

## **16TH OCT-EU FORUM - BRUSSELS (19 - 23 FEBRUARY 2018) - REPORT**

After arriving Brussels around midday on Monday 19 July 2018 the afternoon was spent settling into the Hotel Metropole and orientating myself with the whereabouts of key locations and facilities. The Trilateral meetings began the next morning. These were not held at the hotel and Kedell and I shared a taxi to the Devco Building of the EU Commission.

### **TRILATERALS**

Four persons from the Commission including the Director attended our Trilateral. Tim Palmer from the DFID Europe Team was also present.

Dax Richards, Financial Secretary, joined by Skype and led on our discussions. There were three main issues EDF 10, EDF 11 and an Evaluation visit.

### **EDF 10**

This was about the EDF 10 programme having now come to an end. Rupert's Wharf had been completed in May 2016 and the first official call by the MV Helena is expected early March by which time it is expected that the UK Department of Trade will have formally certified the jetty as an official port. Mention was also made about the Roads R1 project which has been completed where 42.67 km of strategic roads have been realigned or resurfaced.

### **EDF 11**

This refers to the sub marine cable project and at the time of these discussions it was anticipated that the end of the week would see the signing off on a single programming document. Discussions were extremely positive with Commission representatives who were fully supportive of this project. This cable which is expected to go live in 2020 will provide the Island with a considerable amount of connectivity at high speeds and will have a number of significant benefits for the community.

This project is being referred to as an Investment Grant and it was stressed many times by the Commission Director of the need to now move quickly regarding policies and financial planning. It is hoped to get a draft agreement to St Helena by mid-March with signing by the end of March/early April.

Being present at the Trilateral and speaking later informally with members it was obvious that St Helena has a tremendous amount of support from the Commission. We should also explore cooperation with the EU post Brexit.

### **EVALUATION VISIT**

A programme review of EDF 9 and EDF 10 is Likely to take place on Island in May.

### **OCEANS CONFERENCE**

This took place at the Metropole Hotel in Brussels on Wednesday 21 February 2018. Discussions were led by the Hon. Cartwright-Robinson Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands who is also the Chair of the Overseas Countries and Territories

Association (OCTA). In setting the scene the Hon. Cartwright-Robinson spoke about the importance of the oceans and the challenges including pollutions, fisheries and climate change. Also about new opportunities for research and monitoring the ocean.

Through recent years, oceans have become a part of a wider global political agenda with international institutions and public and private sectors taking action to secure a healthier ocean and building a sustainable blue economy. As 'Large Ocean' Territories, the state of the oceans has always been of importance to the OCTs, as the ocean and its resources are a vital and fundamental part of their economic and social structure. With vast ocean spaces, OCTs also represent an important share of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EZZ) of the Member States to which they are linked, and more than two thirds of the EU EZZ of 25M KM<sup>2</sup>, making it the world's largest. At the same time OCTs are in the front line of the effects and threats facing the oceans in terms of both climate change and pollution. As the international focus on the oceans increases, OCTs therefore wish to seize this momentum. The purpose of the Oceans event is to further explore blue growth opportunities and initiatives within the OCTs, and to ultimately create their own oceans agenda.'

There were other speakers during the 0900 to 1300 session and one of the presentations was about a global agenda for oceans and where do OCTs fit in. It was agreed that all countries and territories have a part to play. As most speakers overran their allotted time opportunities for interventions and questions was reduced. However I was able to do an intervention based on information I'd been supplied with. This was as follows:

### **A Marine Protected Area for St Helena**

A 200 nautical mile maritime zone (445,000 square km) in the sea around St Helena was designated a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in September 2016. Its marine life, including humpback whales, whale sharks and dolphins will be protected going forward.

The MPA and subsequent Marine Management Plan for this area were agreed by Executive Council under the St Helena Environmental Protection Ordinance, 2016. It is a significant step forward for the Island in meeting both local and international commitments, and protecting local maritime interests.

Under this protection, St Helena is striving to achieve an International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Category VI status - a protected area with sustainable use of natural resources. Category VI protected areas conserve ecosystems and habitats, together with associated cultural values and traditional natural resource management systems.

The Marine Management Plan (MMP) relates to the designated Marine Protected Area and identifies the existing and potential pressures in St Helena's waters, which includes pollution, fishing, biosecurity, tourism and construction. The MMP specifies management strategies which ensure our natural marine resources are used sustainably.

The designation and adoption of the MMP is the first step, St Helena has now demonstrated the value we put on our marine resources. As we move forward with implementing the MMP and the EPO there is provision in both for protection and enforcement at a practical and legal level.

The British Government has committed funding toward the development of the MPA through its 'Blue Belt' programme and we are currently working with CEFAS and MMO to develop a plan of action.

### **COMMENT**

While this was a brief visit to the 16th OCT -EU Forum it was enlightening as well as showing that as councillors we need to be constantly across all the key issues. I think it is also important to provide evidence of political support for projects.

As regards travel, not counting Windhoek, with seven airports in seven days meant this was a hectic trip. It was disappointing to miss the proceedings for Thursday 23 February but hopefully in future opportunities to travel to and from the Island can better match requirements.

**Tony Green**

**27 February 2018**