



Species Survival Working Group

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Consultation on a new UK Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy: Call for Evidence

IUCN NCUK SSWG response submitted March 2023

Introduction to the IUCN NCUK SSWG

The IUCN Species Survival Working Group (SSWG) is part of the IUCN UK National Committee. It supports the work of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), its programmes and initiatives. The SSWG aims to connect research and practice within the SSC's thematic work areas in a UK context, including the Commission's Species Strategic Plan 2021-2025. The SSWG builds relationships between the network of practitioners delivering in these areas in the UK and its Overseas Territories.

The SSWG welcomes the proposal to develop a new, living, UK OT biodiversity strategy as a tool to guide future investment in protecting and restoring OT biodiversity. The current UK OT biodiversity strategy contains sound and sensible strategic priorities. These priorities should be expanded to align with the newly adopted KMCBG targets and underpinned with a secure funding stream.

In what way is the SSWG involved in biodiversity conservation in the OTs?

The role of the SSWG is to support of the work of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) and its programme and initiatives. The geographical area of operation includes the British Isles and the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies and the emphasis will be on new and innovative practices which aim to reverse biodiversity loss and contribute to meeting the relevant short, medium and longer term targets agreed by parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity as they are negotiated and agreed.

The SSWG considers the following strategic priorities of the current strategy still relevant to biodiversity conservation in the OTs:

- Obtaining data on the location and status of biodiversity interests and the human activities affecting biodiversity to inform the preparation of policies and management plans (including baseline survey and subsequent monitoring);
- Preventing the establishment of invasive alien species, and eradicating or controlling species that have already become established;
- Developing cross-sectoral approaches to climate change adaptation that are consistent with the principles of sustainable development;
- Developing tools to value ecosystem services to inform sustainable development policies and practices;
- Developing ecosystem-based initiatives for the conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment.

The SSWG considers that the following high priority areas that should be included in the new OT biodiversity strategy, and additional measures that would make a new OT biodiversity strategy more effective:

The Territories are home to almost 27,000 known species, at least 1,500 of which are endemic, compared with just 90 found in the UK. Less than 10% of these endemic species have had their global conservation status assessed and, of those that have, 77% (111 species) are Globally Threatened. There is an urgent need for a full assessment of the biodiversity on the OTs, particularly understudied groups including marine biodiversity; invertebrates; non-vascular ('lower') plants; lichen and fungi. High priority should be given to red listing endemic species whose status is unknown.

A [2014 RSPB report](#) estimated there could be a further 50,000 unrecorded species and over 2,100 undiscovered endemic species. Support should be given to fund research to determine what species are present on the OTs and what their status is.

An over-arching biodiversity strategy for the Overseas Territories should be a mechanism for effectively and efficiently sharing and communicating between and within the territories and the UK, for the various governments, local and UK-based NGOs and researchers working in the region. It should also be designed, with full involvement from and agreement with the OT governments and administrations, to function on regional and local scales to best support the objectives within it. For example, the strategy should consider the specific needs and aims of each country and each cluster of territories alongside ambitions for the territories as a whole.

High priority should be given to increasing capacity within the territories. This includes guaranteeing local governments and administrations, which have been wholly engaged in the development process, are fully committed and have adequate staff to devote the necessary time to ensure the strategy is considered at all stages of policy and law development including development and planning, climate resilience, tourism, fisheries and farming. Increased capacity is also needed for the in-country NGOs and to develop their research strengths so that there is reduced reliance on researchers from overseas and more in-country ability to inform decision making.

Stronger links should be encouraged and supported between local governments and with the UK government, and between local NGOs and UK-based NGOs. Regular assessments of how the strategy is being implemented and opportunities to adapt it when needed will strengthen its effectiveness. The widespread use of Conservation Standards and Conservation Evidence should be adopted to ensure the strategy is flexible and responsive, and that resources are used as efficiently as possible.

The current strategy and individual territories already have a strong focus on tackling invasive, alien species. Measures to strengthen and support the eradication and prevention of any further threats from invasive non-natives are critical. Support for continued and increased eradication and surveillance programmes should be a key focus of the new strategy.

Many of the Overseas Territories are particularly at risk from climate change impacts and need urgent funds, support and information on adaptation processes. Measures to strengthen and support resilience from increasing climate change threats, such as hurricanes and sea level rise, are critical. These measures must be aligned with sustainable use practices particularly with regards fisheries.

The new strategy should ensure alignment with the relevant goals and targets agreed as part of the CBD Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Assessments made as part of red

listing endemic species will generate knowledge that will feed directly into the targets 4 and 5 to halt species decline and ensure sustainable harvest and trade of wild species. High priority should also be given to assisting the OTs in identifying marine and terrestrial areas to be protected and restored under targets 2 and 3. This strategy should also be developed and compatible with the UK's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP).

In developing this new biodiversity strategy, the UK government should take into consideration the commitments already made under the Environmental charters and ensure the aims and targets are aligned and can be implemented alongside them.

All the above measures are dependent on substantial, long-term, secure funding, which is needed to give all stakeholders confidence in collaborating fully.

The NCUK SSWG is fully committed to supporting a new OT biodiversity strategy.