

Biosecurity Assessment for Ascension Island

Terms of reference

Background

Ascension Island already has one of the world's most heavily invaded terrestrial ecosystems with more than 90% of higher plants and at least 70% of invertebrates believed to have been introduced. With an economy based primarily around military installations and telecommunications, the Territory also has no commercial farming or forestry sectors to provide economic incentives for developing biosecurity policies. These two factors have undoubtedly contributed to limited progress and a lack of urgency in advancing biosecurity.

Nevertheless, there is a recognized need to rectify this situation. Ascension still has invaluable natural capital in the form of regionally-important seabird and sea turtle nesting populations, numerous endemic plant and invertebrate species and a near-pristine marine environment, which contribute to global biodiversity and attract a number of tourists to the island each year. The development of a "focused biosecurity action plan that identifies and addresses key threats to marine and terrestrial ecosystems" is a key objective under the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

The first step towards this goal was made at the South Atlantic Overseas Territories Regional Biosecurity workshop, held on Ascension Island, 14 – 18 August 2015. Here, regional guiding principles for biosecurity actions were agreed and the appropriate level of protection for Ascension Island was discussed. It is recognised that Ascension Island can't currently justify the implementation of a comprehensive biosecurity system, but that targeted protection against priority high risk introductions is desirable and could be feasible within available limited resources.

The purpose of this consultancy is to critically review the existing situation, identify high risk pathways and species, and make practical recommendations for reducing identified threats by working along the biosecurity continuum. The consultancy is funded by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and will be coordinated by the Ascension Island Government (AIG).

Aims:

1. Conduct a pathway analysis
2. Review existing practices
3. Review existing legislation, policy and contractual obligations
4. Carry out an initial assessment of risks to the environment, public health and the economy, and identify target species.
5. Recommend next steps for advancing biosecurity within the Territory.

Details

1. Conduct a pathway analysis

Carry out a detailed analysis of the existing pathways of introduction, both air and sea, collating information on types of vessel, frequency of arrival, amounts and types of cargo, names and

contacts of operators/agencies, numbers of passengers arriving in and transiting Ascension Island, and any other pertinent information.

2. Review existing practices

Working with the military (MOD and USAF), shipping companies and other relevant agencies, carry out a critical review of existing biosecurity practices, such as cleaning vehicles before shipment, shipping container cleaning programmes, information dissemination, and all other relevant practices. This should refer to both air and sea pathways, including passengers, cargo and vessels.

3. Review existing legislation, policy and contractual obligations

Assess the existing legislative and policy framework for Ascension Island with regards to biosecurity provisions, identifying any gaps and recommending reforms, as appropriate.

4. Carry out an initial assessment of risks to the environment, public health and the economy, and identify target species.

In light of the findings from points 1 to 3 above, identify potential high-risk species which could arrive via existing pathways, are known invasive species in other countries, and which could adversely impact Ascension Island's biodiversity (marine and terrestrial), livelihoods or public health.

5. Recommend next steps for advancing biosecurity within the Territory.

Based on the background review, pathway analysis and risk assessment, identify prioritised next steps and provide a costed, timed, realistic implementation plan for the next 5 years that meaningfully takes into account resource constraints. These will be prepared in consultation and agreement with AIG and other stakeholders to ensure they can be realistically built into existing work programmes.

It is expected that the consultant will work closely with available local expertise in the Conservation Department, as well as through personal networks, international databases and other on-line resources. There may also be a requirement to meet with UK-based suppliers to assess pre-border controls.

Deliverables

- Detailed work plan for the consultancy period, to be submitted within 2 weeks of commencing the work
- Report on pathway analysis, noting those of particularly high and low risk; existing practices, noting areas of strengths and weaknesses; and existing legislation, noting gaps.
- Report on the initial risk assessment, identifying species of immediate concern as potential invasive introductions, their pathway of introduction and likely impact.
- Five-year action plan for implementing biosecurity recommendations.

The consultant will be based in the Conservation Department, Georgetown, Ascension Island, and work under the supervision of the Head of Conservation. Reports will be sent for peer review by biosecurity professionals from the RSPB and other South Atlantic UK Overseas Territories before being finalised.

Timeframe

The start date for the consultancy as soon as possible and work must have commenced by **1st April 2016**. A minimum of 1 month (preferably 6-8 weeks) will be spent on Ascension Island meeting with stakeholders, reviewing current operations and carrying out risk assessments. A substantial field element is necessary to ensure that the successful applicant gains a proper understanding of the biosecurity situation on Ascension Island and what is practical within existing operating procedures and resource limitations. The timing of the field element is flexible, but needs to have commenced by **1st April 2016** and should coincide with international shipping operations. Dates and availability will be discussed during the interview stage.

Specification/qualification

The successful candidate must be able to demonstrate:

- A higher level qualification in the natural sciences
- At least 3-5 years' experience working in biosecurity, including pest risk assessment and pathway analysis
- Excellent communication skills
- Experience in analysing information and writing reports to deadlines
- Familiarity with Ascension Island and the SA UKOTs is a definite advantage

Remuneration

The consultant will be paid a fee of **£10,000** for the successful delivery of the project plus one return flight from the UK (RAF Brize Norton) to Ascension Island and rent-free accommodation whilst on-island. International return flights to the UK and internal transfers within the UK will also be covered for the right candidate up to a maximum of **£1,250**. An initial fee of £2,500 will be paid on agreement of the detailed work plan and the remainder on the completion of the work to the satisfaction of the Ascension Island Government.

Application

To apply, please send a current CV and a letter explaining your qualifications and suitability for this role to sam.weber@ascension.gov.ac no later than **23th October 2015**. Interviews will be held by telephone in the week beginning **Monday 2nd November**.