CBE, Governor [remotely]  
HH Simon Minshull, Administrator  
Andrew Dawson, Attorney General [remotely]  
Peter Thomas, Director of Resources  
Councillor Ethan Bally  
Councillor Eugene Bennett  
Councillor Michael Ellick  
Councillor Thomas Hickling  
Councillor Laura Shearer  
Councillor Alan Nicholls

**In attendance:** Martin Hogg, Head of Administrator's Office  
Dr Tiffany Simpson, Director of Conservation and Fisheries [Agenda item 4 only]  
James Twigg, Crown Counsel  
Chrystele Todd, FCDO Desk Officer [remotely]  
Georgina Wilson, Clerk of Council

**Apologies:** Councillor Thomas Barnes

#### **1. Welcome**

HH the Administrator Simon Minshull welcomed all parties present and introduced those attending remotely.

#### **2. Approval of Minutes**

There were no minutes to approve.

#### **3. Matters arising**

The Administrator explained that the outstanding items in the Action Tracker regarding the Medium-Term Financial Plan would be covered in Agenda Item 6, and while there are no initial updates to food security, the Administrator will provide updates to council on a regular basis.

#### **4. Wildlife Protection Ordinance**

The Ascension Island Government (AIG) Director of Conservation and Fisheries (DoCF) Dr Tiffany Simpson, introduced the proposed changes to the Wildlife Protection Ordinance (WPO). Currently 70 species of plants and animals are included in the Wildlife Protection Ordinance (WPO), 2013, which states it an offence to wilfully kill, take, trade or molest these species on Ascension or within the 200NM Exclusive Economic Zone around Ascension Island. The current wording states it is an offence for a person 'wilfully to take, kill, trade or molest; or be in possession of, with the intention of taking, killing, trading or molesting, any prohibited wildlife product'. As the definition of 'molest' is unclear, it is proposed to substitute 'molest' for 'harass'. A definition for harass would then be added: 'to disturb, damage, distress, or cause a change in behaviour by way of touching, obstructing, making noise, exposing to light, or destruction of habitat'.

The proposed amendments also include the addition of several species to the lists of prohibited wildlife products. Ascension is a party to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT). The DoCF proposed to protect billfish species below a minimum landing size (MLS) and to add full protection to several oceanic, pelagic and migratory elasmobranch species to maintain compliance with ICCAT regulations. Questions were raised at the informal council meeting regarding whether the implementation of an MLS was the most appropriate measure for limiting Atlantic sailfish mortality in Ascension. The DoCF explained that Gibraltar have

implemented an MLS of 100cm but no other British Overseas Territories currently have an MLS for sailfish. The DoCF noted that the United States of America (USA) have implemented a MLS of 160cm Lower Jaw Fork Length (LJFL) and that the St Helena legislation states that ‘1) Sailfish is catch and release only (no take) and 2) The licence holder or any “Named Master” commit an offence if they fish for Blue Marlin, White Marlin, Black Marlin, or Atlantic Sailfish using any hook except a circle hook....’ The DoCF explained that ICCAT requires all parties to take measures to limit mortality of Atlantic sailfish and asked councillors to consider whether Ascension should adopt the ICCAT recommendation to implement an MLS of 160cm which helps to provide a precautionary measure to protect the spawning potential of Atlantic sailfish.

Further amendments include expanding the list of endemic invertebrates, many of which are critically endangered or currently unlisted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

The DoCF invited questions from councillors. Councillor Bennett asked whether the Ascension Island Fishers Association had been consulted on the proposed minimum landing size (MLS) for sailfish; the DoCF confirmed no engagement had taken place. Councillor Bennett noted sailfish are not a targeted species locally and catches are minimal, arguing the proposed restrictions could unnecessarily impact the fishing community. He cited other island nations without sailfish size limits and suggested community education as an alternative. The DoCF responded that for full compliance, Ascension must introduce a legal mechanism to limit mortality and a MLS is the simplest protective measure to implement and enforce but it is not the only option. Awareness efforts like ID cards for fishers are being introduced as well for community education. Councillor Bennett questioned ICCAT’s 2024 Billfish Check Sheet, including a reference to sailfish retention being banned under Ascension’s ordinance; the DoCF clarified this was an error and a correction would be requested. Councillor Bennett stated he could not support the introduction of MLS at this time. The DoCF agreed to remove the sailfish proposal from the current list of amendments and only re-introduce following public consultation.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to remove sailfish from the proposed WPO amendment and revisit it at a later date and to proceed with the other amendments except of those relating to sailfish as a recommendation to legislative change to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
1	<b>To remove sailfish from the proposed WPO amendment for the moment and;</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
	<b>Proceed with the other amendments except of those relating to sailfish</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**HE the Governor acknowledged councillors’ recommendation and accepted, thanking councillors for their advice.**

## **5. Public Holiday – King’s Birthday**

The Administrator proposed observing the King's Birthday Public Holiday on 14 November due to holiday clustering in May/June.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to propose observing Friday 14 November as a Public Holiday for the King’s Birthday forward as a recommendation to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
2	<b>To observe Friday 14 November as a Public</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

	<b>Holiday for the King's Birthday</b>						
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**HE the Governor acknowledged councillors' recommendation and accepted, thanking councillors for their advice.**

## **6. Medium Term Financial Planning – Review of rates of taxation and charges**

The AIG Director of Resources (DoR) Peter Thomas explained that AIG's operating activity is currently running a cash deficit of £1.22M each year. This operating cash deficit, together with capital expenditure not funded externally, is being funded by reserves held by the AIG. To ensure that AIG's reserves are not depleted below a satisfactory level, AIG are developing a Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025-2030 to bring AIG's budget back into financial balance. Currently 40 ideas have been raised as potential ways to reduce the budget deficit. The Senior Management Team of AIG recommends to councillors that AIG implement revisions to the rates of taxation and charges in the four following categories: These being

- Customs Duty – which is applied to Alcohol and Tobacco products, amounts have not been uplifted since 2017.
- Visa, Permits and Licenses Charges - which similarly have not been uplifted since 2017.
- Corporation Tax - by raising the rate of Corporation tax from 18% to 20%
- Ship Operating Charges – raising ship agency charges and introducing ship to shore / shore to ship persons transfer.

The DoR opened the floor to questions from councillors. Councillor Nicholls questioned the detrimental social impact of increasing the rates of duty on alcohol and the impacts on the local members clubs, highlighting that they are struggling with increasing costs. The DoR acknowledged Councillor Nicholls concerns and recognised the challenges faced by local members clubs and the social benefits they provide to the island. The DoR advised that the proposed increase, per drink, was relatively small and that rates of duty have not been increased since 2017. The DoR noted that alcohol is considered as a discretionary spend and people have a choice if they wish to consume alcohol and tobacco products, or not.

Councillor Nicholls raised a concern on the proposed increase to the shipping costs and the potential impacts on local businesses and residents. The DoR explained that no increases were being proposed which would directly affect local business and in turn residents, for example no increases were proposed on container handling charges.

Councillor Bally raised concerns on the proposed increased cost to an Ascension driver's licence, commenting that it could negatively impact newcomers to the island whom may not be able to afford the increase in cost. The Administrator explained that newcomers to the island are able to drive on their own overseas licence for three months before they are required to gain an Ascension Island driving licence (unless their role requires an Ascension Island driver licence sooner). The DoR confirmed the current cost of a one-year licence is £18.30, and if Councillors decided to increase by 100%, this would take the cost to £36.60.

Councillor Bennett referred to the proposed increases of the fish permit fee from £5 to £10 (for fish permits to St Helena) and £10 to £20 (for fish permits to the rest of the world) and asked whether there was any option to increase the 10kg allowance in line with the increase in costs. The DoR explained that the setting of the limit for export were not made from within the Resources directorate and this should be discussed with the DCoF. It was noted that the fee charged on the fish permit covers only the administration of the permit system rather than being an export specific fee.

The DoR asked Councillors if they had any specific questions relating to the proposed increases to Customs Duty. Councillor Shearer advised that she felt it was not appropriate to put this forward for this financial year due to the increased stress and welfare concerns faced by constituents such as housing and financial issues currently being faced by those living on the US Base and at Travellers, but would consider revisiting this in the future. Councillor Shearer agreed with an introduction of duties on vapes, which currently has no duty applied. The

Administrator explained that there was a fine balance, to consider the welfare and public health aspect of residents.

The Administrator invited the Governor and Attorney General to make comment. HE the Governor referenced the public health benefits of reduced consumption of alcohol and tobacco, and that taxation was one way to encourage this outcome. The Attorney General's Andrew Dawson (AG) view was that the rate of increases or taxation, such as for alcohol and tobacco should be at the very least be set at the same rate of inflation.

Councillor Nicholls asked if there could be a review of the proposed uplift percentages of the duties on alcohol and tobacco, and whether a wider range of potential increases and the subsequent revenue it generates be presented to councillors to consider. The DoR agreed that a greater range of options would be set out for councillors at a later date. However, the revenue generated would be dependent on the effect that the price increases had on demand, which would only be known when increases were commenced. The DoR proposed that if councillors had no further comments to raise at this time that voting take place relating to the proposals to customs duty to close this topic.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to take the proposal to increase customs duties for alcohol and tobacco in accordance with the uplifts suggested, forward as a recommendation to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
3	<b>Revise customs duties for alcohol and tobacco in accordance with the uplifts suggested</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to take the proposal to extend the rate of duties to vape products forward as a recommendation to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
4	<b>To extend the rate of duties to vape products in accordance with the uplifts suggested</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**HE the Governor acknowledged councillors' recommendation for introducing rates of duties to vape products and accepted, thanking councillors for their advice.**

The next area considered was the pricing of visas, permits and licences charges. The DoR asked councillors to consider the recommendation to increase the visa fees for visitors and contactors and welcomed questions from councillors. There were no questions raised by councillors.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were in favour of imposing a 100% increase in all of the visa fees as a recommendation to the Governor.**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
5	<b>Increase visa fees by 100%</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**HE the Governor acknowledged councillors' recommendation and accepted, thanking councillors for their advice.**

The DoR asked councillors to consider increase to permits and licence fees. Councillors agreed that mineral export permit fees should be voted on separately.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to take the proposal to increase the mineral export fees by 100% forward as a recommendation to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
6	<b>Increase Mineral permit fees by 100%</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**HE the Governor acknowledged councillors' recommendation and accepted, thanking councillors for their advice.**

The DoR proposed a 50% increase to remaining permit and licence fees. Councillor Bennett noted that raising road licence fees while road conditions were still poor could be viewed negatively by the public, and questioned whether any improvement would be delivered alongside the increase. The Administrator explained that revenue from licences forms part of central funds so is not directly linked to road improvements. The Administrator also explained that fees had remained unchanged for a number of years and that increases were necessary to help reduce the budget deficit alongside other revenue-generating measures.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to take the proposal to increase the permits and licence fees by 50% forward as a recommendation to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
7	<b>Increase permits and licence fees by 50%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**Four of six councillors agreed to raise the fees by 50% and so HE the Governor acknowledged councillors' recommendation and accepted, thanking councillors for their advice.**

The Administrator advised that these changes will not be an immediate increase, but will be subject to legislative changes which will follow through in a few months.

The DoR explained that the next area for consideration was the recommendation to raise corporation tax from 18% to 20%. The DoR opened the floor to questions from councillors. Councillor Nicholls questioned with the proposed increase of the Business Levy in the future, would this cause a further burden on organisations? The Administrator advised that the Business Levy required a separate discussion and that corporation tax was different in that it only applied to profit. The DoR confirmed that Ascension Island would still remain below the UK level of up to 25%, and that corporations paid below the rate that applied to individuals and small businesses on island.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to take the proposal to increase corporation tax from 18% to 20% forward as a recommendation to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
8	<b>Increase corporation tax from 18% to 20%</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**HE the Governor acknowledged councillors' recommendation and accepted, thanking councillors for their advice.**

Councillors considered a proposal to increase port charges. The DoR recommended increasing agency fees to £2,000 on weekdays and £3,000 on weekends, introducing a £20 per person, per ship visit, ship to shore transit fee, raising pet transport fees from £48 to £50, and increasing light dues for yachts and vessels from £15 to £30. Councillor Shearer noted that the pet transportation fee increase was modest and questioned whether making a

larger increase was possible. The Administrator noted the modest increase was chosen to limit impact on residents.

**Each councillor was asked in turn if they were happy to take the proposal to increase port charges forward as a recommendation to the Governor?**

	Proposal	Cllr Bally	Cllr Bennett	Cllr Ellick	Cllr Hickling	Cllr Nicholls	Cllr Shearer
9	<b>Increase port charges</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**HE the Governor acknowledged councillors' recommendation and accepted, thanking councillors for their advice.**

## **7. Any other business**

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

- i. **Youth Trainee Placement:** Councillor Nicholls asked if AIG could support Mitie by sharing its safeguarding training for staff working with work experience students. The Administrator confirmed that safeguarding measures and guidance would be shared with Mitie's HR department.
- ii. **Child Welfare Ordinance:** Councillor Nicholls raised a conflict between the Child Welfare Ordinance (under-18 definition) and the Marriage Ordinance (allowing marriage at 16 with consent). Crown Counsel James Twigg advised that this issue has been identified and that he was currently reviewing the matter.
- iii. **Medium-term financial plan:** Councillor Bennett asked if other savings and revenue ideas had progressed since the recent informal meeting of Council. The DoR stated there was no update to report and reminded Councillors that they were to report on their priorities.
- iv. **Fuel Station:** Councillor Bennett also raised fuel station improvements, which the Administrator confirmed are under review by the Director of Operations and Facilities.
- v. **Safety at the Turtle Ponds:** Councillor Bennett raised child safety concerns at the BBQ area near the turtle ponds. The Administrator advised Councillor Bennett to submit a Councillor Enquiry Form for review.
- vi. **Telecoms Survey:** Martin Hogg (Head of the Administrators Office) informed councillors that a community survey on residential telecommunications usage would be issued shortly.

## **8. Proposed dates of next meetings:**

Informal Council meeting – 15:00 Thursday 09 October 2025

Formal Council meeting – 16:30 Thursday 23 October 2025

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 18:00

Georgina Wilson  
Clerk of Council

*I certify that this is a true record of the meeting to which it relates.*



*Simon Minshall*

*On behalf of HE the Governor, Mr Nigel Phillips CBE*