

CONSULTATION

Response Document



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**Safeguarding the environment in
British Overseas Territories
(Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs)**

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Introduction to CIEEM

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM), as the leading membership organisation supporting professional ecologists and environmental managers in the United Kingdom and Ireland, welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation.

CIEEM was established in 1991 and has over 5,000 members drawn from local authorities, government agencies, industry, environmental consultancy, teaching/research, and voluntary environmental organisations. The Chartered Institute leads the way in defining and raising the standards of ecological and environmental management practice with regard to biodiversity protection and enhancement. It promotes knowledge sharing through events and publications, skills development through its comprehensive training and development programme, and best practice through the dissemination of technical guidance for the profession and related disciplines.

CIEEM is a member of:

- Environmental Policy Forum
- IUCN – The World Conservation Union
- Professional Associations Research Network
- Society for the Environment
- United Nations Decade on Biodiversity 2011-2020 Network

Comments from CIEEM

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to participate in the consultation on safeguarding the environment in British Overseas Territories (OTs). This response was produced by CIEEM's UK Overseas Territories Special Interest Group (SIG). The Overseas Territories SIG comprises volunteers who support our members who work in the Overseas Territories. They provide a key role in knowledge exchange between members who live and work on the OTs and those who are engaged in research and innovation that might be pertinent to the OTs. The SIG also raises the awareness of the exceptional biodiversity of the OTs within the UK; provides support on best practice and guidance; and has a strong facilitation role running face to face conferences, meetings and webinars supported by stakeholders in overseas territories as well as in the UK.

We would be happy to provide further information on this topic. Please contact Jason Reeves (CIEEM Head of Policy and Communications) at JasonReeves@cieem.net with any queries.

1. What are the biodiversity challenges you are addressing in your region? What is your role in tackling these challenges?

Our remit covers all of the UK's OTs. CIEEM:

- supports people in the region tackling the biodiversity challenges on their island or islands and the British Antarctic Territory;
- facilitates information and knowledge sharing and help build capacity of OT stakeholders; and
- helps build links between environmental professionals in the territories and the UK to help build best practice.

From the work we and our members have done on the OT islands, technical events and informal consultation, we understand the following are key challenges:

- Challenges in the Caribbean and the Pacific islands:
 - Lack of ecological resilience to extreme weather events driven by climate change.
 - Presence of and introduction of invasive species.
 - Inappropriate development which does not acknowledge best practices and local guidelines.
 - A need for evidence to persuade developers, insurers and re-insurers to take natural capital and biodiversity into account, and to understand that environmental resilience for the future will only be realised if guidelines and environment planning policy are established and followed.
 - A lack of fundamental data sets such as soil properties, weather patterns at an island scale, climate change prediction data, species niche occupancy and environmental envelopes for key endemics species.
 - A need for greater awareness of how the availability and use of potable water and food security are interacting with wider biodiversity to impact natural capital on the islands.

- Challenges in the South Atlantic:
 - Understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change with significant changes on land and within the marine environment as the Antarctic sheet ice melts.
 - The difficulty of maintaining good environmental management when populations are small and so corresponding workloads are large and cover a very wide remit.
 - Presence and introduction of invasive species.
 - Lack of key data sets on environmental risks such as erosion, soil and ocean acidification and carbon loss through denaturing of peat deposits.
 - A lack of good knowledge of endemic species networks and the climatic conditions in which a species currently lives, known as its “environmental envelope”.

2. What are your sources of funding? What is the impact of current funds on biodiversity and conservation on the ground in the OTs? Please provide information on specific funding streams/ schemes and the outcomes they have achieved.

Our role as a professional body means that we do not interact with funding sources directly. However, we understand for members both on and off OTs that there is a concern about funding streams post-Brexit, with Darwin Plus becoming the main funding mechanism. Even with the change in application window for Darwin funding, the process is onerous.

It is difficult for commercial companies to lead Darwin Plus bids because of the cost structure. Whilst we acknowledge that the funding should be for a given OT and not for UK firms, there is a valuable role for commercial UK organisations to input their knowledge and expertise when working in partnership with research and conservation parties. We feel that another type of fund would be useful to address this and to enable the transfer of best practice projects from the UK to the OTs and visa-versa.

We would encourage a closer relationship between UK universities and Overseas Territories to share and/or align research priorities.

3. What are the main barriers to tackling the challenges you face? If lack of funding is a barrier, please describe the objectives you would deliver with additional funding and how these relate to UK and OT government biodiversity priorities.

It is our understanding that the main barriers are:

- lack of data (see above);
- lack of knowledge of the importance of biodiversity (especially with respect to key decision-makers); and
- lack of personnel with the skills and experience to deliver environmental projects, and lack of funding.

Overcoming these barriers necessitates dealing with:

Funding for conservation projects

It is our understanding that the OTs are concerned about funding for environmental projects which will only be available under one programme (Darwin Plus) following the UK’s exit from the EU. The diversity of the current funding programmes means that different types of projects can run

concurrently. The EU BEST project (voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European overseas)¹ can tackle larger projects which involve infrastructure and on the ground action, for example, the 'Developing a Site-based Conservation Approach for Sei Whales, *Balaenoptera borealis*, at Berkeley Sound' project².

Small grants of up to £30K are difficult to obtain for work on OTs islands, however this size grant is often ideal for turning research projects into operational work that delivers changes on the ground.

We strongly recommend a variety of funding programs post-Brexit aimed at different types of environmental projects.

Funding for research projects

Large research projects involving the OTs are very difficult for UK universities to obtain funding for. In order to qualify for funding, most research must be delivered on OT islands which are developing countries and or transitioning countries. Research funds which include the UK OTs even as project partners would greatly enhance the chance of funding and therefore the scientific understanding of the biodiversity of the OT islands.

For those who wish to engage in research on the OT islands, the Chevening scholarship fund³ is extremely useful for taught Master's, however there are no mechanisms known to the group which are similar for achieving funding to undertake PhDs on OTs. It is necessary to encourage original research on the OT islands to answer some of the knowledge gaps.

There is more that could be done to ensure that research is linked with the needs of OTs and answers significant knowledge gaps. A portal for OTs to post research questions which can be accessed by those studying environmental subjects in the UK would help address this gap. This could be implemented using existing knowledge-sharing organisations such as the British Ecological Society.

The link between science and cultural understanding could also be highlighted more.

Land ownership

The distribution of land ownership can be a barrier to biodiversity work on OT islands as very few areas are owned by the government and many stakeholders are likely to have interest in any given piece of land, therefore decisions on protected areas can be difficult.

Objectives to be delivered with additional funding

With additional funding, some of the challenges outlined in question 1 could be addressed, for example, the challenge of the presence and introduction of invasive species. This directly relates to the priority action of tackling invasive species set out in Defra's Biodiversity 2020 strategy⁴.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/best/index_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/best/pdf/fs_sei_whales_en.pdf

³ <https://www.chevening.org/>

⁴ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2011) *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services*, London: DEFRA

- 4. What do you think of the current allocation of funds between the OTs and the UK, and between strategic priorities? Can you think of ways to improve the effectiveness/efficiency of this allocation and its impact on the ground?**

See answer to question 3.

- 5. Do you have views on how any funds you have accessed are run and administered? How could they be better organised?**

Most of the OTs are small island communities with only a few key individuals who have a proven track record in delivering projects. A project which aims to increase capacity for accessing partnership projects and funding, project management and delivery would be valuable.

- 6. How have you collaborated with other organisations, both public and private, to ensure spending delivers outcomes? Is there more that could be done to improve collaboration?**

In our role as a professional body, we have not directly collaborated on projects in the UK Overseas Territories. Collaboration is, however, key to delivering good outcomes and should be facilitated.

As stated in our answer to question 3, a portal for OTs to post research questions which can be accessed by those studying environmental subjects in the UK, along with opportunities for collaboration, would be a useful tool.

- 7. How are your funded projects monitored and evaluated to ensure they deliver value for money?**

N/A

- 8. Does any particular fund deliver better value for money, in comparison to others? How/why?**

N/A

- 9. Do you have any ideas of innovative methods to improve biodiversity and conservation in your region? Do you have any experience of use of innovative methods?**

In our conferences and webinars, we encourage the discussion of novel ideas and innovative methods, e.g. using technology to connect these communities⁵.

BEST projects and links between OTs and those of other EU countries are also of great value. These links should be maintained and facilitated post-Brexit to encourage knowledge-sharing of innovative methods of conservation.

⁵ <https://cieem.net/resource/cieem-webinar-providing-an-evidence-for-conservation-in-the-uks-overseas-territories/>

10. Are there other environmental or climate change programmes in country that also contribute to biodiversity outcomes, including those funded from the budget?

N/A

11. Have you identified any forms of government funding that could encourage financial investment from other sources (e.g. leveraging for match funding, private investment and academic research funding)?

We feel the OTs could usefully be included in the growing debate about Payments for Ecosystem Services and how schemes could be enabled on OTs. The role of natural capital has been highlighted in recent projects. We feel these concepts are of great importance to the OTs and should be supported.

12. How have biodiversity and biodiversity funding supported wider benefits in your region, such as sustainable economic development?

Ecosystem services and natural capital are key to supporting sustainable economic development. The environment underpins the economies of many OTs with a substantial income being generated in the Caribbean by tourism related to beaches, species, and water related activities such as fishing and diving. Understanding the environmental drivers and resilience of these features is key to the future of such OT islands.

Having basic environmental data like habitat and terrain maps allow OT islands to plan, monitor and model the long-term futures of a given island which can save lives, for example, by understanding risk areas due to storm surge and planning development activities in line with these known features, as demonstrated in the JNCC projects funded under the Catchment Sensitive Farming Funds.