# BIOT/CHAGOS CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK (DISCUSSION PAPER)

**Professor David Bellamy, 2002:**
"It has been my dream that the whole Chagos Archipelago should be an International Marine Nature Reserve and Sanctuary…. The whole ecological structure is under threat. Fortunately all is not yet lost, though time is short. The Powers-that-be, the international commune of conservation and locally-focussed bodies such as the Chagos Conservation Trust can work together in an effective mix of vision and management. Maybe the Chagossians too can have a role to play. The Archipelago will even more deserve, and perhaps at last obtain, the title of World Heritage site."

**Professor Callum Roberts, University of York, 2007:**
'The Chagos Archipelago represents a magnificent conservation opportunity that could be of lasting benefit to humanity. There can be few places on this planet that represent better value for leveraging spectacular returns. What is needed is vision and a leadership initiative by Britain to create the Chagos as an iconic, pristine area of the planet held in trust for the future of the world community.'

**Dr Peter Bridgewater, Chair, UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee and former Secretary General, Ramsar Convention, 2007:**
'Ramsar covers the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) and it is important to remember that Ramsar is about the wise use of all wetlands in the territory of the country and getting the management right. This means, as coral reefs are wetlands under the convention, that the whole Chagos ecosystem should be managed wisely. According to the convention a Ramsar site should be managed to ensure no change to the ecological character of the system.
Given the status of the Archipelago, and given wise management in future, should the World Heritage Convention be extended to the territory at some future time it is clear a nomination would be successful.'

**Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008:**
'The Ocean Legacy project is looking at opportunities to protect surviving world-class marine systems. The Chagos Archipelago is a rare gem in an increasingly populated region whose shores and waters are already over-exploited and heavily degraded.'

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Chagos Islands, in the centre of the Indian Ocean, have belonged to Britain since 1814 (The Treaty of Paris) and are constituted as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). The area includes 55 tiny and remote islands, 10 coral reefs, and 5 coral atolls. Only one island, Diego Garcia is inhabited (by military personnel and civilian contract employees). It accounts for over two-thirds of the total land area of 50 square kms. The other 54 (tiny and uninhabited) coral islands cover a total area of only 16 square kms. They are set in some 500,000 square kilometres of sea in the central Indian Ocean.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (Page 2)

The British Indian Ocean Territory (The Chagos) has the most pristine tropical marine environment surviving on the planet. Its quarter of a million square miles is Britain's greatest area of marine biodiversity by far. The paper summarises reasons why the Chagos natural environment is so important and makes specific proposals for its protection.

The UK Government and the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) Administration are committed to managing BIOT as if it were a World Heritage site and have enacted significant legislation to protect this globally important environment. However a more robust and extensive framework for conservation is needed to meet future challenges. The existing environmental safeguards should be strengthened to create a long-term conservation framework with the maximum international support. It would be a world class natural conservation area and a major British contribution to 'saving the planet'. Elements of the policy framework (many of which have been agreed in principle by the British Government) might include:

- The existing Ramsar Area should be extended (as already agreed by the Government in principle) first to the territorial waters and then to the whole Chagos Archipelago, with strict reserve areas for the priority biodiversity sites. The BIOT Environment Zone (created in 2004) should be completed.

- A comprehensive Chagos marine and fisheries management and conservation system should be established, to include a 'no-take' fishing zone, initially covering at least one third of the Territory's coastal and lagoonal waters (as already provided for in the Chagos Management Plan).This would increase Indian Ocean fish stocks and thus benefit neighbouring countries.

- There should be increased surveillance for conservation protection.

- A small, fixed scientific research facility should be established, perhaps on a northern island.

- A new, sustainably funded, small organisation (perhaps a Public Foundation) should be established by the Government to manage and conserve, with effective support from other organisations, the natural marine and terrestrial environment and biodiversity of BIOT, as well as the related science, research, education and protective visiting. Experience should be drawn from best practice in other comparable protected natural areas in the world.

- A greater US contribution to environmental conservation within BIOT should be encouraged, in the co-operative spirit of the existing bilateral Agreement.

- The issue of human habitation should take full account of the environmental implications. The conservation and scientific frameworks proposed in this paper could be organised to offer financially viable and sustainable balanced employment opportunities for a limited number of new inhabitants.

- Wider international support should be promoted for a comprehensive Chagos nature reserve framework (e.g. Ramsar, IUCN, UNESCO World Heritage).
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## 3. THE GLOBAL IMPORTANCE OF BIOT's NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- These are features which make the Chagos an outstandingly important environmental site:
- The archipelago has the most pristine tropical marine environment surviving on the planet. This has become of greatly increased importance in recent decades, which have seen the rapid degradation of the planet's ecologies elsewhere.
- The Chagos contains the world's healthiest coral reefs and the world's largest surviving coral atoll. Scientists fear that half of the world's few remaining coral reefs could be lost by 2025. It is essential to save them. Hundreds of millions of people in the world depend on healthy reefs in one way or another. Living reefs provide food, protect beaches from erosion and form a treasure house of genetically diverse creatures and plants.
- The wildlife biodiversity of Chagos is very rich. It provides at least 220 coral species and over 1000 species of fish with a stronghold which is vital. It is also a rare refuge and breeding ground for whales, sharks, dolphins, marine turtles, rare crabs, other threatened marine life, and birds. In marine terms BIOT is by far the most bio-diverse part of the UK and its Overseas Territories.
- The archipelago is isolated and at the very centre of the Indian Ocean where it acts as an 'oasis' for marine and island species (which are nearly all in decline under pressure from the effects of massive, recent human population growth in the region).
- Most of the Chagos is uninhabited. This is the main reason why the ecology of the Chagos is nearly pristine and full of diverse life, a rare surviving example of nature as it should be, and where human pressures do not conflict with environmental needs and lead to degradation and impoverishment.
- Also, because of its mainly unspoilt and healthy environment, the Chagos provides us with a scientific benchmark for how the world should be. This is evidently important in helping us to understand and deal with such problems as pollution, loss of biodiversity and climate change.

## 4. CLIMATE CHANGE

As regards climate change, the Chagos is very vulnerable to global warming. However, it will also have several key positive roles to play in the coming years since its seas and coral reefs are the least impacted by direct human impacts. It will therefore provide:

- A scientific control site to compare with other more impacted sites (especially coral reefs).
- A means of filling gaps in global climate monitoring programmes (eg acidification, sea temperature, sea levels and gasses). The Indian Ocean is as yet largely omitted from these programmes.
- Contributions to our understanding of the processes that collectively create global warming and climate change, the threats they pose, and management options to counter them.

(Climate Change contd) However, the Chagos is itself vulnerable to physical pressures from global warming and these must be monitored (particularly in the light of a possible additional human presence). The pressures include: (Page 4)

- -Sea level rises leading to inundation of low-lying islands;
- -Sea temperature rises leading to coral mortality;
- -Coastal erosion from loss of protective structure of reefs due to coral mortality;
- -Rising CO2 levels causing ocean acidification and reduced reef growth.

## 5. THE EXISTING COMMITMENT TO THE PROTECTION OF BIOT'S ENVIRONMENT

The British Government, through the BIOT Administration, is committed to conserving the environment of the Territory and has taken significant measures to put this into effect, within the framework of the UK's International Priorities and Sustainable Development Strategy and the Government's Environmental Charter for the Territory itself.

The Chagos is one of Britain's largest and most important nature conservation areas. Its Environmental Protection Zone (declared by the Government) covers about half a million square kilometres. UK legislation is also in place to protect natural resources, notably in the restricted and reserve areas, with controls on fishing, pollution and the killing, harming or collecting of animals.

The Government has designated a first Ramsar (Wetlands Convention) site, on Diego Garcia, which includes all of the lagoon waters, the eastern side of the main island and the islands in the main channel as well as the marine waters to the limits of the territorial sea (3nm). The Government has also agreed in principle on substantial further Ramsar designations and has undertaken to manage the whole area "as if" it were a natural World Heritage site (that is "a site of outstanding universal value for the world's natural heritage'). 95% of BIOT's biodiversity is outside Diego Garcia. Existing terrestrial and marine protection is provided over wide areas of the Chagos Archipelago through national legislation. Protection for the northern atolls is provided in a number of Strict Nature Reserves.

The Chagos Archipelago is also subject to further levels of internationally binding legal protection. This includes, the Whaling Convention (including an Indian Ocean whale sanctuary), the Law of the Sea Convention (with provisions to protect fish stocks), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the CITES Convention (regulating trade in wildlife, including corals) and the Bonn Convention (with provisions to protect marine turtles and cetaceans).

## 6. MARINE AND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

Virtually none of the deep sea area of BIOT and only 3% of the shallow sea area is protected. The declared territorial sea limits extend to only 4 nautical miles, whereas 12 nautical miles is now the norm. Reef sharks, tuna, groupers, sea-cucumbers are already among the categories of species vulnerable to illegal fishing and over-fishing around the Chagos. The fact that the Indian Ocean shark population is thought to be 90% smaller than it was 40 years ago is an indication of the pressure on Indian Ocean marine life.

An effective fisheries conservation regime with a substantial strict protection ('no-take') area (as already agreed in principle by the Government) would increase Indian Ocean fish stocks, thus benefiting people in neighbouring countries as well as the global environment.

The current licensing mechanism consists of a recreational fishery (yachts and Diego Garcia) and 3 licensed commercial fisheries: Offshore (Purse Seine for yellowfin and skipjack tunas); Offshore (Longline for bigeye and yellowfin tunas); Inshore (Bank fishery for snappers, groupers). The most significant monitoring, control and surveillance issue at the present time is it that of illegal vessels and fishing camps.

Implementation of both the fisheries policy and the conservation policy relies essentially on enforcement by the BIOT Support Vessel, 'BritOp' operations carried out by the British military authorities, and so far only sporadic scientific monitoring observations.

There are key questions relating to the overall policy on fisheries management and conservation policy in the half million square kilometres of ocean, as well as that of the sources and size of funding required for implementation.

Poaching and pressures on BIOT's marine life will increase. It is argued that large scale no-take zones should be created and that one fisheries protection vessel is inadequate for such a huge area; the single patrol vessel appears to be struggling with its (necessary and important) multiple tasks.

It is suggested that the tuna licensing brings in relatively very little money; the income stream is highly variable year-on-year. Investigations should be started into the possible alternatives which would include strict no-take for the majority of the EFZ and territorial waters, with funds for two permanent patrol vessels securely funded in perpetuity by a large endowment. This would undoubtedly reduce pressure and would further protect other oceanic species such as sharks which are impacted as by-catch.

The Chagos is a global coral reef biodiversity hotspot. The objectives of the required coral reef management agenda should be:
1) maintain or recover reef growth and structural complexity of habitats;
2) maintain or recover fish stocks and sustain fishery yields;
3) prevent, reverse or minimise local losses of species;
4) ensure that no species are driven to extinction.

At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development the coastal nations of the world, including the UK, committed themselves to establish national networks of marine protected areas by 2012. There is clear evidence that marine reserves work. Reserves all over the world show dramatic increases in spawning stocks. Multiple stresses are overwhelming local efforts to protect reefs. We need to scale up protection from local to regional. Theoretical work indicates we should protect between 20% and 40% of the sea to maximise fishery benefits and maintain sufficiently large populations so that species can bounce back quickly after shocks. Such source populations and adequate inter-reserve connectivity can only be guaranteed when large marine networks are created-of the order of 30% or more of habitat.

We agree with Professor Callum Roberts of York University that The Chagos Archipelago represents a magnificent marine conservation opportunity that could be of lasting benefit to humanity and biodiversity. There can be few places on this planet that represent better value for leveraging spectacular returns. What is needed is vision and a leadership initiative by Britain with others to create the Chagos as a model, pristine area of the planet held in trust for the future of the world community.

## 7. OTHER CHALLENGES FOR BIOT CONSERVATION

### *Regulatory Framework UK/BIOT*

Not least in the light of recent legal judgments, there is a need for confirmation of the validity of the existing legal framework for BIOT environmental conservation (based largely on UK Orders in Council).

There is also a need for updating and defining the framework of BIOT protected areas. Work has begun on this.

### *Fully Protected areas*

Of particular importance is the implementation of "one third fully protected areas" or "no take zones" (for maritime areas). The concept is incorporated in the agreed Conservation Management Plan for BIOT. Representative selections of all habitats should be covered in these areas. These areas need not require exclusion of all access but they will exclude extractive activity, fishing, construction and other interference.

### *Proposed Removal of Exclusions to the Environment Zone*

Currently the Environment Zone has an outer boundary (the 200 nm limit) and several inner boundaries around each island or group of islands. This has the effect of excluding from the Environment Zone all islands and their immediately adjacent reefs and shallow waters (the areas which are richest in biodiversity and in particular need of environmental protection). The simple removal of all inner boundaries is proposed.

### *Scientific Monitoring and Research*

The 2006 Scientific monitoring expedition was carried out very effectively with excellent official support, including the essential role of the BIOT support vessel. This present mechanism of expedition-type research visits has served well enough up in the past but there is now a need for a modest facility which remains for authorised scientific work. Much new science requires equipment which cannot simply be flown out on a temporary basis but needs a non-humid, fixed location. Some equipment can be moved, but only at great expense and inconvenience. Avenues for funding and managing such a facility are being discussed.

### *Habitat Restoration and Biodiversity*

Scientific monitoring should pay particular attention to 'sentinel' species including seabirds, turtles, corals, reef fish, sharks, native plants. In the Indian Ocean most of these are on the decline. Sea-birds are subject to numerous threats and some are at a small fraction of historic levels. The Chagos is a vital refuge and breeding ground for them. Yet 9 of the 17 species of breeding seabirds studied by the 2006 scientific expedition showed a significant reduction in numbers since the 1996 expedition. (A survey of the breeding birds of the Indian Ocean Territory shows huge declines in some seabirds between 1996 and 2006:
Audubon's Shearwater -69%, White-tailed Tropicbird -46%, Masked Booby -67%, Roseate Tern -80%, Bridled Tern -60%, Brown Noddy -78%, Lesser Noddy -91%.)

On BIOT, the islands which are rat free (eg Nelson, Three Brothers and Danger Island) are teeming with birds, whereas those with rats (notably those which were previously inhabited) are not. Habitat restoration, with successful rat eradication, would add directly to breeding habitats. Eagle, Sea Cow and Egmont Islands are candidates for such treatment when funding can be found.

### *Visiting Yacht Regulation*

Providing the numbers of visiting yachts are controlled and regulations as regards pollution and moorings etc are adequate and enforced, the yachts need not present a significant environmental threat. It is essential to have moorings which protect the coral from anchors and chains. Charges should be sufficient to cover costs and contribute to conservation work.

### *Planning*

There is effectively no land planning legislation for the Chagos. A framework for this appropriate for possible future scenarios should be put in place.

### *Enforcement*

Rapid response is needed to prevent the pressure for poaching. The retasking of the FPV as the BIOT Support Vessel is a very positive step; but it is unlikely that the single vessel will be sufficient in future.

### *Finance*

The FCO and BIOT Administration frequently refer to the financial problems facing BIOT management. The Administration of the BIOT in regards to conservation and fisheries management and enforcement and scientific monitoring must be more adequately resourced than at present.

## 8. HUMAN HABITATION

The Chagos Conservation Trust and partners consider that even as the legal arguments continue it is not too soon for the British Government and other concerned bodies to begin to draw up longer term plans to sustain the environmental integrity of the Chagos while taking the possibility of human habitation into account. As a non political charitable organisation, the Chagos Conservation Trust has not taken a position for or against resettlement in the Chagos Islands by the Chagossians while the matter was sub judice. Nevertheless the Trust has previously drawn attention to the environmental implications associated with human resettlement. Any such resettlement needs to take account of the importance of safeguarding the unique, delicate and vulnerable ecology of the archipelago. This is not only because human settlement would have an impact on important ecosystems and threatened species, but because any degradation of the environment could adversely affect the welfare and prosperity of possible human communities.

In the spirit of Professor Bellamy's remarks quoted at the head of this paper, it would seem reasonable to hope that good livelihoods in areas including those relating to conservation might exist in future for some Chagossians who wish to return.

As regards the outer islands, the Posford Haskoning Study and the Jenness Review comment on this subject of the compatibility of human habitation on the outer Chagos Islands and the safeguarding of the ecology of the archipelago. The Jenness Review considers that Chagossian re-settlement "can occur in a way that protects the islands' natural environment".

However the environmental risks from resettlement foreseen in the June 2000 feasibility study are very real. That study said that 'resettlement would have a profound effect on the structural and functional characteristics of the coral reef ecosystems. The main consequence will be habitat destruction, exploitation of natural resources and pollution' The experience in Mauritius and the Maldives is one of mining and destroying coral reefs and the life they used to support. For example fertiliser used in agriculture leads to nutrient enrichment which is one of the main causes of coral reef damage.

Permanent human settlement on the outer islands on a significant, commercially-driven scale with its related modern utilities, commercial operations and infrastructure as proposed in the Jenness and more recent Howell papers would risk being severely detrimental to the natural protection of the nearly pristine natural environment of the Chagos archipelago.

The environmental impact of much of the type of new human, commercial activity (activity as suggested by Jenness and Howell) would clearly not be compatible with the necessary, and currently agreed, level of ecological protection required. Examples are: progressive development of "a tourist industry and business ventures", requiring dedicated water supplies from a desalination plant, refuse and sewage disposal; "timber ventures for the production of timber, furniture and boats"; a "coconut industry"; "collaborative, commercial exploitation of the archipelago's underutilised fishing resources"; an international airport; and other infrastructure sufficient to support such industries on these tiny islands. Suggestions have been made that there could be a viable timber industry using available imported and 'local' timber, including Takamaka. But only the islands of highest conservation importance have any of the rare original island trees; and none should be raided for local construction if there is a serious conservation policy.

We suggest in Section 11 below an alternative approach for an environmentally positive framework providing good livelihoods and employment.

## 9. STRUCTURAL ISSUES FOR BIOT CONSERVATION

### *US/UK Relations in regard to BIOT*

The 1966 UK/US Agreement broadly granted the US Government the right to use the entirety of the BIOT for military purposes, subject to agreement by both governments regarding acceptable facilities and arrangements. Further conditions are contained in the 1976 Agreement and subsequent bilateral arrangements. The UK retains its national sovereignty over the whole Territory. The 1966 Agreement provides that BIOT is to remain available for defence purposes for an indefinite period of time, initially for 50 years (ie to 2016) and then for a further 20 years unless notice is given.

It is the assumption of this paper that the BIOT will be required for defence purposes in 2016 and beyond. However, just as adjustments have been made periodically in the past to UK/US arrangements, it seems likely that some further changes will need to be made in coming years, for example with a view to 2016, and, where required, these could incorporate agreed provisions related to issues considered in this paper.

### *A strong and internationally supported legal conservation framework*

Whichever overall political scenario emerges for BIOT and the human habitation there is within it, a strong, and internationally supported legal conservation framework is essential, and fully in line with the Government's policy.

### *UK/BIOT legislation*

As discussed above, the valuable existing UK framework of legislation requires confirming and updating in the light of recent developments.



### *Regulatory Framework: Ramsar*

There is no formal Ramsar protection for the western islands of Peros Banhos Atoll, Eagle Island, nor any part of Salomon or Egmont Atolls. Furthermore there is no protection for the non-islanded reef systems, including wide areas of the Great Chagos Bank and the surrounding shallow reefs and banks. Marine protection is restricted to those areas adjacent to these existing protected areas. CCT proposed in 2005 a phased extension of this coverage. The Government agreed in principle to the first phase named 'The Chagos Islands Ramsar Site". This site would include all of the land areas and their adjacent territorial seas, a designation producing a site with 7 separate areas.

If at any point the BIOT government were to extend the territorial waters to 12nm, as is now the norm in most countries, we propose that this Ramsar designation should be extended accordingly. This 12nm limit is already used in the fisheries management. This extension would aggregate this Ramsar Site into two separate areas.

There is no doubt that this Ramsar site meets the requirements for designation. It encompasses some of the most important nesting sites for seabirds in the western Indian Ocean. It includes some of the least disturbed island ecosystems in this Ocean, including several islands not impacted by alien invasive species. It also includes some of the most extensive shallow water reef ecosystems, including entire atoll ecosystems in the case of Egmont, Peros Banhos and Salomon.

This designation will, we believe, tie in well with the recently declared Environment Zone. The latter provides a statement of intent with regards to environmental protection from the edge of Territorial Waters to a distance of 200nm. Ramsar designation would effectively fill the gaps of the Territorial Waters within this Environment Zone.

CCT proposes a second phase of Ramsar designation whereby the entire area currently covered by the "Environment Zone" (EPCZ) and the Fisheries Conservation and Management Zone (commonly referred to as the "Fisheries Zone") would be designated as a single 'Chagos Archipelago' Ramsar site. Precedents for this style of approach for designation are increasing and there can be no doubt that this site meets the criteria required for Ramsar designation. The declaration of entire shallow marine ecosystems provides a robust, whole-ecosystem approach. The unique and important value of the Chagos reefs is clearly explained in numerous publications and there is increasing evidence that, amongst the Chagos reefs, the shallow banks may include unique or important communities which would not be protected under the Chagos Islands Ramsar Site already described.

### *IUCN - World Commission on Protected Areas*

A decision by the UK Government to create a IUCN Category 1 status protected area or areas is a further possibility for internationally supported BIOT conservation frameworks.

### *World Heritage Status*

Nomination by the UK of the whole of the Chagos archipelago (perhaps excluding Diego Garcia) as a World Heritage site is a logical step further, given the UK Government's existing commitment to treat the whole area 'as if' it were a World Heritage Site.

(The wording of this commitment, in the statement on BIOT

conservation policy in October 1997, was that 'the islands will be treated with no less strict regard for natural heritage considerations than places actually nominated as World Heritage sites, subject only to defence considerations.')
Inclusion on the World Heritage list would offer significant potential benefits particularly:

- A lasting, UN commitment to protection of the world's heritage;
- Prestige which raises awareness of the importance of caring for the site.
- A catalyst for attracting funding.

The Government indicated that the reservation of BIOT for defence purposes precluded an application to UNESCO for World Heritage status. However legal advice on this point provided for NGOs in 1999 stated 'In our opinion, the obligations that the British Government would assume if all or part of the Chagos were listed as a World Heritage Site are not incompatible with the [UK/US] Defence Agreements.'

## 10. EXPERIENCE FROM OTHER WORLDWIDE CONSERVATION AREAS

It is worth looking at arrangements for, and experience with, other significant territories of environmental importance. Even within the UK itself St Kilda island, Outer Hebrides of Scotland, is managed by a partnership of Ministry of Defence, National Trust for Scotland and Scottish National Heritage and combines World Heritage status and military use. There are significant natural World Heritage or other sites in other UK Overseas Territories which are managed in a satisfactory way, for example Tristan da Cunha's Gough and Inaccessible island Site which was created in 1994.

Within the Indian Ocean , the Seychelles Islands Foundation, established in 1979 with the participation of the Governments and Royal Society, manages the conservation, scientific research, restoration and tourism in Vallee de Mai and Aldabra atoll with the islands of Malabar, Polymnieli, Picard and South Island, providing employment in areas such as guides, wardens, logistic staff and educationalists. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has played a crucial role in financing.

Many other world nature conservation sites combine natural reserves of varying strictness with scientific research facilities, park and research staff, limited tourism and differing conditions of human habitation. There are problems and challenges common to most: human impact on nature, enforcement, invasive species (rats, cats, imported plants, etc) and, notably, finance. However there is plenty of scope for deriving 'best practice' for the conservation management of the Chagos Archipelago.

## 11. A STRUCTURE FOR CONSERVATION AND SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT IN THE CHAGOS

In order to meet the environmental challenges and objectives described above, we consider that a new small structure is needed, dedicated to ensuring that the area of the Chagos Archipelago already the subject of the Government's 'Environment Zone' legislation is well managed (on a robust, long term basis) for conservation, fisheries management, scientific research, and related education and 'protective tourism'.

We suggest that a charitable, not-for-profit Public trust or Foundation be created by the Government for the purpose. As mentioned above, there are many examples of such structures in other important natural protected areas around the world; and experience should be drawn from these.

The organisation could be managed by a Manager appointed by the Government, reporting to an official and supervised by a Board of Trustees whose membership would include representatives of Government, financial and other contributors, and conservation, scientific and educational organisations.

The organisation, might be responsible for the preparation and implementation of marine and terrestrial conservation and management planning.

The organisation would require substantial Foundation capital to provide income to ensure its sustainable financial viability. Its income could be supplemented by income and fees from limited, vessel based, visits and protective tourism, and from the use (by authorised scientific entities) of a small research station on one of the northern islands (perhaps in a restored plantation building).

The organisation would require the periodic use of a support vessel for transport between Diego Garcia and the research station on a northern island in addition to adequate vessel use for its agreed overall responsibility for marine and terrestrial conservation and fisheries management.

The organisation could provide some good livelihoods and important sustainable employment of a kind compatible with the Government's commitments to protecting the environment of the Chagos, including treating the whole area as if it were a World Heritage site. Such employment might for example include Rangers, Assistant Rangers, Guides, Boat personnel, mechanics, and Scientific Research station and habitat restoration staff.

## 12. NEXT STEPS

This discussion paper was produced by members of the Chagos Conservation Trust, (following its November 2007 conference on the subject at ZSL) in preliminary consultation with individual members of other organisations including the Royal Society, the Pew Environmental Group, The Zoological Society, the Linnean Society, the RSPB/Birdlife International, Coral Cay Conservation, Warwick University, The University of Wales, and The Nature Conservancy. The present text of the paper is under active discussion and is not endorsed by all of the organisations themselves.

The next stage will be more formal discussion in the coming months between the organisations mentioned and others. This will be co-ordinated by the Chagos Conservation Trust and RSPB. At an appropriate point we will ask for joint consideration with the responsible Government departments and organisations.

Chagos Conservation Trust
1 June 2008