



**Formal meeting of the Ascension Island Council**  
**1630 on Thursday 28th February 2019 at the Court House**

**MINUTES**

Present: HE Lisa Honan, Governor  
HH Louise MacMorran, Administrator  
Councillor Samantha Arms-Lawrence  
Councillor Nicky John  
Councillor Alan Nicholls  
Councillor Terence Young  
Councillor Keturah George  
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources  
Allen Cansick, Acting Attorney General

In attendance: Dee Baum, Director of Conservation [Item 4 only]  
Sarah Roberts-Favell, Head of Administrator's Office (HOAO)  
Jane Disley, Clerk of Council

Apologies:

**1. Welcome**

The Administrator welcomed all to the meeting.

**2. Approval of minutes**

Minutes from the formal meetings on 4 Oct 2018 and 8 Nov 2018 were approved.

**3. Matters arising**

The following matters arising from the minutes of the previous formal meeting on 8 Nov 18 were discussed.

- 2.a) Minutes: The minutes were amended and circulated by the Clerk.
- 2.b)ii Medical complaints: The Clerk updated the actions list.
- 2.b)iii Minutes: The minutes were amended and circulated by the Clerk.
- 2.b)vi Minutes: The minutes were amended and circulated by the Clerk.
- 2.b)vii Minutes: The minutes were amended and circulated by the Clerk.
- 3. Marriage ordinances: Changes to the marriage ordinances had been agreed at the previous meeting. They had since been enacted.
- 4.b) Incinerator lighting: Since the last formal meeting, Dir Ops had provided an update.

4.c) Georgetown pool: Since the last formal meeting, Dir Ops had provided an update.

4.d) Animal welfare: Since the departure of the Policy Officer, Dir Cons had been working on a draft paper on animal health and welfare for review and discussion by the Council.

**Action: Dir Cons was asked to attend the next informal meeting in order to present her paper on animal health and welfare.**

Cllr George asked that thanks be recorded in the minutes to the volunteers who had worked on the project to repair the fence and remove the sheep from Two Boats Village. Although not all the sheep had been removed significant progress had been made and it had been a good community effort.

#### 4. MPA

Dir Cons was asked to join the meeting at this point and provide a summary update. She reminded those present that the timeline for the MPA designation was designation during 2019 and that the Council had been asked to consider options. It had been decided at an early stage that there would be only two viable options: an MPA covering 50% or 100% of the EEZ. A public consultation had taken place. Responses had been received from this and there had been a discussion at the informal Council meeting on 21 Feb based on the feedback. The licence revenue generated did not currently cover the costs of effective management and monitoring of the fishery. Therefore consideration had to be given about how a 50% open area would be managed. One option was to put it into a period of dormancy; a 50/50 MPA would retain the flexibility to open it up in future. It was stressed that there would be management costs regardless of the choice made. Blue Marine was pushing for the 100% option and had provided more information about the potential donor. Other NGOs might participate in a Trust option. NGOs said that they would not help with the core surveillance and enforcement cost of £120k per year which they believed the UK Govt should bear. In terms of benefits to conservation, both the 50/50 and the 100% option would include the richer areas in the 50nm around the islands and around the seamounts, but the 100% option was expected to bring additional wildlife benefits. Recreational/sports fishing around the island would not be affected; prohibition would apply to large scale fishing and mineral extraction. Hence, future activities would be affected but there were none considered viable looking out 10-20 years.

Cllr Nichols asked how the 50/50 option would be defined. Dir Cons suggested it would be the immediate area around Ascension and the southern section of the EEZ including the seamounts, and would look similar to the area currently closed to fishing. These contained the highest areas of biodiversity while the most productive fisheries would be excluded and so this provided a good balance. The dividing line would be at 8 degrees of latitude which made it easier for enforcement.

The Administrator asked if there were any other questions from the room or from the Governor/acting Attorney General.

The Governor asked for clarification of the percentage. Dir Cons confirmed that the UK commitment was to maintain a minimum of 50% MPA. The current closed area is actually 52.6% of the EEZ and for ease of implementation it might be better to keep to this if the 50:50 option were chosen even though it slightly exceeded what was required. The Governor said that she did not have a strong view and it was for the Council to decide. She understood that the costs would be the same regardless of the option chosen, but a 100% MPA would attract support from Blue Marine via a Trust and that there might be the donor to supplement the income. She suggested that as much flexibility as possible be built into the donation in order to allow greater choice in future in the event that the Trust were to founder.

The Administrator thanked the Governor for her input and asked for Council members' views.

Cllr John read out the following statement:

#### **“Fisheries option**

I think it is now evident that a 50% fishery is an unviable option in any form (whether due to fish stocks

declining, less 50% fishing space or the conflict between conservation interests and commercial venture falling under the same umbrella). Whichever or both being the determining factor/s we need to stop the fishery and any associated costs.

### **MPA Commitment**

Declaring or indicating any form of commitment to a 100% MPA comes at a time of financial uncertainty at best, i.e. it has been proposed to reduce spending by 15% across AIG to mitigate financial impact prior to the end of 2021 when it is anticipated that the Air- Bridge will return. That mitigation is with exception of the overall conservation effort if the minimum cost option is adopted and we are left solely responsible for its enforcement, i.e. 100% MPA will increase conservation spending at an approximate 70% (200K-15%)+120k! and that is if the rules of MPA management and consequent costs does not change and incur higher costs.

### **NGOs must not govern our thinking**

We are responsible to our electorate and have to tread extremely carefully when considering funding proposals made from NGOs, in this instance they do not offer the funding certainty we need, furthermore history has informed that after initiatives being realised by NGOs the public purse is expected to be responsible for its continuation.

I fear that external funding of this sort will only generate more initiatives/objectives with the tax payers have to fund long term!

### **Blue Marine**

When the question of “why weren’t Ascension consulted before such a commitment was made in party manifestos”, Charles Glover replied “the EEZ is not yours to decide on anyway and an MPA will be forced if necessary” perhaps this is truly unfortunate because we can now disagree on budget if such enforcement is made and we could ultimately jeopardise all forms of democratic process.

### **International criticism**

We could be subject to international criticism or perhaps UK would be subject to international criticism because this is in-fact is their pledge and without consultation, we are vindicated in respect of this lack of prior consultation and our constraints and minute resources.

### **In respect of the future plans for Ascension (our request in return for an MPA)**

I think if we follow the route of committing 100% if HMG pays, then we surrender our chance of a stronger economic position for Ascension and a stronger position to fully fund an MPA autonomously, i.e. Ascension being in control and not at the mercy of external funding.

I hereby Abstain from advising the Governor on either option and await HMG spending review and progress on the future plans for Ascension before consideration.”

Cllr George said that she shared the vision for the 100% MPA but felt that the MPA should not be formed until we had received full commitment for funding support. This would therefore depend on the UK Govt spending review.

The Administrator confirmed with Cllr George that her position was that she wished for AIG to proceed on the basis that we recommended the 100% MPA subject to funding being approved. Dir Cons stated that the UK Govt would prefer a steer from the Council in terms of their MPA preference in order that they did not appear to be pre-empting the decision by announcing budgets before the decision had been made. Such a steer would allow Ascension to approach the UK Govt for funding and then offer a chance to review their funding offer to see if it met the Councillors’ requirements for the MPA to proceed.

The Administrator asked for clarification on the length of funding that the Councillors were asking for, noting that the current UK Govt would not be able to commit future governments to indefinite funding. Cllr John stated that the UK Govt had wanted the MPA and had forced it onto Ascension; therefore he felt long term UK Govt funding was needed.

Cllr Nicholls shared the views of his colleagues that it had been forced upon the island. He was keen to support the 100% MPA for sound economic reasons, given that the fishery was not viable. However, he felt the need for caution because of the funding issue. Although there was support across the UK Parliament and therefore funding might be forthcoming regardless of the party in power, there were no guarantees. Hence, he felt that the issue should be suspended until the UK Govt provided more information.

The Administrator asked for clarification whether this meant he abstained or whether his position was that he agreed the recommendation of a 100% MPA subject to funding. Dir Cons advised that if the Council were to recommend acceptance of the 100% MPA subject to the condition that UK Govt funding were made available, then, if that condition were not met the Council would have the opportunity at a future meeting to recommend an alternative option. Approaching the UK Govt about funding would be easier, however, if the Council were to provide a steer about their preference and the barriers to agreeing to it; that way it would be clearer to the UK Govt what needed to be done in order to achieve it. The Governor reminded the meeting that there was no option to not designate an MPA.

Cllr Arms-Lawrence and Cllr Young both said they supported the 100% MPA option subject to a commitment from the UK Govt for long-term funding to cover the management costs of the MPA.

With one abstention, and some reservation about the risk, Councillors agreed on the 100% option, subject to securing long term UK Govt funding to cover the management costs of the MPA. Dir Cons advised that next steps would be for her team to produce a marine management plan and for the draft legislation to be prepared. A more detailed steer on the form of the MPA would be needed from Councillors in due course. Dir Cons was asked to set out the next steps and confirm the Council's decision to the UK gov't.

**Action: Dir Cons would communicate the Council's decision to the UK Govt representatives and would provide information on the next steps for the Council.**

Cllr Nicholls stated that a contingency needed to be added to the costs described in the evidence and options paper and that inflation would need to be taken into account.

Cllr George noted that the Council's decision would need to be communicated to Lord Ahmad as well as to UK Govt officials. Dir Cons offered to assist the Council in producing a draft letter.

**Action: The Council would prepare a letter to Lord Ahmad with assistance from Dir Cons.**

*Clerk's note: The letter has been drafted by Dir Cons and circulated to Council members.*

## **5. Joint Ministerial Council update**

Cllr George had provided a written summary of the JMC and had asked the following four points be raised at this meeting.

a) Policy on safeguarding of vulnerable adults, not just of children: Although Ascension would not normally have vulnerable adults because of the residence policy, there was a need for the safeguarding policy to include mention of vulnerable adults as well as children. That way their needs would be covered in the event that such a situation arose. The social worker and the Safeguarding Board would be asked to advise. The Governor confirmed that Safeguarding Action Plans now had a deadline of 6 months rather than 3 months; she asked if Ascension had one. The Administrator thought this was the case but the Safeguarding Board would need to advise on the details.

**Action: The Safeguarding Board would be asked to check that the Ascension policy included reference to vulnerable adults and report back ahead of the next meeting.**

b) Funded training for safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults: The Administrator advised that the Safeguarding Board in St Helena had received some support from the Child and Families Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) who had visited St Helena. It is expected that CAFCASS will visit Ascension too as part of the CSSF safeguarding project. Cllr George asked that where training funded by CSSF was available then Ascension should be made aware of it too. It wasn't simply about training that was needed but about sharing in training that had been made available.

**Action:** HOAO was asked to share information about future CSSF training activities with relevant parties on Ascension.

c) EDF 11: The question had been raised about whether or not EDF funding would continue to be available to OTs post-Brexit. The Administrator confirmed that in the event of a no-deal Brexit the UK Govt would honour existing funding agreements for EDF11. If there is a Brexit deal then EDF11 funding will come through the EU as planned. Dir Res reported that for Ascension this would be 1.75m Euros (for FY 2020/2021). AIG had started to review spending requirements but would need discussion with the Council in due course as part of that process.

d) Advice and information about opportunities for school leavers: A request was made to ensure school leavers received information about working for the Armed Forces, eg via a visit to the school or pamphlets to provide advice about options. The Governor reported that previous attempts had been made on St Helena to encourage Armed Forces recruiters to visit; however this had not been successful. Various options were discussed to enable access to Ascension ,eg videos, Skype, travel via the A400. The Administrator reported that Asst Dir HR was looking at this issue and would report back to the Council in due course.

## 6. Any Other Business

a) FIRS delay: The Administrator advised that the FIRS was likely to be delayed for operational reasons and this would cause food challenges. As a contingency measure to avoid shortages AIG planned to make a food order, largely replicating the original, to be shipped on the MV Helena arriving on 18 Mar. Arrangements were also in place for additional freight of fresh produce to come on the 13 Mar flight. Additionally, AIG was asking islanders to advise if they had any special needs for the MV Helena, eg baby/allergy foods. AIG would facilitate the supply of these goods. The MOD had chartered an additional vessel to replace the FIRS but there was no information yet on exactly when this would call. More information would be known on 11 Mar.

b) Additional flight: Cllr Young asked why there was an additional flight so close after the regular on one 9/10 Mar. The Administrator explained that some tourists had wanted to come and offered to pay for the extra flight. As a result, the dates were chosen by them but the flight had been opened to the public to facilitate additional access to and from the island.

c) Employment Legislation: Cllr Nichols asked what had happened to the employment legislation. It was reported that an away day was due to be planned for the new year but there had been no agreement on the day or time that all Councillors could attend. The Administrator suggested that the Acting Attorney General could reassess next steps while he was on Ascension. Cllr John asked about the 1926 Workman’s Ordinance. The Governor stated that this was on the web site, but Cllr John said it wasn’t clear which aspects had been updated.

**Action:** The Acting Attorney General would review the employment legislation and advise on next steps.

**Action:** The Acting Attorney General would review the Workman’s Ordinance and confirm the correct version.

d) Cancellation of ships: Cllr John also asked about cancellation of ships and about a disaster management plan, which the Police Inspector had been tasked to review. The Administrator said that there was an existing plan that she believed was fit for purpose, but she would ask Inspector Kewley to report back on the status of the plan.

**Action:** The Administrator would check progress on the disaster management plan and report back ahead of the next meeting.

e) Communication with the public: Cllr Nichols said that communication with the public appeared to have dried up recently. The Administrator said that this was not intentional and that the Policy Officer and HOAO were working on a plan to improve it, but noted that a lot had been happening lately to

impact on their time. Cllr Nichols suggested that perhaps updating the web site could help. Dir Res advised that AIG had been looking into how best to fix and improve the web site. Although this had been attempted in the past the plan was, rather than rely on individual skills (which we would then lose), to find a solution that would stand the test of time.

**Action:** Dir Res would report on progress at the next informal meeting.

In response, Cllr John raised the issue of Council minutes being put onto the web site. It was explained that only formal minutes that had been approved are published. Now that the minutes from the last two formal meetings had been approved, they could be put onto the website.

**Action:** The Clerk would put all approved Council minutes onto the website.

f) Publishing responses to Councillor concerns: Cllr George asked if a summary of the concerns raised at the previous informal meeting, and responses to them, could be shared with the public. She advised that she had now received a second request for a public meeting about such concerns. Cllr John reinforced the point that people did not have enough information. The Administrator explained that getting information out about formal and informal meetings was the purpose of the new standing agenda item on Publicity. The Council could agree during that item what information – if any – it wanted to publicise. She suggested that the HOAO could put some information together about specific AIG works/projects for publication. There should also be regular updates from AIG on key areas of AIG business that were of interest to the public.

**Action:** HOAO would collate information from the recent informal meeting into a format suitable for dissemination to the public.

*Clerk's note: The information has since been distributed via a public notice.*

**Action:** Where the Council had agreed that items discussed in a meeting needed to be shared with the public, the Clerk would draft an appropriate note for publication.

g) Petrol station: Cllr Young asked if consideration could be given to opening the fuel station in the mornings to allow easier access for shift workers. The Administrator advised that she would ask Dir Ops to look into it. She also advised that she anticipated that the challenges that had prevented petrol being dispensed were close to being resolved. It was hoped that a fuel bowser would arrive on the charter vessel.

**Action:** Administrator to ask Dir Ops to consider revising the fuel station opening times to include an early morning option.

## 7. Publicity

Following on from the previous item, it was agreed that a readout of key items from the Council meeting would be drafted for circulation to the public. It was confirmed that this would include:

- a) Details of the decision made on the MPA
- b) Information that AIG was trying to secure Armed Forces recruiting information for school leavers
- c) Key messages from the Dir Ops update at the previous informal meeting
- d) Council thanks to the Two Boats village volunteers on the sheep project

**Action:** The Clerk would arrange for a summary of the meeting, including these issues, to be produced and made available to the public.

## 8. Date of next meetings

As per the agreed schedule, the next formal meeting should be at 1630 on Thursday 11th April.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1815hrs.

J Disley

Jane Disley

Clerk of Council