

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

CONFIDENTIAL

Title of Report: Request to visit Beauchene Island for Falklands Conservation five-year census.

Paper No: 139/10

Date: 24 June 2010

Report of: Environmental Planning Officer/ Head of Policy

1.0 Purpose

To advise Honourable Members of an application to visit Beauchene Island from Falklands Conservation to conduct a five year seabird census and conduct research on rockhopper penguins and black browed albatross.

2.0 Recommendation

That Honourable Members agree to the proposed research visits to Beauchene Island in October 2010, January 2011 and March 2011.

3.0 Summary of Financial Implications - None

4.0 Background

4.1 Beauchene Island is a FIG-owned National Nature Reserve and is the most southerly and remote island in the Falklands archipelago. Lying thirty miles to the south of Sea Lion Island, the island is a pristine environment hosting a wealth of seabird biodiversity. This biodiversity includes the largest population of rockhopper penguins in the Falkland Islands, the second largest population of black browed albatrosses, and the only breeding site for fairy prions in the Falkland Islands.

4.2 Historically Beauchene Island has been visited infrequently due to its remoteness and difficult landing aspect. In more recent years access to Beauchene Island has been strictly controlled by FIG in an attempt to prevent any degradation to the wildlife on the Island. Applications to visit the island must be approved by ExCo.

4.3 The last visit to Beauchene Island was made by the Shallow Marine Survey Group (SMSG) in December 2009 as part of a diving survey of the shallow marine environment. They also conducted onshore bird surveys as part of the expedition.

4.3 Falklands Conservation last landed on Beauchene Island in 2005 as part of their last Island-wide five year seabird census undertaken. It now wishes to visit in October 2010, January 2011 and March 2011.

5.0 Research procedure

5.1 Falklands Conservation wishes to undertake three specific pieces of research during its visits to Beauchene Island. The main effort of the visits is to undertake a census of the Island's seabird populations as part of the Island-wide five year census of penguin and albatross species. To maximise the benefit of the visits, FC also wish to undertake research on rockhopper penguins and black browed albatrosses. It is envisaged that there will not be another visit by FC for at least five years.

5.2 Counts of black-browed albatross and rockhopper penguin breeding pairs will be conducted using the area-density method described in Huin and Reid (2007). A count of the resident Gentoo penguin colony will also be made.

5.3 Rockhopper penguin diet sampling, blood sampling for stable isotope analysis and satellite tagging is the focus of the rockhopper study. This is part of a larger FC Overseas Territory Environmental Programme (OTEP) project funded for the next two years.

5.4 A study on black browed albatrosses is proposed which will involve diet sampling albatross on Beauchene for a comparison of diet with birds which breed on Steeple Jason Island. This is a one off study and will be very interesting in terms of comparing dietary make-up of the two largest black browed albatross colonies in the Falkland Islands.

5.5 These three research projects were approved by the Environment Committee at the last meeting of the Committee held on 5 April 2010. Additional details are available from the Environmental Planning Department on request.

6.0 Transport

6.1 Transport to Beauchene Island will be provided by Mike Clarke by the MV Condor. It is hoped the census work will be conducted concomitantly with rockhopper penguin research and albatross research. This research will require extended stays on Beauchene Island and FC will need to camp for periods of up to 3 weeks. Falklands Conservation has both the expertise in remote area camping, and the necessary equipment.

7.0 Biosecurity and fire risk

7.1 Falklands Conservation abide by a strict operating procedure when operating on remote islands such as Beauchene and this will be enforced for the three proposed visits to Beauchene Island.

7.2 Biosecurity:

- The operator of any vessels being used should be asked prior to departure about recent hull scrubbing and an assessment of marine invasive risk from the vessel should be made. (MV Condor's hull is being cleaned this winter so should be free of marine invasives).
- Before arriving at Beauchene all luggage and equipment to be brought ashore will be inspected and brushed down.
- Bags and equipment will be thoroughly checked for rodents before arrival on the Island
- Rodent traps will be placed on-board the vessel.
- Stores should be kept pest-free, and records should be kept of the actions taken for pest control.
- All foodstuffs should be stored in see-through sealed plastic boxes to minimise the chance of rodents hitchhiking to islands.
- If boxes are used, they should be well taped up (ie all holes >5mm and openings sealed).
- Boots will be washed prior to going shore in a biocide; in this case it will be *Virkon*.
- All clothing will be inspected prior to shore paying particular attention to Velcro, footwear, gaiters, trouser turn-ups and jacket hoods.
- No fresh meat, vegetables, fruit or dairy products, especially poultry products and eggs, will be brought ashore.
- The zodiac will be thoroughly inspected for pests and organic material before each shore deployment.
- If any invasive species, especially rodents, are accidentally introduced to the island, every effort should be made to capture or kill it. If this is not possible the incident will be reported to FC/EPD in Stanley for response.

7.3 Rubbish and waste:

- All rubbish will be taken off the island at the end of the trip.
- All rubbish will be stored in sealed containers.
- No materials, (with the exception of biodegradable toilet paper) will be deposited at the site.
- A full risk assessment will be conducted shortly after arriving to identify the most suitable camp site / cooking site and toilet site taking into account the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the island and associated fire risks. The hut on Beauchene is seen as the likely best cooking site but will be checked on arrival.
- It is preferable that a toilet be designated where there is suitable access to the sea. When this is not possible, a toilet will be earmarked at a suitable location (away from all water sources and wildlife). A latrine will be dug, and filled in at the end of the trip.

7.4 Fire risk:

- No open fires, no smoking

- All fuel stoves and generators must be in good operational order and meet international safety standards.
- When in operation, fuel stoves and generators must not be left unattended.
- Power leads must be inspected for physical damage before use and must be tagged.
- When not in use, fuel and fuel stoves must be stored appropriately.
- After an initial check, cooking will be conducted in the hut. Cooking will be kept to a minimum (i.e. using package food that only requires heating and not cooking). FC have extensive experience of cooking and operating field stoves in remote conditions.
- Fuel must be stored in containers that meet international safety standards.
- Relevant documentation is to accompany all hazardous chemicals and should be stored and transported appropriately.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 This is a very worthwhile research proposal which was been approved by the Environmental Committee. The Committee supports the maximisation of scientific benefit by conducting three pieces of research on the back of the main effort of the census of Beauchene Island's seabird populations.

8.2 The Environmental Planning Department additionally support this visit as it hopes to get sufficient information from the visit to complete the draft Beauchene Island Management Plan which should be completed once the census figures have been produced by Falklands Conservation.

9.0 Financial Implications - None

10.0 Legal Implications - None

11.0 Human Resources Implications - None