

News story: Blue Belt representatives to visit Tristan da Cunha and St Helena

The Blue Belt Programme is a 4 year initiative delivered in partnership with the UK Overseas Territories, the UK Government and stakeholders to provide long term protection for over four million square kilometres of marine environment across the UK Overseas Territories.

The purpose of the visit is to discuss how the local communities of Tristan and St Helena will benefit from the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme. The Programme aims to ensure that, as well as providing greater environmental protection to globally important ecosystems, these benefits are delivered in tandem with social and economic opportunities for the local communities.

For example, by reviewing options for a Traffic Separation Scheme around Tristan da Cunha, identifying areas to be avoided around the islands/seamounts and introducing a compulsory reporting system for certain hazardous cargo, we can look at how best to mitigate the very real risks to the environment and to local fisheries that were brought into sharp focus with the 2011 MS Oliva grounding on Nightingale Island.

The Blue Belt Programme has also recently undertaken a survey of bluenose fishing stocks to ensure the long-term sustainable management of the fisheries business.

We are working with the St Helena Government on a range of projects to fulfill the objectives of their Marine Management Plan, including projects to determine the movements and growth of the local tuna populations, to establish the sustainability of grouper and lobster. We are also looking at other human impacts on the marine environment and how we can manage them.

The Blue Belt Programme are working closely with the Tristan da Cunha and St Helena Governments on a number of separate projects, but are also keen to hear direct from local communities whilst they are on the island, to answer their enquiries regarding the Programme.

Craig McGarvey, Programme Director will be joined by Dr Martin Collins, Lead Scientist for the Blue Belt Programme and Oliver Yates, Senior Marine Science Advisor.

Speaking today, Mr McGarvey said: "My colleagues and I are very much looking forward to meeting with the local communities of Tristan da Cunha and St Helena as well as meeting local officials and representatives of the Governments, to discuss how specific parts of the Blue Belt programme will be implemented in practice, to ensure that the social, environmental and economic benefits are realised."