

## **UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee reports on the environmental consequences of UK's exit from the European Union**

In the wake of the EU referendum, the UK Parliament's House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) launched several inquiries, as well as revisiting subjects that it had covered previously, and which were likely to be impacted by the Government's response to the result. UKOTCF was amongst those giving evidence to these. UKOTCF alerted its Members and associate organisations to these and encouraged them to submit their own responses as well as provide input into UKOTCF's. In 2017, the Committee's reports were published.

### **Committee Inquiry into the *Future of the Environment after the EU Referendum***

In September 2016, a submission was made this Inquiry. Although EAC's report concentrates on the impact on GB and NI, there are some references to UKOTs, which are pleasing to see.

The Committee drew on the submission from UKOTCF noting:

*"43. The UK Government must also address concerns relating to the natural environment in UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs). The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum explained that support would be needed to help Gibraltar retain existing environmental law in its own legislation, and to ensure it became a party to international conservation frameworks outside the EU umbrella. The UK government has consistently said that UKOTs meet their obligations to the Bern convention through the EU Birds and Habitats Directives without them needing to be party to it, however these Directives themselves will probably not apply to the UK when it leaves the EU. The domestic legislation transposing them into UK law will be retained through the Great Repeal Bill but this will not apply to Gibraltar. The Forum therefore continued:*

*UK's ratification includes the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, the Isle of Man and Jersey. As long ago as 1996, in UK Dependent Territories: a Conservation Review (part-funded by UK Government's Darwin Initiative), UKOTCF (at the request of Gibraltar partners) called on the UK Government to include Gibraltar in its ratification of the Bern Convention and assist in its implementation.*

*The Forum also called on the UK Government to increase Defra resources in order to support territories and Crown Dependencies in designating and managing Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.*

Furthermore, linked to their recommendations the EAC noted:

*"Membership of the EU has provided a common framework within which the devolved nations have been able to develop their own environmental policies. References to the EU will need to be removed from devolved legislation, and the Government must substitute a new common framework. The Government must ensure that the status of EU environmental legislation in the UK Overseas Territories is understood and action taken to preserve protections where necessary."*

The full report can be seen at:

[www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/599/59902.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/599/59902.htm) .

### ***Inquiry into Marine Protected Areas revisited***

In October 2016, written evidence was submitted on MPAs. The material used to draft a response came largely from the marine session at the Gibraltar conference in July 2015 (see *Forum News 44*) and the *Review of progress in meeting Commitments under the Environment Charter, Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals* ([www.ukotcf.org/charters/progress.htm](http://www.ukotcf.org/charters/progress.htm)).

The EAC invited UKOTCF to provide oral evidence in its session, held 10 January 2017, alongside the Blue Marine Foundation and the Pew Trusts. The full recording of the session, together with the session held on 26 January, involving Rt Hon Baroness Anelay of St Johns, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Dr Thérèse Coffey, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, DEFRA is available to view at

[www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk). and <http://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/ea5de59c-f449-4573-a97f-e8100e06ef23>. Following this, additional written evidence was submitted, and this has also now been published online.

In those parts of its report

(<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/597/597.pdf>) relating to Overseas Territories, EAC frequently cited evidence from UKOTCF. The Committee's conclusions include:

*56. To gain support for the MPA network, the Government must ensure that it consults more effectively and transparently with Governments and local communities in the Overseas Territories. It should ensure that any concerns of the UKOTs are given due consideration before designating MPAs in their waters.*

*60. Designation of an MPA is only the first step. MPAs will only be effective if they are properly resourced, managed, monitored and enforced. Many UKOTs lack the necessary resources to effectively manage their MPAs.*

*61. The Government must provide support to the UKOTs to help them properly detect and deter illegal activities. The Government must explore ways of strengthening surveillance and monitoring, to help detect illegal fishing activities in resource-poor UKOTs.*

*67. A lack of funding in the UKOTs hampers the ability to effectively manage and enforce designated MPAs. We welcome the Government's commitment of £20 million over the next four years to support the implementation, management, surveillance, monitoring and enforcement of MPAs in the UKOTs. However, we are concerned about the loss of EU BEST funding which currently provides approximately 1/3 of all environmental project funding in the UKOTs.*

*68. We recommend that the Government commits to replacing BEST funding after we leave the European Union. The UK Government should explore and promote opportunities for the UKOTs to access funding sources from environmental initiatives, NGOs, conservation groups and charities for environmental projects in the UKOTs. This should be used as an additional source of funding for projects in the UKOTs and not be utilised as an excuse to replace any existing sources of funding. This would help the Government contribute to achieving the Global Goal 14 'Life Below Water'.*

*70. The UK Government must assess the likely impact of leaving the EU on Gibraltar's Marine Protected Areas. In response to this report, it must set out what additional support it intends to provide to Government of Gibraltar to prevent incursions in their territorial waters. It must set out in the Great Repeal Bill and any new Fisheries or Environmental Protection Act how the funding, monitoring and evaluation of Gibraltar's MPAs will proceed to minimise any future difficulties with Spain over management measures.*

### **Inquiry on Sustainable Development Goals in the UK**

Again, all submissions, including UKOTCF's, can be seen on the EAC page. EAC's report (<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/596/596.pdf>) refers to the overall situation, rather than addressing UKOTs specifically. Nevertheless, especially because it addresses in part the approach to UK Government spending overseas (especially, but not exclusively, by DFID), it is very relevant to UKOTs. The criticism of lack of awareness-raising has resonance with UK Government's removal of eligibility of grant-funding in UKOTs of environmental education and awareness-raising measures. Some key points in the report are:

From the Summary:

*By adopting Agenda 2030 the Government has committed itself to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals - or the Global Goals - in the UK as well as overseas. However, the Government's doughnut-shaped approach - which is to see the Goals as something for the UK to help other countries do, rather than drawing on other countries' experiences in implementing the goals here at home - suggests that it has little interest in, or enthusiasm for, maximising the opportunities and benefits*

*presented by the Goals. Successful implementation would not only encourage greater cross-departmental collaboration and policy coherence in Government, it would bring economic, social and environmental benefits to the UK...*

*Raising awareness and encouraging engagement with the Global Goals will increase the number of people and organisations able to contribute towards meeting the Goals. But today few people in the UK know about them...*

*40. Progress on developing measurement frameworks for the Goals is too slow. We recognise the progress of the Office of National Statistics to date and commend its efforts to engage with stakeholders and draw on non-official data sources as a way to fill the “data gap”. However, it is now almost two years since the Government adopted the Goals. During that time we have seen delays from both the Government and the ONS. Delays to the ONS’s work means delays to the UK’s achievement of the Goals. We are concerned about the amount of time it is taking to develop the national indicators given the ONS “contributed directly” to the development of the global indicators between March 2015 and March 2016. It should be a priority for the ONS to establish an early baseline from which we can judge the Government’s future performance against the roadmap it sets out. Perfection should not be the enemy of the good, so we recommend that the ONS focus its efforts on ensuring it meets its autumn 2017 deadline to report on the Goals to the United Nations. The ONS requires secure and sustained funding to carry out its job in relation to the Goals, and the Government should set out how much funding the ONS will receive at the start of every Parliament.*

*41. However, we are concerned that the Government appears to have changed its mind about the ONS developing a set of national indicators. This suggests an attempt to bury data which will be seen by the public - and us - as going against the spirit of the Goals. This would undermine UK leadership on the Goals. If this is the case then two years of work by the ONS will have been wasted by the Government. It means there will be no aggregate scorecard or baseline against which to measure progress towards the Goals. This will harm public accountability and moves the country away from achieving the Goals. We can see that integrating the indicators into the Government’s Single Departmental Plans will ensure they are taken seriously by individual departments. But the move risks reducing the level of engagement and participation from non-government bodies and it increases the temptation for the Government to cherry-pick indicators and focus on areas where it is performing well. It is also not clear how well equipped Government departments are to ensure proper data disaggregation and therefore focus on the hardest to reach groups in society. The Government must clarify urgently in its response to this report whether the ONS will report on national progress towards the Global Goals. It must also ensure a timely and transparent release of information that monitors progress against the indicators. We expect these to be produced and managed in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics to ensure confidence in their implementation.*