South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands

Strategy 2016-2020
Foreword by Minister Duddridge

Among the United Kingdom’s Overseas Territories, South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands may be one of the most remote and least well known, but it is a Territory about which we should be proud. Three days’ sail from the nearest land, it is a globally significant oasis of biodiversity whose beauty and wildlife attracts tourists, scientists and television cameras.

The Territory is significant for long-term strategic, scientific and sustainability reasons, which contribute to the United Kingdom’s interests in the Southern Ocean. It is in our national interest to ensure that this significance is properly safeguarded: this means ensuring the security of the islands; it means ensuring that the governance of this remote territory is to the highest possible standard; and it means that we must ensure careful management of the unique biodiversity of the Islands, to preserve them for future generations.

The Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI), supported by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), has achieved some significant milestones in the period since the publication of our previous strategies in 2010. In 2012 one of the largest sustainable use Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in the world was declared in the Territory’s maritime zone. This MPA strikes a careful balance between environmental and economic sustainability protecting the Territory’s wildlife while allowing the operation some of best-managed fisheries in the world. The completion this year of projects to eradicate the two most destructive invasive species on South Georgia - rats and reindeer - was an enormous achievement and shows the vital importance of the co-operation and engagement with the Territory’s many stakeholders.

This new strategy brings together HMG and GSGSSI objectives for the Territory and builds on the successes of its predecessors. In some cases the foundations laid over the last five years will provide the basis for on-going developments. In others GSGSSI, supported by the FCO, will be breaking new ground. Above all, the objectives of this new strategy are designed to strengthen the already excellent management of the Territory, support and increase our regional influence, and deliver world-class standards of environmental stewardship and governance.

James Duddridge
Minister for the Overseas Territories and Polar Regions
Foreword by Commissioner SGSSI

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands has a history of pioneering events which link exploration with science. South Georgia was first landed by Captain Cook on his second voyage of discovery in 1775. Following his ill-fated Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, Sir Ernest Shackleton and his party crossed South Georgia on foot after an epic 800 mile open-boat journey from Elephant Island. These journeys remain a source of inspiration for modern-day expeditions and scientists.

The Discovery Investigations, from the late 1920s, were the first to record systematically the marine ecology of the region. Today South Georgia is home to one of the longest and most detailed scientific datasets in the Southern Ocean, and to one of the largest sustainable-use Marine Protected Areas in the world. With the support of partners like the South Georgia Heritage Trust we have achieved world-class results in areas such as habitat restoration.

This new five-year Strategy for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands aims to build on this pioneering spirit, setting ambitious targets and breaking new ground. The Strategy has been developed following extensive consultation with our partners and stakeholders. It aims to reinforce the place of the Territory as a world leader in environmental management governed to the highest international standards.

The professionalism and commitment of the small team in the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, working with the support of the UK Government, will be critical to delivering the Strategy. However, with such an ambitious set of objectives we will only succeed with the support and expertise of our stakeholders. We are committed to engaging and working in partnership with those who share our desire better to understand, protect and enjoy this exceptional Territory.

Colin Roberts CVO
This Strategy 2016-2020 provides a framework to guide the future direction of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) over the period 2016-2020.

For the previous period, 2010-2015, both the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) published separate strategies for the Territory. This new Strategy sets out an ambitious vision agreed by both GSGSSI and FCO, and follows extensive stakeholder consultation. GSGSSI, with FCO, are committed to working with stakeholders to deliver this Strategy as part of a joint endeavour over the next five years. Progress will be monitored and reviewed annually. We will share the findings and adapt and respond accordingly.

This Strategy sets out objectives for SGSSI in the areas of governance, environment, fisheries, visitors and heritage.

To support GSGSSI’s delivery of this Strategy the UK Government, primarily through the FCO, will continue to ensure the security and good governance of SGSSI, including by:

- ensuring a continual British presence in the Territory;
- promoting and safeguarding British sovereignty by maintaining UK influence in the region; and
- upholding the UK’s high influence within the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to underpin and protect the sustainable management of SGSSI.

This Strategy recognises the importance of scientific research in providing the evidence base for policy decisions. It also recognises the importance of communications, outreach and partnership in exchanging information, engaging a wider audience with our activities and for providing support and expertise to allow us to deliver more than GSGSSI and FCO could achieve alone.
South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) is a UK Overseas Territory (OT) situated 1,450 km south-east of Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands. The main island of South Georgia is approximately 170 km long and between 2 and 40 km wide and occupies an area of 3,755 km$^2$, more than half of which is permanently ice covered. Mount Paget rises to 2,934 m and is the second highest point in all UK mainland and territories. The South Sandwich Islands are a chain of eleven small volcanic islands stretching from 56-60°S, 550 km south-east of South Georgia. The SGSSI Maritime Zone (SGSSI MZ, 200 nm from baselines) was declared in 1993 and occupies in excess of 1.3 million km$^2$ of the Southern Ocean.

South Georgia was first sighted by London merchant Antoine de la Roché in 1675 and was claimed for Great Britain by James Cook on January 17th 1775, with government arrangements established by Letters Patent in 1843. Cook also discovered the South Sandwich Islands (1775) and the islands were subsequently annexed by Great Britain through the 1908 Letters Patent. Until 1985 SGSSI was part of the Falkland Island Dependencies, after which it became a separate UK OT. There are no permanent residents.

SGSSI is administered by a small team based in Stanley, Falkland Islands, and by three Government Officers (on rotation) based at King Edward Point (KEP), South Georgia. GSGSSI is financially self-sufficient with annual revenue of around £6 million. This is derived primarily from fishing licences, tourist landing fees and sale of stamps. Revenue is primarily spent on environmental management, fisheries research and protection, and government administration. Reserves currently stand at £6 million.

Scientific research has been important on South Georgia since the pioneering work on the ecology of the Southern Ocean by the *Discovery Investigations* which began in the late 1920s. Now, the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) operates two stations on South Georgia. The station at KEP is run under contract to GSGSSI and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office and is staffed by up to eight BAS personnel. The station at Bird Island has a year round complement of at least four BAS personnel. They contribute to one of the longest and most detailed scientific datasets in the Southern Ocean which has over 30 years of population data on seabirds and marine mammals.

This research helps underpin the management of SGSSI’s fisheries which are run to the highest international standards and certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). The fisheries are managed within international standards set by the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). GSGSSI imposes a suite of additional conservation and safety measures above those required by CCAMLR and established a sustainable use Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2012, one of the largest MPAs in the world.
SGSSI’s environment is of global significance for its major populations of seabirds and marine mammals including globally threatened species such as the wandering, grey-headed and black-browed albatross. Recent habitat restoration programmes aim to safeguard this biodiversity for future generations. SGSSI’s waters are highly productive, supporting a large biomass of krill on which many marine predators depend. They have also been identified as a globally important location for marine benthic biodiversity. The South Sandwich Islands are rarely visited and information on the terrestrial and marine flora and fauna is sparse. Scientific studies have indicated hydrothermal activity in deep water off the South Sandwich Islands which may be home to unique fauna.

The collection of baseline data on the terrestrial and marine environment is an important component of GSGSSI’s commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity which was extended to SGSSI in 2015. Baseline data is also required for nautical charting and terrestrial mapping. Additionally South Georgia is well placed to provide a natural laboratory for scientific study in areas such as climate change, glacial retreat and the upper atmosphere. The potential value of this research is of international importance and its dissemination can play an important role in wider efforts to improve public awareness of our stewardship of SGSSI.

In recent years visitors to South Georgia have numbered over 14,000 per annum. The majority of these are tourists but government officials, BAS personnel, visiting scientists, fishers, and film crews among others also visit. All are responsible for contributing to the sustainable management of the Territory and are potential ambassadors for SGSSI when they depart. Many come for the wildlife that SGSSI has to offer. Others for the unique heritage which includes the remains of the former whaling stations and their historic buildings, wrecks and hulks, sealing artefacts, and early expeditions. The centenary of the church at Grytviken in 2013 and the forthcoming centenary of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s crossing of South Georgia are just two examples of SGSSI’s history which we are proud to celebrate.
World-class environmental management underpinned by the highest standards of governance

GSGSSI Strategic Objectives

• To manage the affairs of SGSSI and the surrounding 200 nautical mile Maritime Zone through efficient and transparent government

• To conserve the Territory’s environment, minimise human impacts and, where practicable, restore the native biodiversity and habitats

• To manage SGSSI fisheries to the highest international standards of operation, stewardship and sustainability

• To facilitate visits that are safe, responsible, environmentally-sensitive and contribute to sustainable management, creating future ambassadors for the Territory

• To preserve where practicable, and bring to a wider international audience, the heritage of South Georgia
1. Governance

To manage the affairs of SGSSI and the surrounding 200 nautical mile Maritime Zone through efficient and transparent government

The Overseas Territory of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) was established by the 1985 Order in Council which provides the basic constitution of the Territory. Under that constitution the Commissioner has the powers to make laws for peace, order and good governance of the Territory, to appoint officers, and to establish courts. The United Kingdom Government retains overall responsibility for the good governance, defence and foreign policy of the Territory. The Commissioner is supported by a small team of Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) officials in Stanley, Falkland Islands and by Government Officers on South Georgia. These are GSGSSI’s most important asset in delivering our objectives. We seek to invest in them, and enhance our capacity through outreach and partnership with others, including continuing our close working relationship with the Falkland Islands Government. SGSSI’s international obligations and good governance are supported by high quality scientific research facilitated by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) stations at King Edward Point (KEP), funded by GSGSSI and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), and at Bird Island.
**Key objectives**

1.1 Support the UK Government to safeguard British sovereignty of the Territory through the highest standards of management practice underpinned by clear policy and modern legislation.

1.2 Identify and mitigate against GSGSSI liabilities through effective risk management policies including maintaining and exercising contingency plans.

1.3 Ensure the long-term financial security of the Territory through prudent financial management, balancing of budgets, and by maintaining at least one year’s operating costs in reserve.

1.4 Ensure the implementation of obligations under international Treaties which have been extended to SGSSI and assist the UK Government’s engagement with Treaties and organisations relevant to the sub-Antarctic region.

1.5 Ensure that GSGSSI demonstrates good government and a clear and transparent approach to decision-making including through active stakeholder engagement and consultation.

1.6 Encourage high quality science that supports our strategic objectives, and work with UK, regional and international organisations to promote research and collaboration.

1.7 Promote outreach of SGSSI activities and collaboration and information exchange through a variety of media.

**Plans for 2016-2020**

GSGSSI will aspire to the highest standards of management practice in its oversight of SGSSI. We will set out how we intend to deliver this Strategy through a series of annual business plans. We will identify, record and mitigate risks and liabilities to SGSSI. A risk register will be developed. We will establish a comprehensive set of policies to guide our internal organisation, external engagement and decision-making.

Despite being a separate UK Overseas Territory (OT) since 1985 SGSSI continues to depend on pre-1985 Falkland Islands and English law. A Legislative Review will put in place the necessary legislative provisions for an uninhabited, self-governing OT, and to underpin GSGSSI policies.

We will consider the case for updating the Territory’s financial administration and the development of modern financial regulations. We will seek to maintain one
year’s basic operating costs in reserve as part of our prudent financial management and review our investment strategy.

A number of international Treaties and multilateral environmental agreements have been extended to SGSSI. GSGSSI will work with the UK Government and other OTs to ensure obligations under these Treaties are addressed and to share knowledge and information.

GSGSSI will strive to demonstrate good governance and transparency in its decision-making. We will consult openly with stakeholders and take evidence-based decisions. We will maintain a high standard of science, including environmental monitoring and data collection, to underpin our decision-making.

We will work closely with the FCO and BAS to ensure the effective management of the KEP and Bird Island research stations and delivery of core science objectives. We will seek better utilisation of facilities by the wider scientific community in line with our strategic objectives, aim to attract the best science, and operate a clear pricing policy with a view to economic cost recovery.

We will clarify decision-making processes and the opportunities for their review. We will seek to partner with stakeholders to enhance our outreach and disseminate information about SGSSI. We will seek to enhance our work through collaboration and information-sharing internationally, with the Falkland Islands Government and other UK OTs, with governments of other territories in the sub-Antarctic and with non-governmental organisations.

*The flag flying at King Edward Point (Credit: James Jansen)*
2. Environment

To conserve the Territory’s environment, minimise human impacts and, where practicable, restore the native biodiversity and habitats

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) sustains globally significant levels of biodiversity including major populations of marine mammals and seabirds. This biodiversity is supported by highly productive seas that produce a large biomass of krill on which many marine predators depend. On-going scientific research continually adds to our knowledge of the environment of the Territory. There have been significant advances in environment management over the past five years, not least the South Georgia Heritage Trust landmark rodent eradication project and work by the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) to eradicate reindeer and designate a Marine Protected Area (MPA). These all serve to enhance the protection of the Territory’s biodiversity, ecosystems and the landscape. While work continues to establish baseline data on SGSSI’s environment, there remain uncertainties over its future due to the rapid regional climatic warming to which SGSSI is exposed.
Key objectives

2.1 Integrate principles of environmental sustainability into Government policies and ensure that environmental management practices are fully transparent and conform to, or exceed, global standards.

2.2 Increase SGSSI’s environmental global reach though collaboration and knowledge sharing with our stakeholders including the UK and other UK Overseas Territory governments and non-governmental organisations.

2.3 Ensure that our obligations under multilateral environmental agreements are met.

2.4 Develop standardised environmental assessment procedures which are scalable and commensurate with the potential impact the activity may have on the environment.

2.5 Enhance knowledge of the biodiversity and habitats of SGSSI through research, monitoring and review, including to establish scientific baselines from which to assess environmental change including the potential effects of climate change.

2.6 Effectively manage invasive alien species and work along the entire biosecurity continuum to implement best practice biosecurity protocols, post-border monitoring and emergency response measures.

2.7 Adopting an evidence-based approach and using the best available data, ensure appropriate protection of the terrestrial and marine environments through a suite of protected areas, ensuring that activities are managed sustainably and with minimal impacts on the environment.

2.8 Understand and, where possible, mitigate the risks from substances that have the potential to harm the environment such as heavy fuel oil and pollutants present in old whaling stations.

Plans for 2016 - 2020

Conserving the environment of SGSSI is central to all activities in the Territory. We will produce a National Biodiversity Action Plan which will outline in detail how GSGSSI will meet each of our key objectives and how these relate to global conservation targets such as those outlined in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

We will implement, where practicable, best environmental management practice, meet our international obligations, and develop a standardised system of environmental assessment procedures to guide management interventions. Stakeholders will be engaged and the decision-making process will be transparent.
We will investigate new ways to involve stakeholders in gathering data needed to support the sustainable management of the Territory. We will continue our policy of not permitting activities that conflict with our environmental management aspirations, such as mineral and hydrocarbon extraction.

Over the next five years, we will seek to enhance our knowledge of species and habitats and the potential impacts of global environmental change, including climate change, to underpin our future management. To better understand our biodiversity, we will utilise traditional survey methods and, where appropriate, explore the use of citizen science and remote-sensing methods.

Monitoring the environmental effects of management interventions such as eradication projects is essential in determining their success and informing future actions, both in SGSSI and in other parts of the world with similar issues. During the next 5 years we will work with stakeholders to implement appropriate monitoring to determine the success of such projects and to quantify the recovery of native species and habitats.

Biosecurity controls will be embedded into all activities and a comprehensive biosecurity handbook developed which details mitigation measures at each stage of the biosecurity continuum. We will work closely with stakeholders to ensure shared biosecurity objectives are met. Particular focus will be given to avoiding the introduction or re-introduction of non-native species, in particular rodents, and in doing so give habitat restoration projects every chance of success. We will seek to better understand the distribution and abundance of non-native plants and invertebrates as part of our continued work to control their spread, and assess the risk of introduction of non-native marine species. We will review controls and incursion plans on an annual basis.

To ensure that the biodiversity, landscape and wilderness values of the Territory are preserved for future generations, we will engage with stakeholders to develop a suite of terrestrial protected areas in line with our obligations under the CBD. When deciding on sites for special protection, we will adopt an evidence-based approach and incorporate the best available scientific data and expert opinion. It is envisaged that different categories of protected area will be established, with the islands’ entire terrestrial environment legally protected in some form. We will review the provisions of the Marine Protected Area to ensure it remains fit for purpose and in accordance with the management plan.

We will consider the environmental risks arising from activities taking place in SGSSI and take action to mitigate these where practical. We will undertake feasibility studies to determine the best way to tackle the environmental impacts arising from the degradation of whaling station infrastructure and the remains of the derelict research station on Southern Thule, South Sandwich Islands.
3. Fisheries

To manage SGSSI fisheries to the highest international standards of operation, stewardship and sustainability

The fisheries of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) are among the best managed in the world and recognised as such by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). These high standards are underpinned by scientific research and precautionary management practices. Four species are currently commercially fished: Patagonian toothfish, Antarctic toothfish, Antarctic krill and mackerel icefish. The fisheries are managed within international standards set by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), on top of which further measures are applied by the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI). The fisheries operate within the context of a Marine Protected Area (MPA), established in 2012, which aims to ensure that the marine environment is properly protected from human impacts. SGSSI fisheries have been influential in raising fishery standards and sustainability within the CCAMLR region and beyond and we will strive to raise standards and sustainability further. Through effective outreach and communication the fisheries have the potential to positively influence some of the global sustainability challenges of the coming decades.

Fishery Patrol Vessel Pharos SG (Credit: Martin Collins)
Key objectives

3.1 Manage SGSSI fisheries in a precautionary manner, to the highest international standards and consistent with all CCAMLR requirements, to ensure long-term sustainability.

3.2 Collaborate with stakeholders to develop fishery management plans to guide our management and research, with clear and transparent policy and updated fisheries legislation.

3.3 Establish arrangements for monitoring and assessing the performance of the MPA to provide evidence for future management decisions in the context of the MPA review in 2018.

3.4 Continue raising standards in the fisheries and ensure best practice is adopted, including by developing a plan to phase out heavy fuel, restricting bunkering activity, and introducing a minimum ice-classification standard in the toothfish fishery.

3.5 Support the UK delegation to CCAMLR to represent SGSSI’s interests and seek the highest standards of marine management and conservation in the Scotia Sea and wider Southern Ocean.

3.6 Improve public awareness about the high standards and sustainability of SGSSI fisheries, and enhance two-way knowledge and best practice information sharing with other fisheries.

3.7 Maintain a strong, enforceable policy on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) vessels, deterring IUU activity through fishery patrolling while exploring scope for additional remote sensing options.

Plans 2016 – 2020

We will continue to manage SGSSI fisheries in a precautionary manner to the highest international standards of operation, stewardship and sustainability. We will seek opportunities to raise standards further. We will establish management plans for each fishery that will guide our management and research, support our MSC certifications and provide a clear and transparent policy. We will seek to collaborate with the industry and other stakeholders to develop and take forward these plans including priority scientific research. We will update our fisheries legislation in support of this.

The fisheries operate in the context of one of the largest MPAs in the world. We will develop arrangements to monitor and assess the performance of the MPA and review the MPA in 2018 in consultation with stakeholders. This will consider the impact of the MPA and any evidence for potential changes to the way it is managed.
Our fisheries research objectives will feed into this. We will look to increase safety and sustainability in fishery operations by working with stakeholders to develop a plan to phase out the burning and carriage of heavy fuel, restricting bunkering activity, and introducing a minimum ice-classification standard in the toothfish fishery as part of efforts to increase safety standards. We will support the UK delegation to CCAMLR to represent and promote SGSSI’s interests, enhance our reputation, and seek the highest standards of marine management and conservation.

Dissemination of information about the high standards and sustainability of GSGSSI fisheries will be a key part of our approach to effective communications and improved public outreach. As part of that we will engage with fisheries managers and scientists from other jurisdictions to promote our approach to fisheries management and gain knowledge of best practice from other parts of the world.

The *Pharos SG* is on long-term charter to GSGSSI and will continue to undertake regular patrols of the SGSSI Maritime Zone as a key asset in supporting our sustainable management of the fishery. In addition, GSGSSI will investigate remote sensing methodology to supplement surveillance activities.

**Toothfish**

Recent analysis indicates healthy recruitment into the toothfish fishery. We will continue to adopt a precautionary approach in managing the fishery, recognising that uncertainties remain including environmental factors such as climate change.

We will aim to move towards a highly precautionary stock biomass target of 55% of virgin biomass at the end of a 35-year stock projection, above the 50% target currently used by CCAMLR as a measure of sustainability. A slightly higher target of 55% would support our precautionary management approach and provide greater certainty about long-term sustainability, both environmental and economic. With greater confidence in stock levels and greater stability in catch limits we will consider, during the course of the next two-year licensing period, the potential for longer-term licensing arrangements.

The Patagonian toothfish stock in the South Sandwich Islands appears to be an extension of the South Georgia stock. We will undertake further research on this and consider the merits of including the Patagonian toothfish stock in the South Georgia MSC unit at the next re-assessment.

Antarctic toothfish are present in the Maritime Zone (MZ) to the south of 60°S and may link to stocks in the South Orkneys, Weddell Sea and Antarctic Peninsula. We will work with industry, and consider broader international collaborations, to develop a research strategy to better understand these stocks so that they can be effectively managed within the GSGSSI and CCAMLR frameworks.
**Mackerel icefish**

The volatility of the mackerel icefish stock and its availability to the fishery is an issue for both industry and management. Latest stock estimates suggest that the current level of exploitation has a negligible impact on the stock, with fishing mortality being a small fraction of predicted natural mortality. To enhance our management of this fishery we will work with the industry and stakeholders to develop a better understanding of biomass estimates and the determining factors that influence population dynamics. We will support industry in continuing the MSC certification of this fishery.

**Antarctic krill**

The Antarctic krill fishery is licensed on an access basis. We will conduct further research to consider the merits of a quota- or catch-based system, with a degree of spatial management. We will support MSC accreditation for companies krill fishing in the SGSSI MZ which is indicative of the high level of sustainability in this fishery. We will look to acquire data on the abundance and distribution of krill and will continue research on krill-predator interactions with a view to enhancing our ecosystem-based approach.
4. Visitors

To facilitate visits that are safe, responsible, environmentally-sensitive and contribute to sustainable management, creating future ambassadors for the Territory

A variety of people visit the Territory each year including government officials, British Antarctic Survey (BAS) personnel, visiting scientists, the media, fishers, expeditions and others. Of particular importance are visitors that are engaged in tourism. Tourism, both cruise ships and yachts, makes a major contribution to the sustainable management of the Territory and provided invaluable support during the recent rodent eradication project. It creates ambassadors for the wildlife, wilderness and global environmental importance of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI). It also provides an opportunity to showcase our high standards of environmental management while highlighting the future challenges faced by SGSSI and the wider region.

The principal objective of visitor management is to ensure that visitors have a safe and enjoyable visit, with minimal (if any) impact on the Territory’s unique environment and heritage. The key challenge to delivering this will be to ensure that our management practices remain robust and risk-based in the face of increasing numbers of visitors so that people can continue to enjoy South Georgia responsibly without negatively impacting the environment or facing unnecessary regulation and restrictions.

Cruise ship at St. Andrew’s Bay (Credit: Martin Collins)
Key objectives

4.1 Adopt a collaborative, precautionary approach to visitor management to ensure all visitor groups, regardless of their purpose, continue to enjoy safe, responsible visits conducted to the highest standards of environmental stewardship.

4.2 Recognising the important contribution tourism makes to the Territory, maintain our management policy to only permit cruise ships operated by members of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) to visit approved visitor sites outside of Grytviken.

4.3 Review and develop visitor management policy to provide for the sustainable use of the environment while protecting it for the benefit of all, including to integrate it into the new system of terrestrial protected areas.

4.4 Work with stakeholders to promote education and outreach of our key shared messages and understand the views of visitors to better support the sustainable management of the Territory and enhance the future visitor experience.

4.5 Develop new tourism legislation that is fit for purpose and ensure there is a complete and effective legal framework and efficient administrative process to underpin all visits to the Territory.

Plans for 2016 – 2020

We welcome visitors to SGSSI and the important contribution they make to the Territory. We will work with them to facilitate safe, responsible and environmentally-sensitive visits.

We will review our visitor management policy with stakeholders. We need to better understand the changing nature of visitor expectations and demands. We also wish to improve our knowledge of how visitors interact with South Georgia’s environment and wildlife. This will enable us to better manage future visits to SGSSI while facilitating the integration of visitor management policy and site-access arrangements with the suite of proposed terrestrial protected areas. Our aim is to provide for the sustainable use of the environment while protecting it for the benefit of all.

We will look to each visitor to care for the environment and take responsibility for their actions. Where impacts are identified we will look to visitor groups to work with GSGSSI to address these and propose a suitable response. GSGSSI will support self-regulation where possible but will need to be satisfied that action is taken where evidence suggests this is necessary, including through appropriate policy and regulatory controls. We must have in place robust plans, agreed with IAATO and other approved visitors, to mitigate and respond to incidents.
For tourist visits we will maintain our management policy to only permit cruise ships operated by members of IAATO to visit approved visitor sites outside of Grytviken. We will continue to monitor passenger numbers on cruise ships and engage with IAATO to review site access arrangements, as appropriate.

We recognise that cruise ships are increasingly offering adventurous activities. Such activities are riskier than those currently undertaken during ordinary visits. GSGSSI will permit adventurous activities, separate from permitted expeditions, only where it is satisfied that a full risk assessment has been conducted and that the activities proposed are safe, environmentally responsible, and conducted in line with IAATO or other widely recognised and published guidelines. We will continue to work with the Expeditions Assessment Panel to ensure that expeditions are planned and executed to the highest possible standards.

We believe that visitors to SGSSI are a powerful tool for education, outreach and communication. We seek to improve the enjoyment of visits through careful environmental management and continued enhancement of the visitor experience at Grytviken. We will collaborate to better promote our key shared messages to visitors to support the sustainable management of the Territory. We will also seek to better understand the views of tourists and field staff.

We will bring forward new legislation to ensure our tourism policy is comprehensively underpinned. In parallel with new legislation a new database system will be developed to facilitate and track the processing of applications, payment of fees, issuing of permits and post-visit reports. This should make the application process more efficient and reduce the level of administrative burden.
5. Heritage

To preserve, where practicable, and bring to a wider international audience the heritage of South Georgia

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) has a unique heritage which includes the remains of the former whaling stations and their historic buildings, wrecks and hulks, sealing artefacts, and early expeditions including the site of the German 1882-1883 International Polar Year base at Moltke Harbour. There are important links to polar exploration and science, including Sir Ernest Shackleton.

The whaling stations represent the most visible heritage of South Georgia. The structures are degrading and many contain asbestos, loose metal and, in some cases, oil. With the exception of the “cleaned” whaling station at Grytviken access to the stations is now prohibited. At Grytviken considerable work has been undertaken in collaboration with the Norwegian Government to manage and maintain much of the original whaling heritage. Artefacts from other whaling stations have been used and displayed here.

The challenge ahead is to list and record SGSSI’s heritage in a more systematic way with a view to developing management plans for the most important sites and structures. This will need to take account of safety and environmental concerns and be underpinned by appropriate heritage legislation.

Husvik whaling station (Credit: Jennifer Lee)
Key objectives

5.1 Develop a system to record SGSSI’s heritage sites, structures and artefacts with a view to developing a prioritised list to guide future management interventions, underpinned by new heritage legislation.

5.2 Develop a long-term management plan for Grytviken promoting management sympathetic to the original design and ethos, while incorporating modern health, safety and environmental requirements.

5.3 Enhance communication and outreach of SGSSI’s heritage to a wider audience including through improved access to information at Grytviken and the use of digital technology, such as laser surveys, to enable online access.

5.4 Encourage the return of historic artefacts to South Georgia and consider the potential to engage a wider audience through the public exhibition of artefacts elsewhere.

5.5 Evaluate the quantities and location of oil remaining in the whaling stations and sunken whale catchers and develop a plan to remove oil that is in line with both heritage and environmental aspirations.

Plans for 2016 – 2020

The Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) will establish a system to list and record SGSSI’s heritage sited and seek to define what, if any, management intervention is required for the site or specific structures or key artefacts within it. We will seek the advice of GSGSSI’s Heritage Advisory Panel (HAP) and other stakeholders with relevant expert knowledge in agreeing a management approach for them.

This process will take a broad view across SGSSI heritage including sealing activity and expeditions. We recognise that, alone, GSGSSI’s resources will not be sufficient to deliver the outcomes on heritage management we might wish to achieve. We are also mindful of the potential for significant legacy costs. We will therefore work with stakeholders to agree a prioritised list of sites and structures on which to focus our collective resources.

We will develop a long-term management plan for Grytviken which is the only former whaling station with significant structures remaining that is accessible to visitors and which is likely to remain the focal point for heritage issues in SGSSI. Here we will continue to manage and maintain our heritage assets and consider the potential to allow greater interpretation of whaling history both on the ground and in the museum, including through the use of electronic media to bring SGSSI’s heritage to a wider audience. This will be a significant endeavour and we will seek the support of stakeholders to deliver this work in partnership. We will ensure that
long-term maintenance work is sympathetic to the original design and ethos of the buildings while providing for the incorporation of modern health, safety and environmental requirements.

The other whaling stations (Husvik, Leith, Stromness and Prince Olav Harbour) are in very poor condition and access into the 200 m exclusion zone will continue to be prohibited due to the unstable structures and asbestos risk. For the most part there appears little realistic prospect of restoration at these sites, and expert advice to Government is that the stations should be left to naturally collapse and decay, retaining the established exclusion zones around each site. However, we recognise their heritage value and will seek to ensure that we record them digitally for the future. Consideration may, in exceptional cases, be given to the management and conservation of certain listed structures or artefacts if, in the view of the HAP, there is a strong justification for doing so. We will also look to recover artefacts from these whaling stations for use or display at Grytviken.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of Norway and the United Kingdom has provided for significant collaboration in the management of shared heritage in SGSSI. We look forward to that collaboration continuing over the next three years, and to working with all interested stakeholders to take forward our heritage objectives.

The Grytviken museum has an important role in showcasing and communicating South Georgia’s heritage and in enhancing the visitor experience. We will encourage the return of artefacts previously removed from South Georgia to the museum or GSGSSI. In line with our wish to make SGSSI’s heritage accessible to people who can’t visit we will look at the potential for the public exhibition of certain artefacts outside of SGSSI. We will also seek to capture and make available information about SGSSI’s heritage online. We will consider how we can enable access to the cemeteries of whaling stations for the relatives of those buried there.

There are safety and environmental concerns associated with all the whaling stations. Heavy fuel oil remains in the main tanks, day tanks and pipework of the old whaling stations and in sunken whale-catchers. We will commission work to assess the quantities of oil, evaluate the potential environmental risk and consider options for remediation.

We recognise that modern structures, materials and field huts may become the heritage of the future and will consider how best to take this into account in their construction and maintenance.