

MINUTES OF THE ASCENSION ISLAND COUNCIL (AIC)

FORMAL MEETING HELD IN THE COURT HOUSE,

Tuesday, 26th September 2017 at 16:30hrs

Present: (by telephone) HE the Governor Lisa Phillips
HH Administrator Marc Holland
Mark Neale, Crown Counsel
Jamie Manson, Director of Resources
Councillor Kitty George
Councillor Marie-Anne Dennis
(by telephone) Councillor Jacqui Ellick
Councillor Nicholas John

In attendance: Emma Corrigan, Clerk of Council
Dr Jude Brown, Director of Conservation
Mr Iain Robertson, Director of Operations

Apologies: Councillor Samantha Arms-Lawrence

1. Welcome

The Administrator welcomed all to the meeting. The Governor, Lisa Phillips, was pleased to be able to attend via telephone. The Administrator confirmed this was Cllr Dennis' last Council meeting due to her resignation following her appointment as AIG's Acting Director of Operations. The Administrator added that a By-Election would be held on an appointed date in line with Ordinance. The Governor thanked both Cllr Dennis for her hard work and the Council for their valued input.

2. Confirmation of Minutes: AIC meeting 23 March 2017

The minutes of the AIC meeting held on 23 March 2017 were formally adopted and published on the AIG website (www.ascension-island.gov.ac).

3. Matters Arising/Actions from AIC meeting 23 March 2017

None

4. Marine Protected Area (MPA) to the National Protected Areas Ordinance

The Director of Conservation, Dr Judith Brown explained that the Ordinance covered the seven terrestrial areas on Ascension Island and the territorial sea for 12 nautical miles (nm) but did not extend to the full Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 200 nm. The proposed minor amendments to the Ordinance were to provide a legislative framework to designate a Marine Protected Area in the future within the entire Ascension maritime zone anywhere within the 200 nm zone. Cllr John stated he was unsure this was the correct time for the designation of a MPA and sought to defer a decision until the future working model of Ascension Island had been established. Dr Brown appreciated Cllr John's concerns over the financing of the designation of an MPA. If and when the data became available to designate a MPA then the proposed amendments would ensure the Ordinance was in place to facilitate such a designation. The Administrator added the possible designation of a MPA in 2019 was UK Government policy and the amendments allowed for the technical and legal framework to be in place if that political decision were to be taken.

Three councillors present voted in favour of the adoption of the proposed amendments; one councillor voted against. Therefore the Governor approved the amendments and noted one dissenting vote.

5. Biosecurity

Dr Brown sought approval of the proposed Biosecurity protocols for Boatswain Bird Island Sanctuary. Following the consultant report in 2016, recommendation was to adopt biosecurity policies and procedures to protect the import of non-native species of seeds and insects on to the island.

All four councillors present voted in favour of adopting the Boatswain Bird Island Sanctuary biosecurity protocols and for the drafting of a Biosecurity Ordinance and policy.

6. Entry Control (Ascension) Ordinance CAP A13

The Administrator presented the proposed technical amendments recommended to the Entry Control Ordinance CAP A13 to bring it in line with the upcoming e-visa system and agreed international terminology. Cllr John asked how AIG would impose a prison sentence without the means to detain an offender on the island. The Administrator replied the possibility of a prison sentence acted as a deterrent in itself and the offender could be detained on St Helena for the duration of their custodial sentence. The Crown Counsel agreed to investigate the logistics and implications of an offender being detained in either St Helena or the UK.

The four Councillors present voted in favour of the amendments being made to the Entry Control (Ascension) Ordinance CAP A13

Action: The Crown Counsel to investigate the logistics of an imposition of a prison sentence as part of the review on Judicial Ordinance. This subject is to be revisited at a future Council meeting.

7. Employment Law

The Administrator proposed deferral until the future working model for Ascension had been established. The Crown Counsel added this was a large piece of legislation introducing many new concepts and it was illogical to adopt it at the present time only to amend it again in the near future.

Action: The current documentation to be re-circulated to Councillors by the Director of Human Resource

Decision: The Governor and Council recognised the importance of the legislation to avoid discrimination but agreed to defer until the working model of the island was determined

8. Airlink Update / MV Helena

The Administrator stated the inter-island Airlink service was announced last week, the ticket booking system finalised and ticket sales went live on 22nd September 2017. Due to the inter-island link being a chartered service the ticket price would not fluctuate with demand or time of booking. The inaugural flight from South Africa to St Helena was planned for 14th October and the first inter-island flight, with the Governor on board, would arrive on Ascension on 18th November 2017. The Governor added a request had been submitted to allow the RMS St Helena to continue operating until February 2018 and SA Airlink were intending to transport about 5000 passengers a year on their route so the frequency of flights between South Africa and St Helena might increase over time. Cllr George asked the Governor if the double inter-island service of the RMS was still planned for December to which the Governor replied this was to be decided in the coming week. Cllr George added Andrew Weir Shipping had stated that the waiver of the cancellation charge for passengers who move their booking from the RMS to the Airlink flight was only valid until 24th October.

MV Helena – The Administrator reported Andrew Weir Shipping had re-confirmed their intention to schedule the MV Helena to operate between South Africa and St Helena on a monthly basis and to travel on to Ascension Island once every two months. The service will begin once the RMS St Helena has ceased operating.

9. Sewage Treatment Replacement works

Director of Operations, Iain Robertson outlined the findings from the White Young Green (WYG) report delivered earlier in the year and their recommendations. One such recommendation was the replacement of

Sewage Treatment works and pipework system in Georgetown and Two Boats Village. Failure to address the recommendation would lead to a risk to public health. Following consultation with Kingspan, a Klargester packaged sewage treatment plant was being considered with a life expectancy of up to 35 years. Remaining life expectancy of the current Two Boats system was 12 months. Mr Robertson was working with WYG to finalise the detailed report. The estimated cost of the required surveys was in the region of £130,000 and would be put to tender. Once the surveys were completed the design would be determined and a detailed strategy developed for the upgrade works.

10. Fuel

Mr Robertson presented an update on the fuel situation on the island. AIG do not have the expertise to manage fuel storage provision on the island and Mr Robertson outlined the options available. AIG had carried out basic improvements to the existing fuel station at One Boat and proposed to provide fuel at this site in preference to the current temporary site at the MT yard in Georgetown. At the request of the FCO a letter had been sent to the MOD Joint Forces Command (JFC) requesting the support of the MOD to procure fuel for the civilian population on island. JFC responded that it wished to retain flexibility in their policy position prior to the Ministerial talks planned for later in the year. JFC requested AIG to contact the Defence Fuel Group (DFG) to investigate a possible sharing of supplier but had yet to provide the contact details. The USAF has reduced the regularity of petrol supplied to the public and may reduce it even further. Cllr George commented on how the public were relieved AIG stepped in following the closure of Solomon's fuel station but perhaps do not appreciate how serious a problem the situation had posed.

Action: The Governor recommended this issue be raised at the Ministerial meeting.

11. Any Other Business

11.1. Future of Ascension Island / Access / JMC meeting

The Administrator reported there was to be a Ministerial meeting to discuss the subject but was deferred due to Hurricane Irma hitting the Caribbean and focus being shifted to dealing with the impact of the crisis caused. The meeting was due to be rescheduled to mid-October and to involve MOD, DFID and the FCO, chaired by Lord Ahmed and the way ahead to be decided before budget setting for the next year could take place.

Access: Occasional MOD tactical flights were being operated but had come under pressure since the deployment of extra aircraft to the Caribbean. Cllr Ellick stated the importance of maintaining a north-bound route and hoped the Minister would be able to suggest a solution.

JMC meeting: The Administrator confirmed the meeting was scheduled for 28th & 29th November; any Councillor planning to attend would need to leave Ascension Island on the Airlink departing the 19th November and return on the flight arriving back on 9th December. It was important for the Council to be represented at the meeting; one option to consider was to request Andrew Sigley of the FCO to support the Council at that meeting.

11.2. Obsidian Hotel

The Director of Resources, Mr Jamie Manson, reported the Obsidian Hotel would close on 27th September. The manager, Mr Hobson, had asked AIG if they wished to purchase the hotel as a going concern but AIG had declined. Once the buildings were returned to the Crown, AIG would provide a limited accommodation service having recognised the need to accommodate the Airlink crew once a month. The Administrator added AIG had considered opening the restaurant once a month to island residents using the services of the Residency chef on the same day that the SA Airlink would be catered for.

11.3. Alcohol Culture

The Administrator reported that following some high-profile cases of offences committed linked to alcohol, a group had been established to review the alcohol culture on Ascension Island. There were three focus groups; Health & Education, AIG Policy & Legislation and Jurisdiction & Enforcement and work would continue over several months. Statistics from the last five years showed 50-80% of court

cases were linked to alcohol, not only drink-driving offences but cases that had involved threatening and abusive behaviour whilst under the influence of alcohol and included visitors to the island.

11.4. Shark Risk

Dr Brown explained following the two shark incidents the advice to the public had remained to stay out of the water. There had been close liaison with an American shark expert specifically experienced in shark attacks and attempts had been made to get him to the island. The expert had offered free advice by email and studied the footage from the visiting film crew. A formal request from the FCO had been made to the US State Department to allow the expert to come to Ascension on the US ATI plane but there were legal issues involved. Conservation had prepared further advice for those people who did choose to enter the sea, advice signage erected and Conservation had continued to analyse the data provided via the public survey on shark sightings. Processes had been put in place should there be a further incident and a request made to the public not to bring fish ashore caught by spearfishing at the two popular family beaches. AIG were now looking at a measured way ahead to allow AIG staff back into the water.

Action: It was proposed to bring this item to the next Council meeting in November for further updates.

11.5. Closure of Pier Head during shipping operations

Cllr John had been asked to investigate the decision to close the Pier Head to the public during shipping operations. Director of Operations, Iain Robertson, was invited to respond and explained the MOD had carried out a survey during cargo operations and found the operation as a high risk to life. In addition the FCO commissioned White Young Green (WYG) earlier in the year to survey infrastructure on Ascension Island. This coincided with the FIRS being present and their findings strongly recommended members of the public not to be permitted in the same area during the operation of heavy lifting equipment. In 2016 the Safety Code was published and WYG recommended AIG to seek to achieve compliance to that code. With this in mind and following the recording of some near misses the Harbours Board made the decision to close the Pier Head to the public during all cargo to shore operations. The FIRS is in anchor for up to 3 days and the RMS for one day, which will also cease in February 2018, so the closure of the Pier Head was a proportionate response to the Health & Safety recommendations.

11.6. Turtle Ponds

Cllr Ellick requested an update on the request for repairs to the Turtle Ponds. Mr Robertson reported on the continued work between Blue Marine and Dr Brown and the receipt of a comprehensive engineering report undertaken by the Military on the long term restoration of the ponds, which would require a form of breakwater structure to protect from heavy sea swells. AIG recognise the lack of expertise on the island for this project. As part of the runway repair next year there may be work undertaken at the Pier that would involve a marine engineer and the plan was to ask for advice at that time. The Administrator added that he appreciated the value of these Heritage sites on the island but funding for the projects addressing the critical issues of fuel supply and sewage treatment works must take immediate priority.

11.7. Director of Conservation

Cllr John asked if, following the resignation of Dr Brown as Director of Conservation and Fisheries, was it not preferable to recruit a Head of Conservation rather than a Director, to save money. The Administrator responded that Conservation & Fisheries are a UK Government priority, the salary is funded 100% by NGOs and the role itself covers a diverse area of responsibility for both terrestrial and marine flora and fauna so requires someone with Director level expertise.

11.8. Car wash area away from the Pier Head

Cllr Dennis mentioned the previous request for a coin-operated jet wash to be installed in the Boat yard and raised the request for a car wash area to be situated away from the Pier Head to prevent oil and detergents entering the sea at this site. Mr Jamie Manson responded that Mr Iain Robertson had been

made aware of this request and had passed it to Dr Brown to approach Blue Marine for funding. Cllr George raised the request for a table to be installed in the Boat Yard along with the jet wash so fish may be cleaned and filleted there in preference to the Pier Head.

Action: Acting Dir of Operations to investigate the siting of a car wash area away from Pier Head.

Action: Dir of Conservation to approach Blue Marine for funding of the car wash.

11.9. Acting Administrator

The Administrator announced the imminent arrival of Mr Nick Kennedy, Administrator of the Pitcairn Islands, on 5th October, together with his partner Ms Poly Pantelides. Mr Kennedy will cover for the Administrator whilst off island between 6 – 17th October and remain on Ascension Island as Administrator Designate until taking over permanently as Administrator for five months from 22 November. The Governor was continuing the recruitment for a permanent successor for when Mr Kennedy must return to the Pitcairn.

Note: As Mr Robertson was soon leaving Ascension Island the Governor and Council thanked him for his hard work and wished him well for the future.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1910hrs.

Emma Corrigan
Clerk of Council