

UKOTA Annual Report to Political Council

30th November 2015





1. Foreword

The United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) was founded in 1994 and exists to promote both the interests of the Territories and cooperation between them, whilst also working to insure the good collective and individual relationship between Territories and the United Kingdom Government. The Association's work is governed by regular meetings of the Representatives of the Overseas Territories who are based in the United Kingdom. Territory Representatives who are not based in the United Kingdom are also able to join in the deliberations by telephone link.

2. The Annual General Meeting and UKOTA Secretariat

UKOTA's Annual General Meeting was held on 12th February 2015 in the London Office of The Government of Gibraltar. Officers were elected as follows:

Chairman: Sukey Cameron MBE, UK Representative for the Falkland Islands Government

Secretary: Albert Poggio, GMH OBE, UK Representative for HM Government of Gibraltar

Treasurer: Chris Carnegy, UK Representative for the Government of Tristan da Cunha

In accordance with the offer initially made by Chief Minister of Gibraltar, the London Office of HM Government of Gibraltar has continued to provide a Secretariat for UKOTA. Those duties have been carried out by Edwina O'Mahony, Government Affairs Coordinator for HM Government of Gibraltar in London, and we are most grateful to her for her hard work during the year, especially in undertaking all the arrangements for the UKOTA events during JMC week.

This arrangement will continue until the end of 2016. It cannot be overstated how important it is to the work and effectiveness of UKOTA to have a dedicated official servicing its meetings and coordinating its work amongst members, as well as with officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Whitehall departments. It remains a longer term aspiration of UKOTA to have its own independent and separately funded Secretariat. However, for the foreseeable future, this must remain an aspiration when in consideration of conflicting priorities and the severe financial constraints and pressures upon all the Territories.

3. Change of Representatives in London

We welcomed two new appointments during the year: Chris Carnegie took up the post of the UK Representative for Tristan Da Cunha and Tracy Knight took up the post of UK Representative of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

4. Membership

Ascension Island became a formal member of UKOTA at AGM which was held on 12th February 2015.

5. The Work of UKOTA

Throughout the year UKOTA has held eleven meetings. A number of briefings have been arranged, including with a representative from UKREP in Brussels, Members of Parliament, Commonwealth groups and the UK Safer Internet Centre. We have worked closely with the All-Party British Overseas Territories Group and also monitored Parliamentary proceedings.

Furthermore, regular meetings are held with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, especially in the run up to the JMC. UKOTA continues to complement the work of the Territories' Sherpas and assists in the planning of the meeting of the Heads of Government for the Pre-JMC, hosted this year by the Government of Bermuda.

Sub Committees of UKOTA:

Representatives Offices – Immunities and privileges

A committee has been set up, under the Chairmanship of the UK Representative of Bermuda, to look at the issue of the position of the OT Government UK offices under the Consular Relations Act 1968. Some offices already appear under the act but others do not and it is important that all Offices are afforded the same privileges and benefits.

Public Relations - Chaired by UK Representative for the Government of Montserrat.

The new website has had positive feedback both in respect of it being more representative of the Territories and for the increased now enquiries it has generated.

The training provided to the UKOTA has meant the general day to day management and updating of the website is dealt with on and more frequently

and information more current. The news section is now more frequently updated and this has led to a renewed focus on using the UKOTA Twitter account. @UKOTAssociation

One issue of the newsletter was produced in July. A new design for the newsletter, to bring it more in line with the website, has just been commissioned in time for the next issue due out in January. The newsletter has a wide circulation and one criteria for the new design is to drive readers look to the website. www.ukota.org

Financial Services Working Group

Chaired by UK Representative for the Government of the British Virgin Islands.

The Financial Services Working Group met four times during the year. They also held meetings with HMG officials, including HM Treasury, Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and with Richard Hay of Stikeman Elliott.

They also addressed the issue of EU blacklisting of some Overseas Territories and discussed the issue with FCO officials and UKREP in Brussels.

A number of Parliamentary Questions have been tabled on Beneficial Ownership and responses monitored. The working group is drawing up a communications strategy in respect of this issue and continued pressures from NGOs.

On 7th December 2015, members of the UKOTA Financial Services Working Group will participate in a Partnership Working Party (PWP1) on Financial Services in Brussels organised by the European Commission (Commission) and the Overseas Countries and Territories Association (OCTA). The meeting will bring together technical experts from various Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and the Commission (i.e. DG TAXUD and DG MARKT).

6. Environment

Chaired by the UK Representative for the Government of St. Helena

The Overseas Territories are custodians of some of the worlds' most critical ecosystems and their inherently unique flora and fauna. We continue to try and demonstrate how very seriously each and every Overseas Territory approach their responsibilities and obligations in this respect.

It is a cause for concern that in the past year the FCO have cut the environmental



desk officer's post in OTD and that DEFRA no longer have a dedicated officer dealing with the Territories. The fact that the OTs were 'forgotten' in the plans for UK representation at COP21 in Paris is an example of how important issues can be missed.

The interpretation of the Conservative Party's Manifesto commitment on establishing Blue Belts around the Overseas Territories, has caused concern that Blue Belts are being imposed on some Territories without due consideration given to the wishes of the people. Some Representatives also attended the Conservative Environment Network and the Great British Oceans campaign reception, at the House of Commons, hosted by Nick Hurd MP, Richard Benyon MP and Zac Goldsmith MP. Oliver Letwin MP provided a briefing on the Government's progress toward establishing marine reserves in the British Overseas Territories. UKOTA was briefed on this issue by the FCO and invited to sit on the Blue Belt Steering Group, which also includes representatives from NGOs. UKOTA also wrote to Oliver Letwin MP, seeking clarification on the issue and requesting that he meet the Leaders during the JMC week. The letter was responded to by FCO Minister James Duddridge. He clarified that they are committed "local support and environmental need" and that they want to work in partnership with the Government of the OTs.

UKOTA supported the OT Student Environment Conference, organised by the JNCC and held on Sunday 29th November.

UKOTA continued collaborating with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and was provided with a briefing on the update report on the RSPB review of environmental governance in the Territories.

7. European Union

A visit by UKOTA to Brussels was undertaken in April to strengthen the links with the European Parliament and a UK Overseas Territories 'friendship group' is being formed, under the Chairmanship of Charles Tannock MEP, to ensure that the views of the OTs are represented.

UKOTA wrote to the Europe Minister, David Lidington MP, to express concern on the position of the OTs in the EU Referendum. The Minister responded to say that whilst the citizens of the OTs (bar Gibraltar) would not be able to have a vote in the Referendum, it was important that our views were taken into account. We have had two briefings from the EU Referendum Unit in the FCO and been in touch with Parliamentarians and pro Europe groups.

Except for Bermuda, all UK OTs were represented at the Energy Ministers Summit



in Brussels and signed the Sustainable Energy Roadmap. All UK OTs have agreed to the Energy Declaration which should be signed at the next EU-OCT Forum which will take place in Brussels during February 2016.

The opportunity to arrange the training session, at the end of the JMC, on the EU Institutions, was taken to enable many of the participants from the Territories to undertake this training on 4th December.

8. UKOTA Financial Statement

In accordance with the UKOTA Constitution, financial resources are at the disposal of the Association for the execution of its activities and attainment of its objectives. Financial resources arise from membership fees and other contributions from Members.

The current annual subscription for members stands at £900. This year we benefited from the subscription payment by new member Ascension Island. To date there are no membership payments outstanding from any member.

The total balance of accounts as of 17th November 2015 stood at £21,398.58. Of this total, UKOTA funds were £19,928.24 and scholarship funding processed by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) was £1,470.34. This latter sum has now been sent as a contribution towards the cost of a conference of JNCC OT students in the UK held on 29th November.

Sukey Cameron MBE
Chairman