



Report Joint Ministerial Conference 1st – 4th December 2014

I left the island on 20th November 2014 to travel to UK to attend the Joint Ministerial Conference in London. I spent three nights on Ascension Island and arrived in UK on 25th November.

Monday 1st December I attended part of the annual general meeting of UKOTA although I had to leave early for a bilateral meeting with Mr James Duddridge MP, FCO Minister for the Overseas Territories.

I was accompanied to this meeting by HE Governor Mark Capes. Most of the forty minutes with the Minister was spent discussing our airport development and necessary continued support after the airport becomes operational. We spoke at length of our desire to make the huge investment in our airport a success by developing a sustainable, tourism driven economy. While acknowledging the budgetary constraints facing HMG, I emphasised the importance of maintaining budgetary support at least at the current level. I argued that any less support would have a negative impact on our still fragile economy and send the wrong message to those who are investing or planning to invest. It would also pose a risk to the purpose of the airport investment, as there was still much to do in terms of tourism infrastructure development.

We also drew attention to the need for a transport link with Ascension Island when the RMS St Helena is withdrawn from service. We explained the negative impact the absence of a link would have on Saints working on Ascension Island and on the Falkland Islands.

We also raised the issue of allocation of seats to St Helena and Ascension Island on the RAF Air Bridge and the problems incurred during the run up to Christmas. It was pleasing to note subsequently that with FCO intervention, additional seats were released to those wishing to travel to St Helena for Christmas.

We described the gains we have made in developing our Social Services and especially our safeguarding arrangements, noting that we welcomed the upcoming inquiry to be headed by Ms Sasha Wass QC which would receive our full support.

Tuesday 2nd December

The day began with a breakfast meeting with the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC). This was quite a rushed meeting with insufficient time for all delegates to give a full briefing. However, I was able to register the main points from the briefing paper provided by EMD.

A meeting followed, with the influential Foreign Affairs Select Committee, chaired by Sir Richard Ottaway. I gave a presentation mainly on the airport project and how its success would be, to a large extent, dependent on HMG's continued support for the many infrastructure developments projects still required, with budgetary support continuing at least at current levels.

Later that morning I met for a general chat about developments on St Helena with Sarah Macintosh, Director General, Defence and Intelligence, FCO.

In the afternoon the JMC was formally opened by FCO Minister Duddridge followed by the following sessions:-

Session 1: Economic Development and Prosperity in the Overseas Territories

Presentations by Premier McLaughlin of Cayman Islands, Chris Barton Director International Trade and Doug Winslow Senior Economist DFID.

Session 2: Delivering Security for the Overseas Territories

Presentations by Mark Francois MP, Minister for the Armed Forces, Rear Admiral Simon Ancona, Ministry of Defence.

Session 3: Strengthening Policing and Criminal Justice

Presentations by Peter Hayes, Director, Overseas Territories, FCO, Ken Littlewood, Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Michael Scott ACPO, Ian Mulholand, National Offender Management Service and Paul Phillips, Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre.

Evening Event

Dinner for Territory Elected Leaders only, at Carlton Gardens, St James's hosted by Ministers Duddridge and Mr Desmond Swayne (DFID). Minister Swayne arrived early and I took the opportunity of briefing him on the issues and challenges we faced on St Helena and how much we want to make the airport a success, underscoring the point that we can only do this if there is continued support from

DfID at the right level. This is particularly so since the investment and growth forecast in the DFID Business was unlikely to begin to materialise to any significant degree until after the airport is operational.

Through networking at this event, I discovered from talking with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar that they were able to overcome the problems around recruiting doctors from UK, without it affecting their medical careers and UK registration. He put me in contact with their Health Minister and we met the following day. I later passed his details to Councillor Rummery and SHG officials for follow up action.

Wednesday 3rd December

Session 4: How does the Environment Contribute to Economic Prosperity?

Presentations by Earl Howe, Minister DEFRA and Dr Orlando Smith British Virgin Islands.

Session 5: Migration, Passports and Border Security

Presentations by Peter Hayes Director, FCO, Graham Zebedee, Head of Border Security Home Office and Patrick Owens, HM Passport Office.

I was able to speak to colleagues from Montserrat and obtain contact details on an online visa system for Overseas Territories that would be relevant for St Helena post airport opening.

Parliamentary Visit

Overseas Territories leaders attended the Prime Minister's Question time. I was also able to meet St Helenian Calvin Thomas, who works at the House of Commons as Chief Usher.

This was followed by a private lunch for leaders and delegations of the Overseas Territories, hosted in the House of Commons by Lindsay Hoyle MP, Deputy Speaker. This gave me another opportunity to speak about St Helena and the importance of continued financial support from HMG.

Session 6: Building a Sustainable Health Service

Presentations by Nick Tomlinson NHS and Dr. The Hon Rufus Ewing, Premier, Turks and Caicos Islands.

St Helena was mentioned in this session following the setting up of the pilot scheme to supply childhood vaccinations. This session also covered the supply of

pharmaceuticals to OT's through the NHS and the difficulty of recruiting doctors from the UK to serve in the OT's.

In his round-up speech Minister Duddridge commented that he would seek to make some quick wins from the discussions and the questions raised at the plenary sessions. He hoped that changing the GMC Regulations, concerning doctors working in the OT's would be one of them.

Session 7: Pensions Policy

Presentation by Roger Edwards MLA, Falkland Islands and Carla Groom, Department for Works and Pensions.

The wrap up session that afternoon on the wording of the draft communique saw some protracted discussion of international finance issues such as beneficial ownership and money laundering. A reception hosted by the Minister was held that evening.

Thursday 4th December

In the morning, I met with Governor Capes at the office of our hard working UK representative, Kedell Worboys where we prepared for a bilateral that afternoon with DfID Minister Desmond Swayne.

The topics discussed in the bilateral with Minister Swayne are in the attached notes. One of the issues raised was Rockfall Protection in Maldivia and the need for an expert to assess the area. DfID said they would support this through the short-term TC budget. I stressed the need for this to be taken forward without delay.

I left the UK on 7th December, for Ascension where I spent four nights waiting for the return of the RMS St Helena. I arrived back on St Helena on 15th December.

This was again a good JMC covering many issues important to St Helena. With the UK General Election so close, I am sure that Ministers had much on their minds but nonetheless, Ministers had listened carefully to our concerns and the points we raised will be on record.

I would like to thank His Excellency Governor Capes and St Helena's UK representative, Mrs Kedell Worboys MBE, for their strong support to me throughout the JMC.

Lawson A Henry
Member of Legislative Council