

SOUTH GEORGIA & THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS TERRESTRIAL PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

Executive summary

- The Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) is committed to a system of terrestrial protected areas and has chosen to adopt a phased approach to deliver this.
- As part of the initial phase of this work, two Specially Protected Areas have been designated; the South Georgia Terrestrial Protected Area (SG TPA) and the South Sandwich Islands Terrestrial Protected Area (SSI TPA). Together they cover the whole landmass of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, including all offshore islands up to the mean high-water mark.
- The overarching conservation objectives for both the Protected Areas are (a) the conservation, protection and preservation of the ecosystem and restoration of biodiversity; and (b) ensuring that any activity in the specially protected areas is managed sustainably, with minimal impact on the ecosystem.
- Recognising the different characters, ecological pressures and restrictions on access of Protected Areas, these overarching conservation objectives are further refined within this Management Plan
- Activities which are consistent with the conservation objectives defined for the Protected Area are encouraged, but to ensure the environment is protected, certain activities have been Regulated. Details of activities which are prohibited without a permit are provided, along with details of under what circumstances a permit can be granted.
- Access to the SSI TPA is prohibited without a permit. Access will only be granted under Special circumstances. Guidance is provided as to circumstances where access may be permitted. These include a range of scientific activities and work that improves public knowledge and perception of the SSI.
- Details of activities which will contribute to the Protected Areas conservation objectives are found across a range of GSGSSI policy, strategy and operational documents. A summary of activities which will support the delivery of the management of the Protected Area, and associated time frame, are mapped against conservation objectives
- Accompanying this management plan, a separate document has been produced that gives a detailed overview of the terrestrial environment as a whole.

1. Global context and principals of protection

The application of the UK's ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity was extended to SGSSI in 2015. Accordingly, the Government of SGSSI is committed to delivering its contribution to the implementation of the UK's CBD obligations with respect to SGSSI, as emphasised in its National Biodiversity Action Plan. A key part of implementation is the delivery of protected areas. Protected areas are also key components in delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 14 and 15.

The Government of SGSSI fully supports the aim of the UK Government to press for a new target to be agreed at the CBD for at least 30% of land and 30% of the ocean to be within protected areas to replace the previous commitments to ensure 17% of the world's terrestrial and freshwater habitats and 10% of the ocean is protected by 2020. SGSSI has already made a significant contribution, through its marine protected areas, to delivering on the proposed 30% ocean target. [Protect Sustain Inspire](#) sets out the desire to 'design and roll out island-wide terrestrial protection' so that we can make a similar contribution to that future target for land.

A protected area is defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as "*a geographically defined area, which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives.*" Under South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands legislation, a protected area is designated under Part III of the Wildlife and Protected Areas Ordinance (2011) which makes provision for the Commissioner to designate "*any area of land [that] is in need of a high level of protection to preserve its special values*".

In 2018, the Government of SGSSI commissioned an [extensive review](#) from the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre to determine options for strengthening terrestrial protection. The final range of options were drawn together following a long consultative process and highlighted the global significance of the Territory in terms of wildlife and wilderness and the robust mechanisms already in place to manage many potential threats. In 2021 the Government of SGSSI committed to being stewards for this ecosystem in recovery setting a clear vision for the future underpinned by four guiding values; environmental protection, evidence-based decision making, sustainability and openness.

2. Phased approach

In order to deliver a system of terrestrial protection which meets our values-based management, in its [Pathway to Protection](#), the Government of SGSSI chose to adopt phased approach. As a part of Phase I, a Specially Protected Area which covers the whole of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands have been designated with the conservation objectives of:

(a) the conservation, protection and preservation of the ecosystem and restoration of biodiversity; and

(b) ensuring that any activity in the specially protected areas is managed sustainably, with minimal impact on the ecosystem.

For the purposes of this Management Plan, the Specially Protected Area is divided into two Terrestrial Protected Areas (TPA) covering South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands respectively.

Phase I was completed by the issue of this management plan and associated regulations. Phase II will use a range of methods to identify assess, focus, manage and monitor the TPAs in order to refine regulation and management in to the future.

To aid in delivery of the TPA programme, GSGSSI has established an advisory group (TPA AG) of invited representatives covering a range of interests including; the tourism industry, scientific community, government administration and relevant conservation groups. The TPA AG provides specialist advice to government on matters relating to the development and ongoing monitoring of TPA on SGSSI. Final decisions on how to implement and manage TPAs rest with the Government and to ensure they are consistent with the values outlined in PSI.

3. Legal context

Under section 16 of the Wildlife and Protected Areas (WPA) Ordinance 2011, the Commissioner may designate any area of land in need of a high level of protection to preserve its special values as a Specially Protected Area by Order. The Wildlife and Protected Areas (Specially Protected Areas) Order 2022 specifies the boundary of the area to be protected, the features which are to be protected and conservation objectives for the area. It also prohibits entry to the South Sandwich Islands without a permit.

Section 17 Of the WPA Ordinance 2011 makes provision for the implementation of management plans and regulations in relation to Specially Protected Areas designated under the Order. This is detailed in the Wildlife and Protected Areas (Specially Protected Areas) (Management Plan and Prohibited Activities) Regulations 2022.

This management plan provides details of protection of the entire landmass of the territory, and therefore the term Terrestrial Protected Area will be used in the management plan in place of Specially Protected Area.

The management plan provides details of phase I of the TPA programme. The plan is in two parts. Part 1 includes spatial extent and protected features of the South Georgia TPA, spatial extent and protected features of the South Sandwich Islands TPA, conservation objectives, implementation and details of restricted activities, and details of procedures for permit applications.

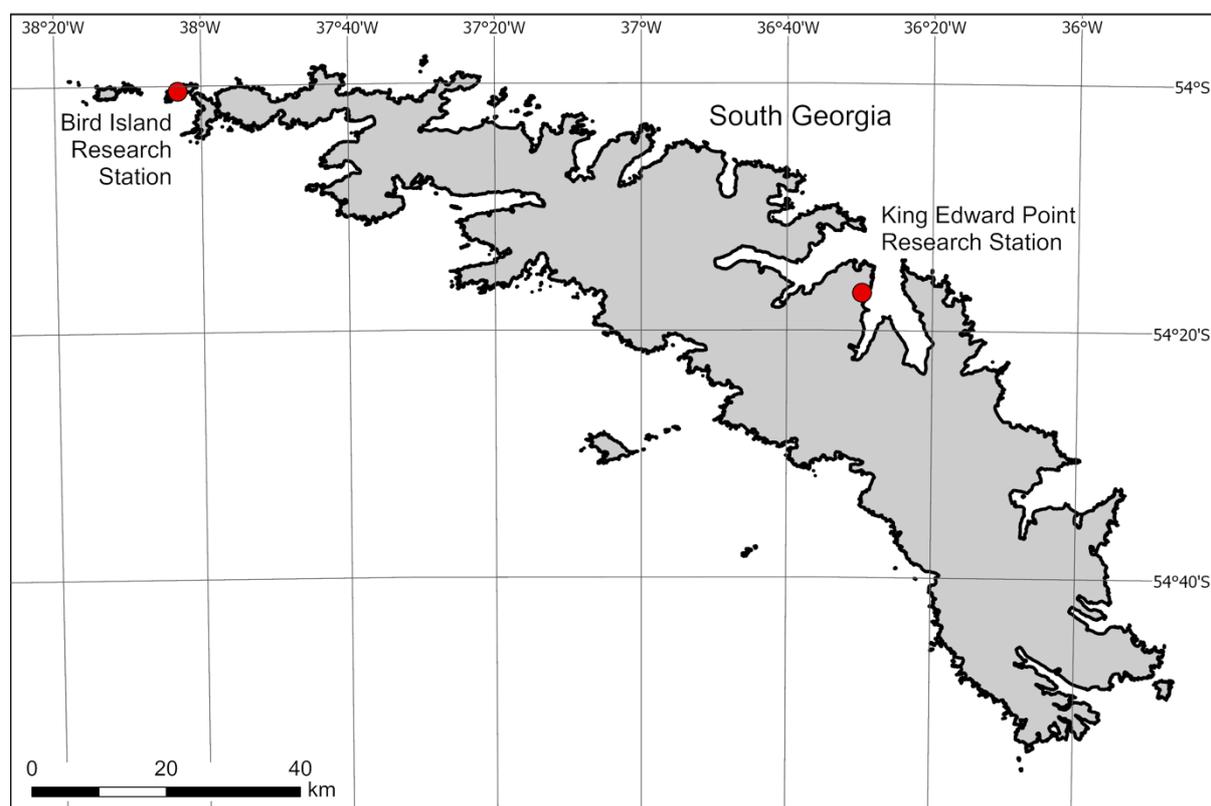
Accompanying this management plan, a separate document has been produced that gives an overview of the terrestrial environment as a whole. This includes a description of physical environment, historical context and flora and fauna which together contribute to making the protected features of the Terrestrial Protected areas of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

4. South Georgia Terrestrial Protected Area

4.1. SGTPA - Spatial Extent

The South Georgia Terrestrial Protected Area (SGTPA) will cover the island of South Georgia and all of its offshore islands to the mean high-water mark including Shag Rocks, Clarke Rocks. The area below the mean high-water mark is protected under a Marine Protected Area designated under Section 18 of the WPA Ordinance 2011.

The focus of the SGTPA is to deliver the **holistic protection of the terrestrial environment and conservation and restoration of biodiversity** within which **globally significant science and sustainable tourism**, may occur



4.2. SG TPA - Protected Features

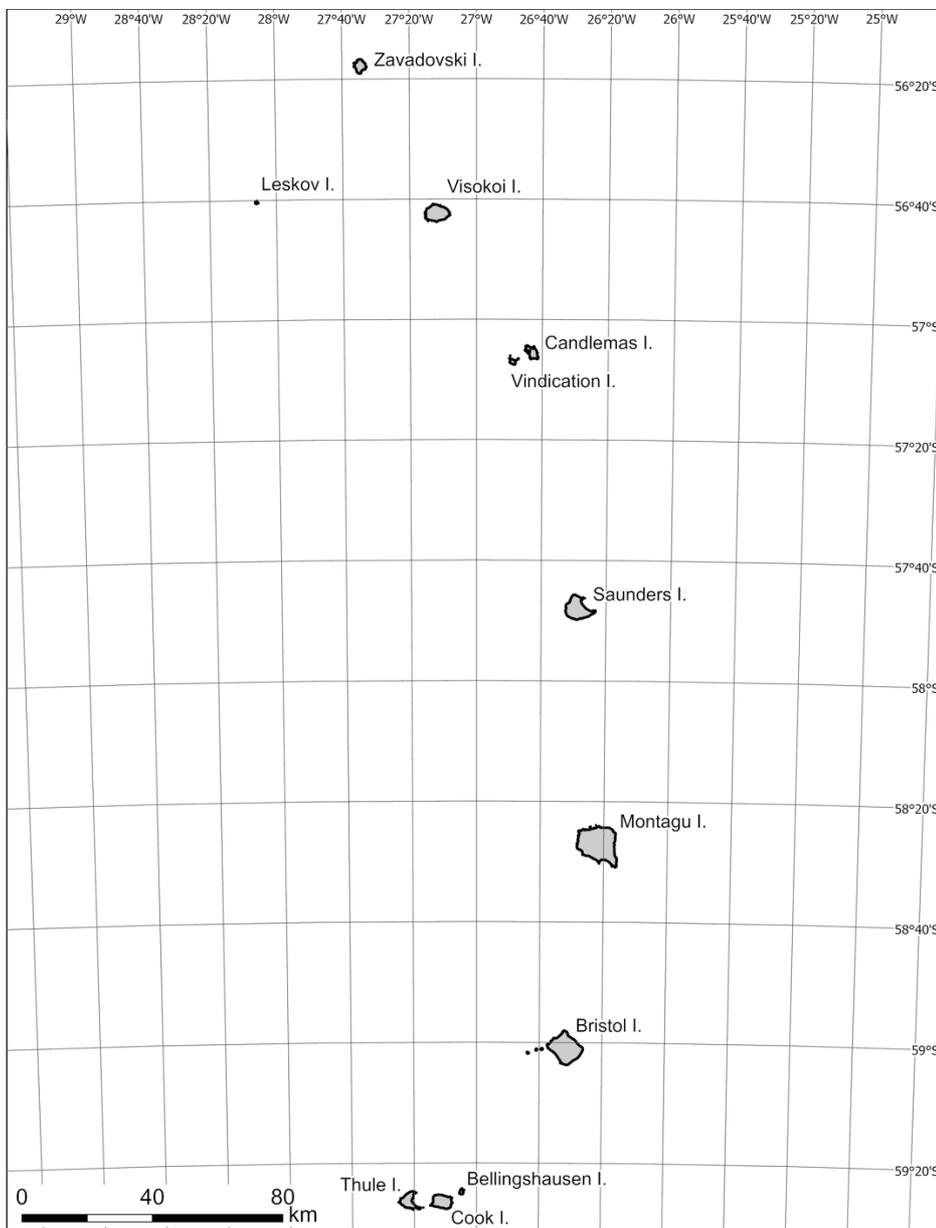
The South Georgia TPA will give protection to all elements of the South Georgia terrestrial ecosystem including native flora, native fauna, habitats, geological and landscape features.

5. South Sandwich Islands Terrestrial Protected Area

5.1. SSI TPA - Spatial Extent

The South Sandwich Islands Protected Area (SSI TPA) will cover the islands of Zavodovski, Leskov, Visokoi, Candlemas, Vindication, Saunders, Montagu, Bristol, Bellingshausen, Cook and Thule including all offshore stacks and islets to the level of the mean high-water mark. Areas below the mean high-water mark is protected under a Marine Protected Area designated under Section 18 of the WPA Ordinance 2011.

The focus of the SSI TPA will be to protect the islands pristine nature, assumed absence of introduced species and strengthen the inherent protection that arises from their remote location and difficulty to access.



5.2. SSI TPA - Protected Features

The South Sandwich Islands TPA will give protection to all elements of the South Sandwich Islands terrestrial ecosystem including native flora, native fauna, habitats, geological and landscape features

6. Conservation objectives of the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands TPAs

Overarching conservation objectives detailed in The Wildlife and Protected Areas (Specially Protected Areas) Order 2022 are common to both the SG and SSI TPA. Recognising the different characters, ecological pressures and restrictions on access of each TPA, these overarching conservation objectives have been further expanded below.

Overarching objective	Detailed conservation objective	SG	SSI
Conservation, protection and preservation of the ecosystem and restoration of biodiversity	Conservation, protection and preservation of biodiversity		
	Management, monitoring and control of invasive species*		
Activities are carried out are managed sustainably with minimal impact on the ecosystem	Environmentally responsible research		
	Promoting wilderness and wildlife		
	Facilitating sustainable visits		

* In the absence of established invasive species, for the SSI TPA this objective is restricted to pre-boarder management of risk

7. Implementation

Successful implementation of the management aims of the SG and SSI TPAs requires a number of elements:

Regulation of Activities – in order to ensure conservation objectives are met, and monitored, it is necessary to regulate certain activities. Section 7.1 and 7.2 provides details of what activities will be regulated. Section 7.3 and 7.4 provides details of procedures to undertake activities which are regulated.

Sustainable Management – as sustainable management is a core aim of GSGSSI activities, details of activities which will contribute to these conservation objectives are found across a range of policy, strategy and operational documents, including [Delivering Protect, Sustain, Inspire – The Governments delivery agenda](#). Section 7.5 details the management aims for each conservation objective and maps this against the planned activities required to achieve success

Research and Monitoring - A research and monitoring plan will be developed within 18 months that review existing monitoring and data gathering activities within the Territory and map these against TPA management aims. This will allow evaluation of to what extent management aims are being met. Based on assessment of existing monitoring, potential gaps which should be the target of future research will be listed and management actions, or further monitoring will be initiated.

7.1. Regulated Activities under the Wildlife and Protected Areas (SPA Management Plan and Prohibited Activities) Regulations 2022

The Government recognises and encourages a range of activities on South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands where these are consistent with the aims and objectives of TPA and related Government policies. The legislation brings in a range of prohibitions and where these activities are likely to involve prohibited activities a Regulated Activity Permit (RAP) from GSGSSI will be required before they can commence following an assessment of their impacts. These are activities that require or can cause:

- a) the collection, sampling or possession of any material, whether biotic or abiotic;
- (b) deliberate or reckless disturbance of, or interference of any kind with, any native or wild bird or marine mammal;
- (c) the erection of any structure or installation, whether temporary or permanent, including affixing any such structure or installation to any protected feature or any building;
- (d) the use of any mechanically-propelled vehicle that is not a wheelchair designed for, and used by, a person whose physical mobility is restricted;
- (e) the use of any aircraft, whether manned or unmanned, at 200 metres or less above ground level;
- (f) the removal of any peat, topsoil or subsoil;
- (g) the removal, quarrying or extraction of any minerals (including stone, shingle, sand or gravel);
- (h) disposal of waste by burial, landfill or incineration; and
- (i) any development, whether temporary or permanent, including the carrying out of building, engineering, demolition or other operations in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land.

Guidance on when and what activities would typically require a permit in the SG and SSI TPA is provided in **Annex 1**

7.2. Exemptions

Nothing prohibited in the lists above apply to:

- Activities undertaken by, or under the control of the GSGSSI, where such activities are carried out in manner that makes best endeavours to be consistent with the management plan
- Activities undertaken by any person who is a member of the naval, military or air forces of the Crown, acting in the course of their duties.

7.3. Procedures to undertake Regulated Activities within a TPA - General procedures

Persons wishing to undertake activities which are identified in Section 7 of the Wildlife and Protected Areas (Specially Protected Areas) (Management Plan and Prohibited Activities) Regulations 2022, as requiring a valid permit, must apply to the Office of the Commissioner. Such permits will be issued in accordance of section 21(3) of the WPA Ordinance 2011.

Permits can only be granted for the purposes of:-

- (a) scientific, research and educational purposes;
- (b) conserving wild birds, marine mammals, native invertebrates or native plants or for re- introducing them to the Territory or re-establishing them in particular areas within the Territory;
- (c) conserving or restoring, habitats;
- (d) preserving public health or public safety;
- (e) preventing the spread of disease; and
- (f) any other purpose for which the Commissioner believes that a permit may properly, in all the circumstances, be granted.

In the case of (f) this may include any activity with the Commissioner believes is in support of the conservation objectives of the TPA

Procedures for applications for 'Regulated Activity Permits' will be published on the GSGSSI on an annual basis.

Applications will be assessed on the feasibility of proposed activities their compatibility with the conservation objectives and management aims of the TPA and any future site-specific management plans. and the likelihood of risk of harm to the environment. The level of assessment will be commensurate with risk.

Permits will specify:

- Locations where activities may take place within the TPA

- Dates / duration when permitted activities may take place
- Conditions which must be followed to ensure that activities are consistent with the conservation objectives and management aims of the TPA
- The name of the individuals, or groups of individuals permitted to undertake the activity.

Some activities may require permission under other legislation e.g. Air Navigation (Overseas Territories) Order, Prohibited Areas Order, Entry Control Order, Immigration Ordinance. Permission granted under the WPA does not predicate permission under any other legislation

7.4. Special procedures for entry to the South Sandwich Islands

Entry to the South Sandwich Islands will only be granted under Special circumstances. This includes:

- a) Activities we can be shown as necessary to meet the conservation objectives for the SSI, including an assessment of:-
 - The population of species, including information on location, distribution and population trends
 - Factors affecting the populations, including breeding success, disease, predation and diet
 - Where entry is required to SSI to assess such information in relation to species occurring in the Marine Protected Area surrounding SSI
- b) Work related to the assessment of seismic and volcanic activity on SSI, including its effects of biodiversity
- c) Other scientific work to which information from SSI is likely to provide significant new knowledge in the areas of ecology, geology, glaciation and the effects of climate change
- d) Work that will significantly improve the wider public knowledge and perception of SSI.
- e) Any other matters that the Commissioner feels is significant enough to warrant a permit to be granted

Applications to undertake activities on the South Sandwich Islands will follow the same procedures as RAP applications on South Georgia, in particular, applications will be assessed on the feasibility of proposed activities their compatibility with the conservation objectives and management aims of the TPA and any future site-specific management plans. When making a decision on whether to grant a permit to enter SSI, the Government will consider how closely the planned activities align with the special circumstances outlined in section 1 and to what extent environmental risk has been mitigated. Only projects where it can be demonstrated that the environmental risk, including the risk of introduction of non-native species, has been reduced as far as possible towards near zero will be granted permission to access SSI. In addition, applicants will need to demonstrate how they will ensure, preferably through a health and safety plan, how they will minimise risk to any personnel.

7.5. Management aims and supporting activities

Conservation objectives and management aims for the SG and SSI TPAs have been drawn from existing GSGSSI policies and are based on advice from the TPA AG. Supporting activities which will be undertaken by GSGSSI to achieve these management aims are identified below

7.5.1 Conservation Objective: Conservation, protection and preservation of biodiversity

Management aim	Supporting activities	Time frame
Ecosystems are protected from present-day and future pressures and recovering from historic human-exploitation	A new National Biodiversity Action Plan will be developed clearly outlining how SGSSI will take forward aspects of the new Global Biodiversity framework, agreed under the CBD	2023
	Activities that are prohibited under the SPA Regulations are will granted a permit following assessment to ensure appropriate mitigation measures are in place to ensure the biodiversity is appropriately protected	As required
	Long-term monitoring projects that document baseline of biodiversity levels (species, population numbers) will be maintained, and developed as required, to be used as an indicator against which to measure change	Ongoing
	Surveys of terrestrial communities in less frequently visited areas, including the south coast of South Georgia, will be undertaken to inform future management	2024
	The TPA AG will undertake an iterative review of existing and new data will be undertaken to assess if specific areas on SG or SSI, or populations of particular species, are at environmental risk and advise Government of any actions that should be considered to mitigate this	2024 - Ongoing
Acknowledging the profound impacts on biodiversity, measures are in place to contribute to global efforts to halt climate change	A report on the effects of climate change in terms of the ecosystems in SGSSI will be completed, including an assessment of potential future changes and approaches	2023
	A micro-hydro plant will be installed at King Edward Point to supplement existing hydroelectric power generation	2024
	100% of power on South Georgia will be from renewable sources	2025

Increased awareness of conservation success stories and promotion of SG and SSIs unique biological assemblages	The GSGSSI website will be updated	Annual
	High quality media projects with global reach will be encouraged	As required
	Contribution to international forums including CBP, IUCN etc	As required

7.5.2 Conservation Objective: Management, monitoring and control of invasive species

Management aim	Supporting activities	Time frame
Measures are in place to manage and if practicable, prevent, the establishment of new non-native species and to reduce the number of non-native species already established	Measures to enhance infrastructure for pre-boarder biosecurity will be developed in the Falkland Islands	2025
	An updated rodent Incursion response plan and risk assessment will be developed and implemented	2023
	Regular reviews of biosecurity efficacy will take place with input from relevant experts as needed	Annual
	Non-native plant management will be undertaken in accordance with the non-native plant management strategy	Annual
An awareness of the risks of invasive species is at the forefront of all activities	All activities which have the potential for introducing non-native species will be preceded by an Environmental Impact Assessment which will include consideration of Biosecurity	As required
	A new legislative framework for biosecurity, including measures for compliance and enforcement will be developed	2024
	Review and update where necessary the legislative and policy framework for activities on SGSSI in view of the latest international legislation, guidance and standards, including the delivery of an EIA regime that is proportionate and effective in maintaining biodiversity conservation and sustainable activities	2024

7.5.3 Conservation Objective: Environmentally responsible science

Management aim	Supporting activities	Time frame
Research activities and methods have minimal impact on the environment	Research involving activities that are prohibited under the SPA Regulations will only be granted a permit following assessment to ensure appropriate mitigation measures are in place to ensure wildlife and the environment are protected	As required
	Any activity involving handling of wildlife will only be granted permission if it has been subject to appropriate ethical review processes	As required
Research which contributes to conservation, protection, preservation and restoration of biodiversity on SG and SSI is supported and encouraged	A science strategy will be developed that identifies the science required to deliver the PSI framework and the wider management of the Territory and promotes scientific research of regional and global importance	2024
	Projects which can demonstrate their objectives are consistent with those identified in this Management Plan and the science strategy, will be offered priority for support in funding bids	As required
	A research and monitoring plan will be developed that will map existing monitoring against management aims and identify knowledge gaps which should be subject to further research	2024
	Research projects wishing to access the most sensitive sites, including the SSI, will be expected to demonstrate the novelty and scientific value of their work and the threshold for environmental risk will be lower	As required
Encourage collaboration between researchers and the sharing of data and logistic support, including free access to the public	A policy of open access will be the default position for all data arising from research and monitoring funded by the Government, collected by the Government or carried out under permit or licence from the Government, except in specific circumstance	2026
	Data portal for upload of georeferenced drone imagery, facilitating collaboration and the development of AI monitoring tools	???

7.5.4. Conservation Objective: Promoting wilderness and wildlife

Management aim	Supporting activities	Time frame
SG and SSI are internationally revered as a wild spaces where natural forces dominate	Recognising its varied meaning, impressions of SGSSI wilderness are captured and quantified	2024
	A communications plan will be developed to promote wilderness values and coordinated protection is shared and in use by multiple stakeholders	2025
High quality, media outreach projects which promote SGSSI wildlife and its conservation are encouraged	Commercial media projects will be required to provide information about the reach and target audience of their productions and demonstrate how the production promote SG and SSI conservation values.	As required
	Media projects wishing to access the most sensitive sites, including the SSI, will be expected to demonstrate a greater outreach potential and the threshold for environmental risk will be lower	As required
Human activities are undertaken sympathetically and strive to leave no permanent mark on the landscape	Activities that are prohibited under the SPA Regulations are will granted a permit following assessment to ensure appropriate mitigation measures are in place to ensure wilderness values are not degraded	As required

7.5.6 Conservation Objective: Conservation Objective: Facilitating sustainable visits

Management aim	Supporting activities	Time frame
South Georgia is a global role model for responsible tourism where stakeholders and Government work in partnership	Clear, evidence based, guidelines for visits to South Georgia available and are reviewed regularly	Ongoing / annual
	New guidelines and management plans for visitor sites are developed as required and in collaboration with IAATO	As required
Visitors are actively engaged in the conservation of the island	A South Georgia Ambassador programme will be developed to engage visitors in promoting science and environmental management	????

Systems are in place to recognise and mitigate possible problems related to visits before the environment is harmed	All visits are followed by a post-visit report which details locations and activities undertaken and notes any impacts	Annual
	A series of Visitor Site Inventories will be developed to document the physical and biological characteristics of visitor sites and will act as a base line against which to recognize and monitor change	2026

ANNEX 1 – GUIDANCE ON WHEN TO APPLY FOR A REGULATED ACTIVITY PERMIT (RAP)

Sustainable visits are an important element of the South Georgia TPA. If carried out in line with agreed wildlife interaction guidelines and in accordance with visitor site management plans, ordinary touristic activities are unlikely to require a Regulated Activity Permit (RAP).

We recommend that as activities including: **research, monitoring, environmental management, certain types of media, expeditions involving oversight stays in tents, construction and maintenance** and **expeditions** are likely to require a RAP before commencing, such an RAP is applied for, or the advice of the Government is sought.

Disturbance of wildlife

Wild birds and mammals may be disturbed if approached too closely. Animals may display behavioural cues that they are being disturbed, or may have a physiological response which is not apparent at the time, but which may have long term cumulative impacts. As disturbance can be difficult to assess and varies from species to species and is dependent on life stage, GSGSSI has produced a guide of maximum suggested approach distances (Table A1). If adhering to these maximum approach distances, it is unlikely an individual will cause disturbance.

Table A1 – maximum suggested approach distances

Taxa	Life stage	Maximum suggested approach distance
Fur seals	Non-breeding adult/juvenile	5m
	Breeding adult	15m
Elephant seal	Non-breeding adult/juvenile	5m
	Breeding adult	15m
	Moulting	10m
Albatross (all species)	Non-breeding adult	5m
	Nesting	10m
	Displaying	25m
Giant Petrels	All life stages	25m
Penguins	Non-breeding adult	5m
	Breeding adult	10m
	Moulting	10m
Other seabirds	All life stages	5m

NOTE: these distances refer to an individual actively approaching wildlife. If a wild bird or mammal initiates an approach to a distance of less than this, it is unlikely to be considered disturbance.

If when planning of an activity with in SG or SSI TPA, if it is intended to approach wild birds or mammals closer than the following recommended maximum approach in Table A1 a RAP should be sought prior to the activity commencing. This may include **media**, or other activities which have a focus on wildlife including some types of **research** and **monitoring**.

Visitor landings and day-to-day activities where individuals follow the Wildlife Code of Conduct and therefore do not intend to cause disturbance by breaching approach distances do not require a RAP. The onus is on each individual to ensure their action does not intentionally or recklessly cause disturbance.

Erection of structures or installations

Structures and installations have the potential to cause damage to habitats, wildlife entanglement, block transit routes or be a hazard for bird strike.

Activities that involve erection of a structure or installation that is affixed to the ground, via pegs, bolts or other fastenings require a permit. This includes erecting of tents or installation of scientific equipment such as antenna or monitoring devices. It does not include use of tripods or other equipment which is not affixed to the ground.

A permit is not required for the erecting of structures for the purpose of emergency shelter in the event of a *force majeure*