

News story: Future support for nature in UK Overseas Territories

A ten week [Call for Evidence](#) has been launched by the UK Government today (Friday, 10 May) to gather knowledge on safeguarding nature in the UK Overseas Territories.

Many of the Overseas Territories are globally significant in their ecological richness, containing over 90 per cent of the UK's marine and terrestrial nature. They are hotspots for biodiversity with an estimated 3,300 endemic species, but they are also highly vulnerable to environmental change.

To support on-going work in the UK Overseas Territories to tackle climate change and protect the natural environment, the Call for Evidence will help to develop and refine existing and potentially new funding streams from the UK Government to replace EU finance sources.

Today's announcement builds on the 25 Year Environment Plan which contains a number of ambitions to improve biodiversity in the Overseas Territories, including the continued implementation of the Blue Belt programme.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The recent IPBES report drives home the message that we must increase our efforts to protect our environment as the effects of biodiversity decline and climate change are felt around the world.

This is why it's crucial to ensure that precious species and landscapes in our Overseas Territories continue to be supported. This Call for Evidence will provide us with the evidence to help determine the best way to do so.

2020 is the year we must all agree on further action for climate, nature and ocean conservation, with appropriate funding to protect and enhance the planet's most pristine ecosystems for flora and fauna.

Announced by the Chancellor in his Spring Statement, the Call for Evidence will also look to further understand how environmental outcomes are delivered through existing spending on biodiversity and conservation, and consider whether spending is effective. This includes looking at options for future funding streams to replace existing EU schemes, such as the Voluntary Scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Overseas Territories of the European Union (BEST).

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, said:

Britain's Overseas Territories contain some of the world's most important and fragile ecosystems. As I said in the recent Spring Statement, there is a clear link between biodiversity and economic growth, so acting now to protect and nurture the biodiversity of the Overseas Territories is not only a down payment on our pledge to leave the environment in a better condition than we found it, but also supports sustainable economic growth in these island territories.

In January 2019, Ministers announced the seventh round of funding under Darwin Plus, worth around £3.75m, was shared amongst 17 projects around the globe including world-leading scientific investigation projects such as the British Antarctic Survey's 'bird-borne' radar tracking system for albatrosses. Scientists will be able to track the movement of this giant bird of the South Atlantic Ocean and to build-up a data picture of how albatrosses can be better protected from fishing tackle on boats. The Darwin Plus initiative has already successfully supported 30 biodiversity projects in the Overseas Territories since the start of 2018.

UK Minister of State for the Overseas Territories, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, said:

Governments around the world must act now to preserve animal and plant species and halt irreversible damage to our planet before it is too late.

The UK Government is working to do just this, from our Blue Belt programme which will protect over 4 million square kilometres of ocean around the British Overseas Territories by 2020, to our leadership on fighting the illegal wildlife trade, to this new call for evidence which will help safeguard the rich biodiversity of our Overseas Territories. The long-term protection of these fragile and unique ecosystems is absolutely vital.

The UK supports the Overseas Territories in implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These include taking 'urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts'; to 'conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources' and protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems', including halting biodiversity loss.

The Call for Evidence is open for ten weeks from 10 May 2019 and closes on 19 July 2019.