



Report of Attendance to JMC OT EN and EU –OCT Ministerial Conference in Aruba

I left St Helena on 31st January 2017 to attend the above conferences: I arrived in London on 5th February. On 6th February I attended discussions with OT leaders on the agenda for JMC and to discuss the findings from the Endson Consultancy report commissioned by UKOTA on Overseas Territories Brexit Strategy.

That evening the territory leaders met with Baroness Anelay for dinner where we had the opportunity for open discussion with the Minister and her immediate advisors. I raised there the importance of the tender process for the interim air service for commercial flights to St Helena and cautioned that we still wanted a long term solution to the problems of wind shear from the Northern approach of the runway otherwise we would not get the full benefit from the investment in the airport.

On Tuesday 7th February the leaders met at FCO with Ministers and had a full day's discussion on the needs of the territories to be taken into account when Britain exits the EU.

The meeting was intense and my feelings from this is that the UK Government is fully committed to ensuring their OT's concerns will be taken into account in the negotiations, the Minister also committed to another conference in June 2017. This in my view shows real commitment on the part of UK Government.

That evening I attended a reception organised by Lord George Foulkes, a member of our All Parliamentary Group. Vince Thompson who had been in the UK played an important part in organising this gathering. There were a number of Lords and MPs present, so was a small number of St Helenians, the UK Rep Mrs Kedell Worboys MBE and her staff, Helena Bennett and Juliette Williams from St Helena Tourism; the event was hosted by Shelco whose team was also present.

Lord Foulkes gave an opening speech asking all parliamentarians to support St Helena, especially in ensuring that the UK Government finds a long term solution to the wind shear problems at our Airport.

Amongst the members of Parliament was also Mrs Meg Hillier the Chair of the UK PAC whom I met. She too has pledged her support for island and said she was determined that we would get the full benefit of the airport. Andrew Mitchell MP who was the DFID Minister who signed off on the airport gave a heart-warming speech and spoke of why it was the right thing to do then and that the British Government must continue its support to St Helena, especially in the transitional period as was intended because there would be much infrastructure development still needed. I gave a responding speech which I shared previously with members. Another member of our All Party Group present was Lord David Shutt. It is clear from discussions with MP's and Lords that St Helena

has much support in Parliament and we should not under estimate the value and importance of maintaining this contact when Councillors are in London. I would encourage other Members who go on similar conferences to likewise make contact especially with members of our All Parliamentary Group.

On Wednesday 8th February I spent the morning at UK Rep's Office preparing for the Aruba trip but that afternoon along with other Territory Leaders we visited Number 10 Downing Street where we met the Prime Minister for a short meeting as a roundup of the conference. The PM reaffirmed her commitment to ensuring the territories get the best possible deal from the EU negotiations.

I also took the opportunity whilst in London to have a quick meeting with Debbie Palmer, a Director in DFID who was present at the JMC. I spoke to her about my concerns over the budget process between SHG and DFID, in that I believe that after the team leaves there is no dialogue from them with Councillors, we do not get any feedback from them, nor is there a report.

I pointed out that we used to get a Senior DFID official that headed the team and at the end of the visit there would be an Aide Memoir signed off in form of a report, which set out a settlement but which would be subject to Ministerial approval at the appropriate time, Debbie was susceptible to these suggestions and promised that she would follow this up. I wrote to Her Excellency Governor Phillips about this and she too accepted the points I made.

I left UK on 19th February, accompanied by Mrs Worboys for Aruba via Miami. We arrived in Aruba 17 hours later. We had four days of meetings, starting on Monday 20th February. During the week we had the annual trilateral meeting with the Commission. We were joined by Financial Secretary Dax Richards via Skype. This meeting was to have those face to face talks with the Commission on where we are with the programming documents for the EDF 11 tranche of funding and report on the EDF 10, which was well received by the Commission. We have the full support of the Commission on the connectivity project for the sub-sea cable funded through the EDF 11. We were requested to have all the programming documents completed and signed off by November 2017.

I also met with the EU Commissioner of Overseas Development where we discussed both EDF 10 and 11 projects and he gave all territory leaders his assurance that we would get the full value of EDF 11. He said that Britain was not leaving Europe but the Union and it was his hope that whatever comes out of the negotiations on Brexit talks, Britain and her Overseas Territories would remain a part of Europe.

At The Ministerial on Friday 24th I made an intervention on behalf of all three South Atlantic Islands, which was well received.

I would like to thank our UK Representative Mrs Kedell Worboys MBE, for her support throughout the meetings I attended and her assistance in making last minute changes to interventions to suit the flow of meetings.

I was requested by SHG Head of News to write a short daily summary of the meetings with accompanying photographs so that she could do a daily tweet. This was well received by Saints and friends of St Helena from around the world, which raises the profile of the island. Thanks to Miss Stevens for doing this. I would encourage other Councillors going to other conferences to do the same.

Finally I would like to thank the Prime Minister and the Government and people of Aruba who were model hosts; it was truly an experience to be able to meet people who are just as friendly as our own Saints.

Lawson A Henry
Councillor