



## Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

16:30 on Wednesday 17 July 2024 at the Courthouse

### MINUTES

Present:	HE the Governor, Nigel Phillips CBE [remotely] Acting Attorney General, Simon Dykes [remotely] HH Simon Minshull, Administrator Peter Thomas, Director of Resources	Councillor Kerry Benjamin Councillor Alan Nicholls Councillor Laura Shearer Councillor Gordon Worthington
In attendance:	Carl Mackerras, Head of Administrator's Office David Mills, Director of Operations and Facilities Cuen Muller, Acting Director of Conservation and Fisheries Jolene Sim, Acting Director of Conservation and Fisheries Ailsa Hearne, FCDO Desk Officer Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council	
Apologies:	Councillor Kyla Benjamin Matthew James, Crown Counsel	

#### 1. Welcome

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

#### 2. Approval of Minutes

The summary of the informal Council meeting held on 23 May 2024, and published on 07 June 2024, was accepted and in accordance with the Council Rules were agreed by Council members.

#### 3. Matters arising

Matters arising were addressed via the Action's Tracker:

**Pets on the MOD FIRS:** The Administrator explained that whilst British Forces South Atlantic Islands (BFSAI) have confirmed pets only belonging to MOD Military Personnel and MOD Civil Servants will be carried on the FIRS, written confirmation from the MOD in the UK has not yet been received. It was agreed at the most recent informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council that Councillors would be updated by write around when more information is available, given that recent occurrences appear to contradict the BFSAI statement. The Administrator therefore proposed that this item now be removed from the actions tracker. Councillor Kerry Benjamin highlighted the public concern around this topic and requested that this item remains on the actions tracker until the issue is fully resolved. Councillors Nicholls requested clarity on who was responsible for providing the AIG with a formal response. The Administrator explained that he is seeking clarity from both BFSAI and Defence Supply Chain Operations and Movements (DSCOM).

**Future vet visit plans:** The Administrator confirmed that opportunities to bid to the AIMPACT fund will be available soon and a bid to support a vet visit to Ascension is expected. The Administrator reported that the formation of the AIMPACT Advisory Board has now been completed and that invitations to bid will be publicised by the end of July 2024. Councillor Kerry Benjamin asked whether there were any indicative costs associated with the vet visit and how soon it is likely to take place, reporting of one severely sick pet on the island. The Administrator explained that costs are likely to be the airfare costs, accommodation and the veterinarian's time.

#### 4. Rodent Controls

The Acting Director of Conservation and Fisheries (ADoCF), Mrs Jolene Sim thanked Councillors for passing on constituents' feedback in relation to rodent controls in Ascension. The ADoCF explained that in recent years seasonal rains have caused an increase in invasive vegetation such as rain grass, which subsequently leads to temporal booms in rodent populations which Ascension is currently experiencing. As a proactive measure the AIG sought additional funding through the Darwin Initiative to hire pest control experts from Wildlife Management International Limited (WMIL) to assess the feasibility of eradicating non-native species from Ascension. WMIL visited Ascension in January 2024 to carry out this study and made recommendations to improve methods of adaptive control. The final report will be made available to Councillors once completed.

The ADoCF thanked Councillor Worthington for his Councillor Enquiry Form (CEF) submission and provided an overview of [the response published on the AIG website](#). The ADoCF confirmed that the increase in the rodent population over the past two months was expected following periods of prolonged heavy rainfall and data from the last two years shows a significant increase in the number of rodent control job requests received by the AIG Help Desk from June to October. As a result, the Environmental Health budget was increased for this financial year to ensure sufficient stocks of rodenticide were readily available on island to manage the fluctuations in rodent populations. The ADoCF explained that in line with the advice from WMIL the AIG has taken a strategic approach of increasing its baiting in residential areas, Two Boat School and work places, with a bi monthly rebaiting schedule in place for these priority areas. A total of 1014 bait stations have been deployed across the island (excluding the RAF Base and USSF Base) with additional bait boxes being deployed around the settlement perimeters at 50 meters apart.

The ADoCF informed Council that recruitment is near completion to replace the third member of the Environmental Health team, with an estimated start date of August 2024. Following the arrival of the third team member an intensive grid-based approach will be applied when deploying bait boxes in Two Boats Village, Georgetown, public beaches and picnic areas. It is anticipated that these boxes will be serviced on a weekly basis. The ADoCF explained that whilst the removal of road kill is still carried out on an ad hoc basis, this is deemed a lower priority than the rodent control measures already discussed.

Councillor Worthington thanked the ADoCF for such a comprehensive update and noted his appreciation for the prioritisation of the Environmental Health team's workload. Councillor Worthington reported of unacceptable amounts of rodent remains on chassis and tyres of MOD and Mitie vehicles and asked whether the rodents found on Ascension are known to carry any diseases and whether the AIG had any suggestions on how to best clean and remove rodent remains from vehicles. The ADoCF confirmed that testing completed in previous years has shown no presence of diseases in the rodents in Ascension. The ADoCF also reported that WMIL provided the Environmental Health employees with dissection training during their visit earlier in the year, adding that should the team observe any changes in rodent behaviour they have the skills required to take samples for analysis. Additionally, WMIL took 53 tail samples during their visit to Ascension and are currently being analysed for resistance to rodenticides and the presence of any diseases. The Administrator recommended that Councillor Worthington also raise this issue with the Mitie QHSE who may be able to advise on the best method of removing rodent remains from vehicles. Councillor Worthington requested clarity on when a reduction in rodent numbers can be expected on popular walking paths. The ADoCF explained that a reduction in rodent number on the Green Mountain is expected within the next three months based on previous years observations and a natural increase and decrease in their populations following seasonal rain. Councillor Worthington asked whether rodent carcasses are known to carry any diseases. The ADoCF confirmed that the rodents on Ascension carry no known diseases at the time of most recent testing. The Administrator also suggested that drivers be encouraged to avoid driving over road kill where possible.

Councillor Nicholls explained that the issue of an ever-increasing rodent population in Ascension has been coming before council for quite some time and requested clarity as to whether there is an island wide strategy to address the issue. The ADoCF explained that following the WMIL report, recommendations have been made on how best to tackle the island wide issue however without external funding the small Environmental Health team has its limitations and is unlikely to be able to make any substantive to the current trend. Councillor Nicholls conveyed

his appreciation of the Environmental Health teams' efforts however felt that the problem was far bigger than the small team can cope with. Councillor Nicholls suggested that in line with the One Island Vision a concerted effort by all organisations in Ascension to tackle the issue more strategically may be more effective. Councillor Nicholls acknowledged that the eradication of rodents from Ascension was very unlikely given that the suggestions made by WMIL would have huge costs associated. The Administrator clarified that whilst the MOD base and USSF base manage their own rodent controls, both are in regular contact with the AIG, sharing best practice measures of rodent management as well as waste management. The Administrator explained that settlements, work places and key infrastructure are high priority for the Environmental Health team, conservation areas such as Nature Reserves where endemic seabirds nest are managed by the wider conservation team to allow the Environmental Health team to focus on these priority areas. Councillor Nicholls asked whether there was any correlation between people owning animals and becoming more susceptible to encountering rodents in and around their homes. Discussion was had regarding informing the public on how to better keep rodents out of their homes and away from surrounding areas, the Administrator agreed to consider issuing a Public Notice in addition to the quarterly Environmental Health update. Councillor Nicholls reported of incidents where rats have eaten their way through fly screens to gain entry to people's homes and requested an update on the alternative fly screens that were trialled to prevent such incidents occurring. The Director of Operations and Facilities (DoOF) explained that the alternative fly screens trialled had presented issues with corrosion and were only suitable for windows, not doors therefore, alternative options are under consideration for trial.

## **5. Waste Management**

The DoOF explained that earlier in the year a 10-point plan that draws together currently and proposed measures to achieve significant change by 31 March 2025 by reducing the amount of food waste and to tidy the One Boat landfill site generally was presented to the Public Works Committee. The DoOF was pleased to report that the amount of food waste taken to the One Boat Dump from Travellers Hill has now decreased significantly with thanks to joint working with the MoD's contractor, Mitie. The DoOF reported that there are plans in place to continue the momentum and introduce more of Travellers Hill waste into the AIG incineration system soon.

The DoOF explained that an additional check is conducted on Wednesday's to identify any overflowing bins in Two Boats and Georgetown, ensuring waste is not left out with receptacles and attracting rodents. The DoOF reported of ongoing support for on island organisations in relation to sustainability and recycling in line with the One Island Vision approach. The FCDO have provided additional support with the funding of a glass crusher that will convert bottles into particles that can be used as building materials which is expected to arrive in October 2024. The DoOF offered to return to Council to provide a further update in March of 2025.

Councillor Nicholls asked when open pit burning would end. The DoOF explained that it would be unrealistic at this time to eliminate open pit burning altogether, however once the 10-point plan has been rolled out in its entirety it is anticipated that open pit burning will be vastly reduced. Councillor Nicholls asked whether there are any concerns that the rats will move to the settlements if their food source at One Boat dump is diminished. The Administrator reported that WMIL have indicated that rodent populations self-manage themselves to some degree, adding that rodents are not then expected to make their way to the settlements for food, although this matter will be addressed in more detail within the WMIL report which will be made available to Councillors once finalised.

Councillor Shearer explained that around five years ago recycling bags were made available to each household to make the transporting of recyclable materials to the collection bins easier and asked whether these would be provided once again. The DoOF explained that this will be captured in phase two of project. Councillor Shearer requested clarity as to which stage the securing of the landfill fencing will take place. The DoOF confirmed that this was forecast to be completed in stage one, by 31 March 2025.

Councillor Nicholls asked whether old tyres were still being shipped to St Helena. The DoOF explained that the AIG are in contact St Helena in the hope of resuming the transportation of tyres to St Helena for upcycling, however this subject to the support of the shipping company operating the Ascension to St Helena leg.

Councillor Shearer requested clarity on what the crushed glass would be used for on island. The DoOF confirmed that it would be used in building materials, albeit only small amounts are expected to be produced. The Administrator also highlighted that once crushed the option of shipping it off island is also being explored.

Councillor Nicholls asked whether all household waste is physically checked before entering the incineration system, highlighting a confidentiality concern. The DoOF explained that whilst it is not a pleasant job, waste is checked for any items, such as metals, that may cause damage to the incinerator or cause it to burn less effectively. Discussion was had regarding accessible information within a communal waste system and the option for people to shred their confidential material or blank out private information prior to disposing of it. The Administrator explained that a confidentiality element is included in all AIG contracts. The DoR agreed to follow up with the Senior Medical Officer, separately to the responsibility of the person disposing of waste to make confidential material unreadable, to confirm what information is required to be issued on medication boxes and provide an update to Councillors at a later date.

Councillor Nicholls thanked the DoOF for driving improved waste management initiatives forward and looked forward to an update in the new year.

## 6. Any other business

There were four items of other business:

- i. **Starlink:** Councillor Worthington requested an update on his [Councillor Enquiry Form](#) submitted on 09 July 2024. The Administrator confirmed that a response will be issued today.
- ii. **OT Strategy Meeting:** The HoAO invited Councillors to join a virtual meeting with the Deputy Director for the Overseas Territories, Becky Richards, on Friday 19 July at 14:00 where an update will be provided post-election in relation to the Overseas Territory Strategy.
- iii. **JMC:** The HoAO confirmed that the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) will be held in mid-end of November 2024. Councillors were invited to consider which two Councillors they would like to nominate to represent Council at this years JMC.
- iv. **New OT Minister:** Councillor Nicholls requested confirmation on whether an Overseas Territories Minister has yet been appointed. The Administrator confirmed that Stephen Doughty was appointed as Overseas Territories Minister at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

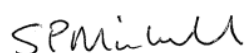
## 7. Proposed dates of next meetings:

Informal Council Meeting – 10:00 14 August 2024  
Formal Council Meeting – 16:30 29 August 2024

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 17:30.

Siobhan Stewart  
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*