



## **Full Business Case Change Control Note**

**Version May 2025**

### **Detail of Template**

#### **1. KEY INFORMATION**

<b>Project Name</b>	Darwin Plus
<b>Original Project Objectives</b>	<p><b>The Darwin Plus programme aims to slow, halt and reverse rates of biodiversity loss in the UK Overseas Territories (OTs).</b></p> <p>The UK holds a deep, historic, and enduring partnership with its sovereign OTs and has a <b>legal obligation</b> to promote their wellbeing under <a href="#">Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations</a>. Each department is responsible for supporting the OTs in all policy areas for which they have responsibility for in England, hence why support for the OTs' biodiversity is an obligation on Defra.</p> <p>Collectively, the OTs host over <a href="#">90% of all species unique to the UK</a>, of which approximately <a href="#">45.5% are threatened with extinction</a>. As mostly remote, low-lying islands, the OTs are extremely vulnerable to the arrival of invasive non-native species and to the impacts of climate change. OT inhabitants are heavily dependent on their unique species, habitats and ecosystems for both their economies (e.g. supporting tourism and fisheries) and livelihoods (e.g. providing resilience to extreme events): therefore, to protect one is to safeguard the other.</p> <p>Darwin Plus is Defra's primary offer of support for the OTs and is recognised by the OTs as an essential source of environment funding, both for their marine and terrestrial environments<sup>1</sup>. Without sovereignty, the OTs are ineligible from accessing most international funding streams (e.g. UNFCCC<sup>2</sup>, Global Environment Facility) and EU funding streams (e.g. EU BEST Initiative<sup>3</sup>).</p> <p>Darwin Plus now strongly supports the:</p>

<sup>1</sup> [UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council 2024: communiqué.](#)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

<sup>3</sup> The BEST initiative (Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European overseas) is a series of actions carried out by the European Commission to prioritise the protection and conservation of these areas.

1. Prime Minister's [commitment to reset Britain's approach to climate and nature](#).
2. Foreign Secretary's [pledge to unlock "much more climate and nature finance"](#), noting the importance of doing so in the OTs.
3. Defra Secretary of State's priority for ensuring nature's recovery, supporting the OTs in meeting the global target for protection of 30% land and water by 2030.

<b>Reasons for change</b>	<b>An increase in the budget from £30m to £41.436 and extension of the end date from March 2025 to March 2026</b> , to allow for Darwin Plus to continue in the current Spending Review (SR) period. A new Full Business Case (FBC) will be developed thereafter, subject to funding being secured at the multi-year SR (MYSR) and confirmation of Defra's future delivery approach for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs).		
<b>Whole Life Cost</b>	Original Amount £30m	Revised Amount £41.436m	Change Amount £11.436m
<b>Budget</b>	Original Amount £30m	Revised Amount £41.436m	Change Amount £11.436m
<b>Project Start &amp; End Date</b>	April 2022 – March 2025	April 2022 – March 2026	Change Amount 1 year
<b>Other projects/ Programmes impacted by change</b>	N/A		
<b>Is the change Novel or Contentious</b>	No		
<b>DevTracker link to original business case</b>	<a href="#">Darwin Plus 2022-25 Business Case</a>		

## 2. KEY DIFFERENCES (CHANGES TO ORIGINAL FULL BUSINESS CASE)

<b>Strategic Case</b>
Continues to fully align with FBC. Theory of Change and Logframe have since been revised.
<b>Economic Case</b>
Continues to fully align with FBC; restructured programme is now established and additional measures have been implemented to improve Value for Money.
<b>Commercial Case</b>

Continues to align with FBC; but now including details of long-term work commissioned through the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera), Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).

#### **Financial Case**

Permission to spend full funding allocation of £11.436m between April 2025 and March 2026, detailed in budget profile.

#### **Management Case**

Team expanded to reflect renewed focus on OTs policy cross-Whitehall; new measures have been implemented to improve practice in compliance and safeguarding.

### **3. INFORMATION**

#### **3.1 What is the projects background and Strategic Objectives? (1-2 paragraphs)**

**The aim of Darwin Plus remains to slow, halt and reverse rates of OT<sup>4</sup> biodiversity loss.** As global biodiversity hotspots, the OTs are each home to diverse and unique species, habitats and ecosystems. For different reasons (e.g. tourism, overfishing, glacier melt, tropical storms), their biodiversity is increasingly vulnerable to habitat loss and change, resource exploitation, invasive non-native species, pollution events and climate change.

Darwin Plus is intended to build local capacity in the OTs to support delivery of their devolved responsibilities for nature. Having separated out from the Darwin Initiative in 2012, Darwin Plus is one of Defra's three Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs)<sup>5</sup>, targeted specifically at OT geographies. Designed to service the needs of the OTs, **Darwin Plus only funds applications for projects that can demonstrate substantial measurable outcomes for biodiversity, climate change, environmental quality, and capability and capacity building.**

**Darwin Plus funding supports the delivery of commitments under UK and OT policies, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and Sustainable Development Goals, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework.** This is important because **the UK is responsible for the OTs' adherence to international environmental treaties and conventions extended to them** and would be challenged in international courts or by other states if an OT was not observing its duties under a treaty.

Successful applicants to Darwin Plus must also articulate how their projects will align with national policy including, but not limited to, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).

<sup>4</sup> The OTs are: Anguilla; Bermuda; British Antarctic Territory (BAT); British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT); British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands; Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha; South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands; Turks and Caicos Islands; UK Sovereign Base Areas. Of these, Montserrat, St Helena - including Tristan da Cunha, and the Pitcairn Islands are eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA).

<sup>5</sup> The other two being the Darwin Initiative and Illegal Wildlife Trade Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

**With climate change and biodiversity loss being interconnected crises, gains and protections for “natural ecosystem area” supported through Darwin Plus will be positive for both climate change mitigation and adaptation. It will also support UK and OT commitments under the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement for those who have had the treaty extended to them.** Types of nature-based solutions for climate change that Darwin Plus already funds include projects for mangrove reforestation, coral reef protection, sand dune stabilisation and peat restoration. Given the OTs are ineligible for most international climate funds (e.g. UNFCCC funding), they have submitted to FCDO a request for a new dedicated OT climate change funding pot: as such, **the importance of Darwin Plus to both the OTs and the UK is clear.**

### **Main developments since start of FBC**

In 2023, the structure of Darwin Plus doubled in size from two to four grant schemes, including new offers tailored to better accommodate OT needs and priorities (**see Annex 1 for a summary of Darwin Plus schemes as they currently stand**). The programme now includes:

- **Darwin Plus Local:** a new grant scheme for small-scale, short-term projects (<1 year) designed to build capacity and grow Territory economies. This scheme is uniquely open to individual applicants (for projects <£20k) as well as organisations (for projects <£50k).
- **Darwin Plus Strategic:** a new grant scheme for large-scale, long-term projects (3-5 years) designed to foster innovation and collaboration in and between OTs, open to projects £1-3m.

In 2024, the long-standing Darwin Plus Fellowships offer was then rebranded to **Darwin Plus People & Skills** and its guidance packs clarified to appeal to new applicants beyond academia. The onus of the scheme is now on broader training, educational and professional development opportunities for OT nationals, long-term residents and (for the uninhabited OTs) those with a long-term relationship to an OT, to increase their knowledge and ability to meet long-term strategic outcomes for their natural environments.

These new and improved grant schemes now sit alongside the classic **Darwin Plus Main** offer for projects costed between £50k and £1m, providing a full spectrum of support to the OTs.

### **3.2 What is the reason for the change?**

1. Darwin Plus is a successful programme that is highly popular with the OTs and is both effective and efficient at delivering outcomes for biodiversity. **To ensure its continued operation throughout 2025/26, we are seeking a costed extension to the programme.**
2. A previous version of this Change Control Note (CCN) was first discussed by Investment Committee on 15 January 2025, but a decision was postponed until the outcomes of non-ODA business planning for 2025/26 were known<sup>6</sup>.
3. Before the FBC's expiry on 31 March 2025, the SRO approved an uplift in programme value of 10% (£3 million) and 5-month extension (to 31 August 2025) within their limit of delegated authority. This allowed Defra to continue funding live contractual commitments and programme running costs.

4. On 8 April 2025, the programme subsequently received £8.186m of non-ODA funding for 2025/26, joining the £3.25m of ODA previously allocated. This updated CCN now seeks approval to spend this full amount (£11.436m) up until 31 March 2026.
5. The FBC sought approval for £30m split across three financial years (i.e. £10m a year). However, due to internal business planning processes, the programme was in fact receiving £11.85m each year (£130k more for the non-ODA eligible OTs). This CCN now accounts for the full funding received.

### 3.3 What is the total and additional funding required?

- We have now received our full funding allocation of **£11.436m for 2025/26**, which this CCN seeks permission to spend. This new funding brings the whole-life funding of the programme to £41.436m from FY 2022/23 – FY 2025/26.
- Our £11.436m funding consists of **£3.25m ODA funding** (which can only be spent on the ODA-eligible OTs) and **£8.186m non-ODA funding**. These figures are consistent with maintenance of the current ODA/non-ODA funding split (apportioned to reflect the 30%-70% split of ODA-non-ODA OTs, respectively).
- The total CDEL sought is £5,307,500 (of which £1,007,500 is ODA and £4.3m is non-ODA) and total RDEL is £6,128,500 (of which £2,242,500 is ODA and £4.3m non-ODA).

**Table 1:** Total Darwin Plus funding allocation for 2025/26.

	Non-ODA RDEL	Non-ODA CDEL	ODA RDEL	ODA CDEL	Total
<b>Darwin Plus Allocation in SR 2025-26</b>	£3,886,000	£4,300,000	£2,242,500	£1,007,500	£11,436,000

- Demand for continued funding is anticipated to be high. Since 2018/19, UK Government spending on Darwin Plus has grown substantially to reflect the OTs' rising breadth and interest in the programme. The introduction of two new grant schemes in 2023 likely increased interest.
- Until we receive permission to spend our full 2025/26 allocation, we have temporarily paused the award of new single year projects. Following HMT's advice, we have also paused the award of new multiyear projects until the outcomes of the MYSR are known. Even with these delays, demand for Darwin Plus funding is such that we still expect to spend at least 80% of our allocated budget this year (at least 86% of non-ODA budget and 61% of ODA budget), once new projects are accounted for (reliant on contractual break clauses for ceasing future commitments, if necessary). Any funds remaining will be identified early on within 2025/26 and made available for supporting wider Environment Group and ODA Hub priorities.
- The absorption capacity of OT individuals and organisations is volatile: based on current spend and uptake, we consider the additional funding sought to be proportionate.

### 3.4 Summary of performance to date

#### Benefits realisation and performance to date:

#### Improving and expanding Darwin Plus

Darwin Plus scored an A in both its [first Annual Review](#) (covering 2022/23) and second Annual Review (covering 2023/24 – yet to be published) for its high indicative performance and continuous

improvement. This is largely credited to the growth and diversification of the programme's offer to the OTs, and the improvement of reporting practice through the introduction of Standard Reporting Indicators in April 2023.

Since the FBC was implemented, programme spending has grown to reflect the rising breadth and quality of applications and mounting interest in the programme from within the OTs. As planned, two new tailored funding schemes, Darwin Plus Local and Darwin Plus Strategic, have been introduced to better meet the needs of the OTs. Darwin Plus Local has proven popular with applicants and is responsible for the major uptick in project numbers observed since April 2023 (accounting for 75% of projects funded between then and March 2025). Darwin Plus Strategic had one successful application in its first round. Its second round attracted five applications, 3 of which have been recommended for funding from April 2025 by the Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG).

### **Projects funded throughout duration of FBC**

**Table 2:** Number and value of Darwin Plus grants awarded since the start of the FBC. (Please see **Annex 2** for a graphical summary of the number and value of Darwin Plus grants awarded and grant expenditure from 2018/19 to date.)

Darwin Plus Funding Round	Number of projects funded					Value of projects funded		
	Main	Fellowships	Local	Strategic	Total	Non-ODA funds	ODA funds	Total
Round 10 (projects starting from April 2022)	20	3	N/A	N/A	23	£5,698,210.68	£758,941.32	£6,457,152.00
Round 11 (projects starting from April 2023)	13	8	59	N/A	80	£6,020,973.14	£1,903,696.17	£7,924,669.31
Round 12 (projects starting from April 2024)	14	3	60	1	78	£9,363,195.55	£901,217.83	£10,264,413.38

Outside of the competitive grants programme, but in scope of the intended outcome of Darwin Plus, we have responded to three requests for emergency funding over the duration of the FBC. These include two direct grant awards to support St Helena's response to an outbreak of *Phytophthora* (£119,700 for 2023/2024, £202,055 for 2024/2025), and one direct grant award for bolstering the efforts of rat eradication trials on Henderson Island, part of the Pitcairn Islands (£153,300 for 2024).

### **Developing KPIs**

Reporting on project impact, outputs and outcomes in the programme's Logframe has been strengthened by the introduction of new **Standard Reporting Indicators** in April 2023. Based on data available at this stage in the rollout, both the 2022/23 and 2023/24 Darwin Plus Annual Reviews suggest that most indicators are meeting or exceeding their targets. The 2023/24 Annual Review found that most **Output Indicators** are meeting or exceeding their planned milestones, and all **Outcome Indicators** for which we have data are exceeding their planned milestones. More robust

conclusions will be able to be drawn in time as more projects implement the Standard Reporting Indicators and data accumulates.

In addition to these new Standard Reporting Indicators, the programme has been working with the JNCC to monitor and report against the **K3 and K4 Outcome Indicators** outlined in **Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan**, which align with Impact Indicators 1 and 2 outlined in the Darwin Plus Logframe:

- K3: Status of endemic and globally threatened species in the OTs ([see latest report](#)).
- K4: Extent and condition of terrestrial and marine protected areas in the OTs ([see latest report](#)).

### **New OT Biodiversity Strategy**

In early 2022, we appointed the JNCC to lead the development of a new OT Biodiversity Strategy – one that recognises the unique nature of each Territory's biodiversity and environmental needs. Between August 2022 and February 2024, the JNCC led an **extensive programme of stakeholder engagement to understand the needs and priorities of the OTs**. The JNCC project team workshoped in nine OTs and, where not practically possible to visit, engaged the rest through UK-based and/or online consultation processes, including via an [online call for evidence](#).

Based purely on input to this consultation, a first draft of the strategy was created and shared with OT governments and administrations in May 2024. Following the appointment of a new government in July, drafting has since resumed, and the strategy is now **intended for publication in 2025**. Designed with the FBC Smart Target in mind, the strategy is being developed as a tool for prioritising funding and resource in serving the distinct environmental needs of each Territory. An Equality Impact Assessment and Environmental Principles Policy Statement will support this new document.

### **Developing a community of practice**

Since April 2022, Defra, JNCC and NIRAS (the programme's fund administrators) have been working together to deliver a range of activities to develop a community of practice:

- **Defra staff and JNCC jointly delivered in-person engagement activities across seven OTs<sup>7</sup>**, as a key tool for diverse and meaningful stakeholder consultation on development of the new Darwin Plus Local and Strategic grant schemes, and the new OT Biodiversity Strategy.
- **NIRAS staff visited eight live projects** to support mid-term reviews across Akrotiri, Anguilla, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos Islands. Mid-term reviews are a **detective control to counter the risk of fraud** by independently verifying project activities against documentation submitted, and support accountability, learning and future project direction.
- **NIRAS provided 26 training workshops and webinars** to help build the capacity of applicants on programme design topics including risk management and monitoring, evaluation and learning, and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI). NIRAS also provided **helpdesk support** to applicants across all stages of application and project delivery; and developed **new tools, products and "how to" resources** on GESI and on topics related to grants management (e.g. submitting financial claims and the change request process).

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<sup>7</sup> These were; Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, Falkland Islands, Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

### 3.5 What are additional expected benefits of the budget or other changes?

The proposed budget increase and extension to March 2026 will continue to support programme delivery, helping to improve impact and Value for Money by:

- Meeting the high demand for project support in scope of Darwin Plus; both **preserving the current pipeline** of 31 multi-year projects for which funding has been agreed in principle **and awarding new projects** in 2025/26.
- Supporting **delivery of the new OT Biodiversity Strategy**; including through an annual review process in close consultation with the OTs, and the offer to support OT governments and administrations with implementation of the strategy (as required).

Please note that, due to the delays with business planning and the delay in confirming and awarding new projects in 2025/26, **we do not plan to invite new applications for projects until 2026/27 (i.e. until a new FBC for the programme is developed).**

### 3.6 What is the approach to implementation?

We will continue the same approach to implementation as described in the FBC, whilst continuing to fund additional, long-running projects in scope of Darwin Plus (funded during the period of the FBC, but currently not captured by it). These are summarised at table 3.

**Table 3:** Roles and responsibilities in delivery of the Darwin Plus FBC.

Organisation	Roles and Responsibilities
<b>Defra</b>	<b>As described in FBC:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management and oversight of Darwin Plus FBC, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund Secretariat and Policy Lead for Darwin Plus grant programme.</li> <li>• Policy Lead for OTs Biodiversity Strategy.</li> <li>• Policy Lead for K3/K4 Outcome Indicator monitoring.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>NIRAS</b>	<b>As described in FBC:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund Administrator for Darwin Plus programme, working closely with Defra.</li> </ul>
<b>Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)</b>	<b>As described in FBC:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical advisory review board. The DPAG assesses project applications to Darwin Plus Main, Strategic and People &amp; Skills and makes funding recommendations to Defra.</li> <li>• A representative from FCDO sits on the DPAG as an ex-officio member.</li> <li>• The DPAG Chair additionally: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Acts as the public face of DPAG;</li> <li>○ Provides an expert steer on Darwin Plus Local applications;</li> <li>○ Guides strategic discussions on the programme;</li> <li>○ Attends and speaks at events such as workshops, conferences and seminars;</li> <li>○ Advises Defra on application sift processes; and</li> <li>○ Sits on the interview panel for new members of the DPAG.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>JNCC</b>	<b>As described in FBC:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery Partner for Darwin Plus Local: JNCC evaluate applications to Darwin Plus Local and monitor its delivery.</li> <li>• Scientific Advisors/Area Experts for OTs Biodiversity Strategy: JNCC lead the consultation and drafting of the Strategy under Defra's guidance.</li> <li>• Scientific Advisors for 25 Year Environment Plan: JNCC monitor and report against the Outcome Indicators K3: Status of endemic and globally threatened species in the OTs, and K4: Extent and condition of terrestrial and marine protected areas in the OTs.</li> </ul> <b>In addition to FBC:</b>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery Partner for Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) project: JNCC has been advising OT Governments and other stakeholders on albatross and petrel conservation, and facilitating co-ordination between the UK Government and OTs on ACAP issues for 5+ years.</li> </ul>
APHA	<p>In addition to FBC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery Partner for OTs Biosecurity Project: APHA provides capacity to OTs for biosecurity legislation, regional training, rapid responses to emerging threats and support to Darwin Plus projects. Joined the Darwin Plus FBC in April 2022.</li> </ul>
Fera	<p>In addition to FBC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery Partner for identification service of invasive invertebrate pests and diseases in the OTs. Joined the Darwin Plus FBC on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022.</li> </ul>
Forestry Commission	<p>In addition to FBC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery Partner for Falkland Islands wildfire training and provision of wildfire response equipment over 2023-24.</li> </ul>

### 3.7 Describe any key changes to the original business case including the Theory of Change or new evidence from ongoing monitoring, evaluation or learning work.

#### Strategic Case

The strategic case for the programme continues to fully align with the FBC. As per **Section 1**, the UK Government has a legal obligation to support the wellbeing of the people of the OTs: by supporting their natural environments, Darwin Plus delivers. Darwin Plus remains Defra's primary offer of support to the OTs and as a long-term programme continues to be an important and unique funding source for their biodiversity conservation. **The objective of this CCN is to continue the programme through the remainder of Phase 1 of the SR period with our full funding allocation, after which, we plan to complete a new FBC to set out the long-term direction of the programme for Phase 2.**

OT Governments [regularly voice their strong support for Darwin Plus](#): continuing to fund the programme will positively support the UK's diplomatic relationship with its OTs, which are an important part of the British realm. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Withdrawing funding would also result in loss of momentum for ongoing projects, as well as new projects and – in turn – loss of benefits for biodiversity.

All projects funded in line with the Darwin Plus FBC must meet at least one of the following broad themes that feed into the overall Darwin Plus programme's Theory of Change (see **Annex 3**):

- **Biodiversity:** improving and conserving biodiversity, and slowing or reversing biodiversity loss and degradation;
- **Climate change:** responding to, mitigating and adapting to climate change and its effects on the natural environment and local communities;
- **Environmental quality:** improving the condition and protection of the natural environment;
- **Capability and capacity building:** enhancing the capacity within UKOTs to support the environment in the short- and long-term

Grantees are required to report on the progress with, achievements of, challenges and impacts of their projects. Their reports provide us with a wealth of case studies that demonstrate the benefits of the programme to the OTs and their wildlife (please see **Annex 4** for a sample of case studies and

project outputs and outcomes). Standard Reporting Indicators were introduced in April 2023 as a requirement for all new projects to tighten the link between project KPIs and the revised Darwin Plus Theory of Change and Logframe. Standard Reporting Indicators now feed directly into the Logframe, which marries up with the Output, Outcome and Impact statements in the Theory of Change. **This places us in a much stronger position now and going ahead to systematically quantify the impact of the Darwin Plus portfolio against the programme's aims.**

#### SMART Target

The FBC proposed the following SMART target for the Darwin Plus programme:

*By 2025 we will have a portfolio of fully funded and on track projects, aligned to a new OT Biodiversity Strategy, that will recognise and support the distinct environmental needs of each Territory. Progress will be measured by a set of clear KPIs that feed into global biodiversity targets.*

Though this SMART target remains relevant, publication of the new OT Biodiversity Strategy was delayed come the announcement of the general election. Having since resumed work on the strategy, we suggest revising the target going into 2025/26, like so:

*By March 2026 Darwin Plus will have a portfolio of fully funded and on track projects, aligned to a new OT Biodiversity Strategy, that will recognise and support the distinct environmental needs of each Territory. Progress will be measured by a set of clear KPIs that feed into the programme Theory of Change to slow, halt and reverse the rates of biodiversity loss in the OTs.*

This Target is:

- Specific: It refers to specific projects, a specific new OT Biodiversity Strategy, and the distinct needs of each Territory.
- Measurable: The success rate can be measured by percentage of projects that are meeting or exceeding their targets, measured by Standard Reporting Indicators (or other clear KPIs) and deliver on the biodiversity strategy of a particular Territory or Territories.
- Attainable: We consider that, over the course of the year, we will have the necessary resource and oversight to continue to deliver and improve the functioning of the programme in a systematic fashion, including to publish the new strategy.
- Relevant: This target strongly supports UK Government commitments and priorities with nature and the OTs. A new strategy for the Territories, with reference to the priorities and needs of each Territory, will deliver on the significance of recognising specific local priorities.
- Time bound: We have one year to deliver upon the target (i.e. duration of this CCN).

#### Revised Theory of Change and Logframe

The Theory of Change and Logframe were reviewed and revised in summer 2024 to:

- Align more closely with each other, and to improve their linkage with the new Standard Reporting Indicators to strengthen our impact measurement;
- Reflect UK and OT Government priorities, including a greater focus on climate resilience and the wellbeing of local communities and stakeholders;
- Stronger recognition of the tools' key assumptions; and

- Include a narrative description of the Theory of Change.

Please see **Annex 3** for the Theory of Change and Logframe which remain under constant review.

#### Benefits realisation

**Defra will continue to maintain benefits by regularly reviewing and revising project selection criteria and processes** (assessment criteria for Darwin Plus Main applications are listed in **Annex 5** as an example), **and scrutiny of individual projects. As part of this, Defra will continue to ensure it has adequate skills, knowledge, capacity and experience amongst members of its independent Darwin Plus Advisory Group who will continue to recommend only those projects which satisfy Defra's criteria for funding, and to prioritise them accordingly.**

Throughout the delivery chain, benefits will continue to be assured through a combination of top-down and bottom-up related actions and processes, including:

- Approval of new applications for funding by the Defra policy team, with input from NIRAS (as appropriate).
- Strategic oversight of the programme by the Programme Responsible Officer and Senior Responsible Officer achieved through bi-annual Programme Board meetings.
- A specific focus on in-OT delivery of projects, with local delivery partners, to ensure that capacity, skills and knowledge are supported in-OT and remain in-OT after a project has completed.

Given benefits will not be directly managed by Defra Group, a Benefits Management Framework has not been developed – **this is instead encapsulated in the Theory of Change and Logframe (see Annex 3)**. Grantees will continue to assess, monitor and report project outcomes to Defra via NIRAS. Data from individual projects will be aggregated and used to assess overall progress relative to Darwin Plus' overall expected outputs, outcomes and impact.

Benefits will be valued through improvement across a range of programme-wide output, outcome and impact indicators (please see the **Theory of Change and Logframe in Annex 3** and **Economic Case: Projected 2025/26 project outcomes**). Standard Reporting Indicators for projects that align with the Theory of Change and Logframe were only recently introduced in April 2023 and are under constant review. Benefits are expected to be sustainable, as Darwin Plus is supporting the OTs to deliver their devolved responsibilities, with many projects focusing on building capacity and capability within Territory. Benefits are also expected to be disbursed across OTs through collaboration and knowledge sharing. Projects often last longer than a year and their results and impacts frequently serve as a foundation for future Darwin Plus projects, meaning that benefits are accrued over a multi-year period.

#### Economic Case

The OTs are home to the great majority (94%) of UK endemic species, nearly half of which are threatened with extinction. The resident populations of many of the OTs are economically dependent upon their natural environments in a myriad of ways. Chiefly, they support their people's livelihoods (e.g. through tourism and fisheries) and provide protection from extreme events (e.g. hurricane shielding by coral reefs, mangroves etc).

**Often with small populations and government departments, most of the OTs have limited skills and capacity for safeguarding nature.** Collectively they report lacking access to ecologists, botanists, oceanographers, hydrologists, geographers, and people with specialisms in processing and managing data, knowledge sharing and project management: these are all professions which Darwin Plus funding can bolster their access to and, in turn, strengthen OT economies - aligning with the UK Government's mission to kickstart economic growth.

#### Major relevant changes to the OTs since the start of the FBC

Two major changes are expected to the OTs before March 2026 that impact the Darwin Plus Economic Case:

- Montserrat is expected to graduate from the OECD DAC list in January 2026 having exceeded the high-income threshold for receiving ODA for three consecutive years. It will still be eligible for Darwin Plus, but new grants will be funded through the non-ODA budget.
- On 22 May 2025 the UK Government signed treaty to hand sovereignty of the Chagos Islands (i.e. BIOT) to the Government of the Republic of Mauritius. Ratification expected in mid-2025. Upon ratification, our working assumption is that BIOT would no longer be eligible for new funding under Darwin Plus, but existing grants would be honoured while programme budget remains.

The developments in Montserrat and BIOT are the only major changes to the OTs that impact the operation of Darwin Plus; no more are anticipated over 2025/26, and we consider that **the economic rationale for funding this programme still stands**. From April 2022 to March 2025, UK Government spending on Darwin Plus grew to reflect the OTs' rising breadth and interest in the programme. OT governments and eNGOs continue to frequently voice their support of the programme [REDACTED]

#### Options appraisal

The FBC sets out the economic rationale for Darwin Plus and the results of an options appraisal which favoured increasing spend on Darwin Plus (initially to £30m over three years). Having since expanded the programme to include a fuller offer of support, we continue to receive high numbers of high-quality applications to the four grant schemes (94 to Rounds 4 and 5 of Darwin Plus Local, 33 to Round 13 of Darwin Plus Main and People & Skills, and 5 to Round 2 of Darwin Plus Strategic). Therefore, **we can be confident that our expectations on performance are unlikely to have optimism bias, and that Darwin Plus would be able to spend the funds requested in this CCN on projects that will significantly contribute to UK Government priorities.**

This CCN seeks a proportionate uplift of 32.2% under largely business-as-usual arrangements to simply extend the FBC to the end of the 2025/26 financial year, whilst acknowledging the funding which Darwin Plus has in fact received for the FBC's duration (£11.85m per year rather than £10m).

**We therefore consider that the original FBC options appraisal remains robust, but present the following *concise* options for the purpose of this CCN:**

- *Do Nothing – do not extend Darwin Plus FBC to March 2026*

**Costs:** None

**Benefits:** Financial saving of £8.436m over 2025-26 (i.e. £11.436m allocation minus the £3m uplift already authorised by SRO and currently being spent).

**Risks:** All ongoing projects and other activities will be halted, resulting in further loss of momentum, partnerships, capacity, knowledge and skills, and Value for Money. Sudden and significant loss of resources and ongoing biodiversity benefits to the OTs. No new biodiversity benefits. [REDACTED]

- *Meet funding commitments to Darwin Plus legacy projects and provide no new/additional funding for future Darwin Plus rounds or activities*

**Costs:** £5.043m to fund projects which Defra has already agreed to fund in principle, plus £271,821 NIRAS fees over 2025/26.

**Benefits:** Existing grants are honoured and still deliver their biodiversity benefits.

**Risks:** No new projects to deliver further biodiversity benefits to the OTs. More gradual but still significant loss of resources and biodiversity benefits to the OTs. [REDACTED]

- *Preferred option – Return to Business as Usual – extend the Darwin Plus programme by to March and release funding allocation for 2025/26 (£11.436m, rising to £41.436m whole life)*

**Costs:** £11.436 over 2025-26, of which £3.25m is ODA funding.

**Benefits:** Existing grants are honoured, ongoing activities and services continue, and momentum is regained as new projects are funded to deliver ongoing and new biodiversity benefits to OTs. **This is the only option that *strengthens* UK Government's reputation and its relationship with the OT Governments and Administrations**, particularly as this will be Defra's first major commitment to the OTs since the change in Government and thus sets the precedent.

**Risks:** Financial risk from investment. Sets expectation that funding will continue following the Multiyear SR.

A cost-benefit analysis of the preferred option against the do-nothing option is included in **Annex 6**. This estimates that the preferred option is expected to deliver very high value-for-money. However, there are significant uncertainties in this estimate, which are explored through sensitivity analysis.

### Value for Money

Though the UK Government legally obliged to support the OTs (see page 1), [JNCC have found](#) that investment in protecting their natural environments can directly and indirectly produce significant value or benefits for people.

We expect the Value for Money offered by Darwin Plus to be comparable to Defra's other two BCFs (Darwin Initiative and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund). However, the Darwin Plus programme is more complex in nature. It is supporting diverse types of conservation projects producing different outputs and involving many different species across radically different landscapes and climates. This makes it challenging to assess Value for Money comprehensively. **Numerous measures have been implemented over the programme's lifespan to maximise and evidence Value for Money, and there are further plans to strengthen our approach beyond March 2025.** These are detailed below and summarised against the four E's in **Table 4**.

**It is important to note that, prior to April 2022, Darwin Plus operated without an FBC.** Whilst an independent [Ecorys evaluation](#) found widespread agreement amongst strategic stakeholders that Darwin Plus provided very good Value for Money, there was little supporting evidence to confirm this. **Development/implementation of the Darwin Plus FBC in/since 2022 has been the first major step in building an evidence base for the programme to ensure this is the case.**

NIRAS have reported that leveraged funding from Darwin Plus projects has tended to be in the range of ~25% - 45%, so for every £1 we invest we achieve around £1.25 - £1.45 in additional funding for communities and environments within Territory. We anticipate the same for the duration of the CCN. The social cost and resulting benefit of leveraged finance has been considered in the cost-benefit analysis of options.

It should be noted that the decision the delay the award of new projects has resulted in a reduction in activity levels already committed to within NIRAS' contract for 2025/26, which will inevitably result in decreased value for money. The delay in the commencement of new projects may impact the delivery of project outcomes, and with less time to deliver, there is a risk that their overall outcomes may be diminished. Subject to the necessary clearances, we will mitigate impacts by confirming new projects as soon as possible.

Throughout the duration of the CCN, we will also continue to ensure Value for Money through a combination of the following measures:

- **Demand-led project funding** to meet the needs and priorities of the OTs;
- **Shared administrative processes** across the BCFs via NIRAS to ensure consistency of policy and practice across funds and also to provide economy of scale with the Fund Administrator contract;
- **Grant assurance processes**, including assessment of funding applications by independent experts on the DPAG and due diligence by NIRAS conducted by KPMG;
  - In particular, the DPAG provide technical and location expertise, which is essential for determining which projects are most likely to be successful in the different environments, contexts and cultures found in the OTs (i.e. adopting a tailored rather than one-size-fits-all approach).

- The application guidance stipulates that **projects must demonstrate strong Value for Money** in terms of expected impacts from each pound spent.
- **Post-award monitoring of projects** by NIRAS, working closely with Defra, through annual reporting (assessed by a combination of NIRAS reviewers and external reviewers) and mid-term reviews through site visits.
  - These checks are to mitigate against instances fraud and other malpractice and ensure projects are on target to deliver their aims. Defra is immediately notified where concerns are raised and appropriate action is taken, whether that is to provide a project with additional support, increase monitoring, withhold funds or terminate a project.

Since the start of the FBC, additional measures have been implemented:

- **We introduced two new tailored schemes** to the programme:
  - **The Darwin Plus Strategic scheme**, which allows economy of scale by funding ambitious cross-OT collaborative projects not feasible under the other schemes.
  - **Darwin Plus Local scheme**, which offers a streamlined process to fund smaller-scale projects while increasing local capacity. While this scheme has a greater risk of instances fraud, this is countered by the lower financial investment in each project.
- **We introduced Standard Reporting Indicators** across projects in April 2023 to increase the evidence base that projects provide for Value for Money. These Indicators were selected to feed into the programme's Theory of Change and Logframe to ensure they align with the aims of the programme.
  - Early results from the [2022-23 Darwin Plus Annual Review](#) indicated that **projects were delivering good Value for Money**, and this evidence base will strengthen over time as the data accumulates.
- **NIRAS introduced a dedicated [Darwin Plus newsletter](#)** in March 2024, which documents and illustrates the stories and impacts of projects in a more qualitative manner. Previously, Darwin Plus featured in shared [cross-BCF newsletters](#) newsletter only.
- **Defra recruited a Communications and Engagement specialist in 2024** who, among other duties, is helping to capture and document the legacy of BCF projects.

**Further action is planned/ongoing to strengthen and assess Value for Money across the programme, including:**

- **Publication of the new OT Biodiversity Strategy in 2025,** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
  - Our intention is to keep the strategy "live" and, as such, its goals kept relevant through annual consultation with OT governments.
- **Development of a Framework (now finalised) for calculating Value for Money across the BCFs.**
- **A Deep Dive on Value for Money across the BCFs (now finalised),** aiming to
  - Explore the potential for a process of regular, systematic assessment of Value for Money in BCF-funded projects. This will be done through a brief review of processes at relevant grant making facilities and other large-scale, systematic programmes focused on achieving impacts in biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

- Identify opportunities to collect higher quality data to inform enhanced assessment of Value for Money while acknowledging the need to keep reporting burdens to a minimum.
- **A Deep Dive on Sustainability in the BCFs** (including Darwin Plus and currently underway) to:
  - Identify the different pathways by which BCF projects have brought about sustained benefits.
  - Identify the key factors that mean that the positive impact of BCF projects will be sustained over time.
  - Develop guidance for those selecting, managing/supporting, and implementing projects to ensure projects have more sustained positive impacts over time.
- **External BCFs evaluation**, which will assess how VfM compares with other conservation programmes.

The conclusions from the Deep Dives will both build the evidence base for Darwin Plus' Value for Money in terms of sustainability of impacts and provide valuable advice on how to strengthen and monitor this going ahead. This includes agreeing a system for standardised periodic follow-ups with Project Leads after grants have completed to understand how projects benefits have been sustained and further impacts and opportunities that have since arisen as a result of the project (e.g. long-term outcomes of projects, further funding secured, new partnerships secured etc).

**Table 4:** Summary of progress against Value for Money criteria since the start of the current FBC.

Value for Money criterion	Development since FBC	Rationale
Economy	Increase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitive procurement of a Fund Administrator and Local scheme Delivery Team.</li> <li>• Sharing of Fund Administrator contract across BCFs.</li> </ul>
Efficiency and Effectiveness	Increase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of Darwin Plus Strategic has enabled Defra to fund large scale, long-term cross-OT collaborative projects that would not have been possible under the other schemes.</li> <li>• Established fund mechanisms and DPAG are still in place to select projects that can demonstrate strong delivery of outputs and outcomes.</li> <li>• Introduction of Standard Reporting Indicators for Darwin Plus projects in April 2023 that align with the programme's Logframe and Theory of Change.</li> <li>• Fund Administrator monitoring of project progress post-award.</li> <li>• (In progress) development of OT funding priorities laid out in the OT Biodiversity Strategy.</li> <li>• (Now finalised) Framework for calculating Value for Money across the BCFs.</li> <li>• (Now finalised) Deep Dive on Value for Money across the BCFs.</li> <li>• (In development) Deep Dive on Sustainability in the BCFs.</li> </ul>
Equity	Increase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of Darwin Plus Local to build capacity and contribute to local economies.</li> <li>• Greater disaggregation of outcomes and impact data by age and gender following the introduction of new Standard Reporting Indicators for project reporting.</li> </ul>
Overall	Increase	Overall, the Value for Money has increased as measures to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and equity have been implemented. Value for Money is still considered to be very good overall.

### Projected 2025/26 project outcomes

Projected outcomes have been modelled for two Darwin Plus schemes based on business-as-usual funding levels:

- Darwin Plus Main: using outcome, targets and spend data for projects awarded in FY 2022/23 and 2023/24; and
- Darwin Plus Local: using outcome data for projects awarded in FY 2023/24.

Due to data limitation, Darwin Plus Strategic and Darwin Plus People & Skills have been omitted from projections.

Please note that Standard Reporting Indicators are self-reported by projects before being assessed and verified by a combination of independent NIRAS reviewers and external reviewers appointed by the NIRAS.

**Table 5:** Example estimated projected outcomes for Darwin Plus Main and Darwin Plus Local project portfolio (including existing and new projects) in 2025/26 based on funding levels set out in the Indicative budget profile in **Table 8**. Full data and modelled projections are available on request.

Standard Reporting Indicators	Projected 2025/26 outcomes (estimated range)			
	Darwin Plus Main		Darwin Plus Local	
	Lower estimate	Upper estimate	Lower estimate	Upper estimate
DPLUS-A01: Number of people from key national and local stakeholder groups completing structured and relevant training.	124	167	179	192
DPLUS-A03: Number of local/national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of project.	13	21	4	4
DPLUS-B01: Number of new/improved habitat management plans available and endorsed.	2	3	25	27
DPLUS-B02: Number of new/improved species management plans available and endorsed	1	1	-	-
DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement).	25	43	4,728	5,072
DPLUS-C01: Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed.	7	11	16	17
DPLUS-C02: Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published	7	10	2	2
DPLUS-C05: Number of projects contributing data, insights, and case studies to national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) related reporting processes and calls for evidence	5	8	1	1
DPLUS-D01: Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices.	-	-	583,709	626,160
DPLUS-D02: Number of people whose disaster/climate resilience has been improved	-	-	7,394	7,932
DPLUS-D03: Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended	1	1	-	-
DPLUS-D12: Area of degraded or converted ecosystems that are under active restoration	225	407	-	-

### Commercial Case

The FBC comprises a series of established procurement approaches with trusted delivery partners. We seek compliant, business-as-usual extensions for these arrangements until March 2026 to avoid disruption to essential activities. The Defra ODA Commercial Team will support the commercial activity required for each of the elements listed in this section below. Please see **Annex 7** for detailed programme expenditure on all commercial partners to date.

#### NIRAS (Fund Administrator)

NIRAS, the appointed Fund Administrator, will continue to deliver the contract and act as Fund Administrator across all three BCFs, continuing to work closely with Defra. The current BCF Fund Administrator Contract (which covers services across all three BCFs) originally ran from 30 March 2022 for up to seven years (three years + up to a maximum of four years, with annual break points – i.e. up to March 2025 with the option to extend up to March 2029). In March 2025, the contract was extended across all three BCFs for two years (up to March 2027). Should the anticipated approvals for 2026/27 spend and beyond not be obtained there are break clauses and wording in the agreement. In such circumstances, NIRAS will be asked to provide a revised/reduced costing plan or to end the agreement.

This CCN seeks permission to release our full 2025/26 allocation now approved through business planning so that we can continue to spend against this contract up to March 2026, at a **cost of £271,821.24 for the whole year**. More than 50% of these costs are expected to cover Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation (MEL) activities across Workstreams 1 (Application Process), 3 (Management of Projects) and 5 (Building and Applying Evidence).

Defra's contract manager has confirmed that the contract with NIRAS has been performed to the current standard required. This is assessed as part of the Darwin Plus Annual Review process and will continue to be assessed throughout the duration of the CCN.

#### JNCC

The original arrangements with JNCC ran from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025. Administration of Darwin Plus Local and implementation of the OT Biodiversity Strategy were contracted under a single existing (Memorandum of Understanding) MOU which is exempt from Public Contracts Regulation Act 2015 (PCR 2015) under Regulation 12. Neither K3/K4 indicator work nor ACAP project delivery were under formal contract. In April 2025, all activity with JNCC was brought under a formal consolidated MoU that runs until March 2026, with an option to extend for a further 3 years (subject to separate approvals). This CCN seeks permission to release our confirmed funding allocation so we can continue to spend against this MoU up to March 2026, at a **cost of £915,032 for the whole year**.

**Table 6: JNCC costs for whole FY2025/26.** Delays caused by the necessary pause on new grant agreements may in/directly slow the pace of deliverables: should this be the case; any remaining funds will be made available for supporting wider Environment Group and ODA Hub priorities.

Area of work	
Darwin Plus Local administration	
OT Biodiversity Strategy Development & Implementation	
K3/K4 indicator work	
ACAP	
Reactive ODA support	
MEA reporting	
<b>Total 2025/26 costs</b>	

#### Fera pest ID service

Fera has led a Defra-funded service since November 2009, commissioned under a long-term service agreement. Under the original Darwin Plus FBC, an Agreed Work Order Form covered work between August 2022 and March 2025. In May 2025 a new Agreed Work Order Form is being signed that runs until March 2026. This CCN seeks permission to release our confirmed funding allocation so we can continue to spend this contract up to March 2026, at an estimated **cost of between ~£60k and ~£87k for the whole year** (precise costings still being confirmed at time of writing).

#### APHA OT Biosecurity project

APHA's OT Biosecurity project has been running since 2016 as an ongoing service to provide largely reactive biosecurity support to the OTs. It was initially funded by the UK Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) before it was transferred to Defra in April 2022, and to be funded in line with the FBC. This arrangement ran until March 2025 and was exempt from PCR 2015 under Regulation 12. In April 2025, this project was brought under a formal MoU that runs until March 2026, which may be extended for up to a further 3 (three) years (in any increment) by the written agreement of the Parties. This CCN seeks permission to release our confirmed funding allocation so we can continue to spend against this MoU up to March 2026, at a **cost of £110,280 for the whole year**.

#### Forestry Commission

Working with the Forestry Commission, funding administered in line with the FBC has supported the co-design and delivery of vegetation fire training modules to Falklanders in partnership with the Falkland Islands Government. This isolated project was considered a success; further projects may be planned according to wildfire risk and OT Government requests for support.

#### Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation

A budget of £80,000 has been allocated to commission MEL activities (in addition to NIRAS' contracted MEL activities) via the MEL Service contracts. An interim evaluation for all three BCFs is planned for 2026. Lessons will be fed into ongoing fund implementation and used to inform future FBCs and contracts. An evaluation end point is then planned for 2028-29 to assess the impact of all

three BCFs: an indicative evaluation plan is included at **Annex 8** for reference. Meanwhile, we will continue to publish Annual Reviews, report on Standard Reporting Indicators, and commission mid-term and end-of-project reviews, legacy evaluations, project-specific evaluations and deep dives. Recent, planned and ongoing BCF deep dives are listed in **Annex 9**.

The introduction of Darwin Plus Local was a step change in how we fund projects, and we have been monitoring this scheme closely to understand its performance and how well it has been received by applicants. An applicant survey was held following completion of Darwin Plus Local Round 1 in August 2023, asking for feedback on the experience of applying for Darwin Plus Local. NIRAS received 30 responses, with **100% stating that their experience had been good or very good**. In addition, Defra commissioned NIRAS to conduct a deep dive in 2024 to capture learning from early implementation of the new scheme. Its results are very encouraging and indicate that **87% of reporting projects led to outcomes that either met or exceeded our expectations**. The deep dive has also highlighted examples of strong projects and key lessons learned through their delivery, whilst raising recommendations to refine the scheme in future.

#### Commercial risks

Commercial risks have been considered and are included in the risk register in **Annex 10**.

#### Financial Case

The total overall programme cost will be £41.436m for the duration of April 2022 – March 2026. Permission to spend our full funding allocation of £11.436m (£3.25m ODA and £8.186m non-ODA) over 2025/26 will allow us to:

- Continue funding the 31 multi-year projects already approved in principle, without drawing on contractual break clauses;
- Fund applications for new single year projects from September 2025;
- Fund applications for new multi-year projects from September 2025, with contractual break clauses included (subject to outcomes of MYSR);
- And wider programme activity described at section 3.4.

Existing Darwin Plus grant commitments (and associated Fund Administrator fees) have been laid out in **Table 7**. An indicative 2025/26 budget profile has been provided in **Table 8**.

We carry out ESA10 evaluations on project applications that are recommended by the DPAG for funding before making recommendations to the minister based on our available budget. In accordance with HMTs' consolidated budget guidance, any projects that meet ESA10 are categorised as Capital R&D in the accounts and the spend is expensed in year with no impact on the balance sheet. Any grants that don't meet ESA10 are categorised as RDEL.

Darwin Plus projects have been assessed using the International Climate Finance (ICF) Rio Markers Classification methodology, identifying a 50% split between mitigation and adaptation: however, these assessments took a narrow interpretation of the guidance, hence the historical 80% ICF classification. There is a growing and strong evidence base demonstrating the effectiveness of Darwin Plus interventions on climate mitigation and adaptation outcomes with an expectation that climate outcomes will be achieved in the majority and possibly all the of projects, but specific

activities are not yet known given the challenge fund model of delivery. For all ODA eligible activity, we expect ICF eligibility to have been at least 95% in 24/25 (and projected the same for 25/26) due to incorporating the most recent evidence available of the links between biodiversity and climate into ICF project assessments, and the revision of the ICF classification guidance.

**Table 7:** Existing Darwin Plus grant commitments (ongoing or committed projects that started **before** FY 2025/26 – these are covered as “Darwin Plus Legacy” in Table 8) and associated Fund Administrator fees.

	2025/26 (whole year)	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
<b>Grant ODA Totals - CDEL</b>	£253,281.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
<b>Grant ODA Totals - RDEL</b>	£499,489.50	£199,982.60	£110,729.80	£0.00
<b>ODA NIRAS Fees (RDEL)</b>	£189,721.23	£189,721.23*	£189,721.23*	£189,721.23*
<b>Grant Non-ODA Totals - CDEL</b>	£2,527,827.17	£880,550.68	£44,110.00	£0.00
<b>Grant Non-ODA Totals - RDEL</b>	£1,762,905.36	£1,176,847.58	£461,308.45	£0.00
<b>Non-ODA NIRAS Fees (RDEL)</b>	£271,821.24	£271,821.24*	£271,821.24*	£271,821.24*
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£5,505,045.50</b>	<b>£2,718,923.33</b>	<b>£1,077,690.72</b>	<b>£461,542.47</b>

\*Cost is subject to agreed contracted NIRAS deliverables for that year – TBC.

Managing expected spend of 2025/26 allocation

We have received steer from Minister Creagh to spend our full 2025/26 allocation on Darwin Plus activities, and this remains our intention. However, we predict there will be some underspend due to the necessary delay in awarding new projects. At this stage, it is not possible to accurately predict the 2025/26 underspend, but **Table 8** presents our best current estimate. We expect to have greater certainty of underspend amount by September 2025, once the MYSR has concluded and we have confirmed which projects remain viable for delivery in 2025/26 and, for those projects, their new

financial forecasts. We will work with Directors at Defra to release the identified underspend as early as possible so it can be made available for supporting wider Environment Group and ODA Hub priorities.

## **Management Case**

### **Defra Resourcing**

Defra team personnel have increased since the FBC started in 2022. With a renewed focus on OTs policy cross-Whitehall, FTE required to oversee the programme in 2025-26 will remain as 0.4 G6, 1.0 Grade 7, 1.0x SEO and 2.0x HEO and 1xHEO(D) (currently resourced via the Fast Stream). Staff costs other than those within the Darwin Plus budget are covered under the NETL Directorate baseline

### **Governance**

- **Defra:** Including Programme Responsible Officer, Senior Responsible Officer and Programme Board responsible for strategic oversight of the programme. Defra will remain responsible for agreeing with Ministers the sift criteria for policy, technical excellence and project impact; for recommending to Ministers projects to fund in line with these criteria (following advice of the DPAG); and for ensuring the smooth running of funded projects. Defra will also remain responsible for on all incoming business (e.g. parliamentary questions, correspondence, invites) and proactive business (e.g. briefings, submissions, speeches) relating to biodiversity in the OTs, and for continuing work on development and publication of the new OT Biodiversity Strategy – coordinating views from other relevant Defra Teams and Arm's Length Bodies (e.g. Marine and Fisheries, International Nature).
- **Fund Administrator:** NIRAS will remain the Darwin Plus Fund Administrator. NIRAS will continue to closely with Defra to manage the application assessment process, lead on project monitoring processes and tracking of project expenditure, provide grant management training for applicants, and support for all project leads and applicants.
- **JNCC:** JNCC remain Defra's delivery partner for Darwin Plus Local; for development of the new OT Biodiversity Strategy; and for development and monitoring of the [25 Year Environment Plan K3 and K4 Outcome Indicators](#).
- **Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG):** The DPAG will continue to review applications to Darwin Plus Main, Strategic and People & Skills, making robust recommendations to Defra on which projects are high scoring against its policy, technical excellence and impact criteria. Members of the DPAG are recruited for their expertise in biodiversity and conservation, particularly in OT and small island settings. Given the unique geographies, cultures and biodiversity needs of the OTs, having their specialist expertise to hand will remain essential to ensuring the programme continues to support each OT's individual needs. The DPAG Chair will continue to provide expert advice on Darwin Plus Local applications (as required). DPAG members are recruited through a call for applications (including CV and how they meet the necessary criteria) followed by an interview with the DPAG Chair, member of the Darwin Plus Programme Board, and a member of NIRAS.

### Delivery Plan

A 2025/26 Delivery Plan for the Darwin Plus funding rounds can be found at **Annex 11**. We received a high number of applications for Round 13 of the Darwin Plus Main, and People & Skills schemes and Round 2 of Darwin Plus Strategic, and Darwin Plus Local Round 5. These were assessed by the DPAG (or JNCC for Darwin Plus Local), with strongest recommended for funding. However, the awarding of new single year projects has been paused until we have permission to spend our full allocation for 2025/26, and the awarding of new multiyear projects has been paused, pending outcome from the MYSR and business planning. Applicants have been notified of the pause and that we expect to update them by August 2025. Defra officials will put advice to Ministers on which projects they recommend should be funded within CDEL/RDEL, ODA and non-ODA budgets, and will subsequently work with NIRAS on necessary paperwork and due diligence checks to have agreed projects ready to start from Sept 2025.

**Demand for Darwin Plus grants remains demonstrably high. Therefore, even with the delays to awarding new projects, we can be confident that Darwin Plus will still be able spend at least 80% of our full 2025/26 allocated budget (at least 86% of non-ODA budget and 61% of ODA budget) by funding high quality projects that significantly benefit biodiversity in the OTs.**

Please note, we do not plan to invite new applications for projects until 2026/27 (i.e. until a new FBC for the programme is developed).

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### Compliance and Safeguarding

A number of measures have been taken to improve practice around GESI and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) safeguarding in Darwin Plus. These follow recommendations from the independent [Ecorys evaluation of the BCFs in 2022](#) and the [2022-23 Darwin Plus Annual Review](#). Principally:

- Applicant guidance and capacity building activities have been updated. All applicants must consider GESI, including demonstrating an understanding of the diversity within their stakeholders, and how their project will contribute to advance equality of opportunity between persons of different gender and social characteristics, and foster good relations.
- With the introduction of new Standard Reporting Indicators for project reporting, applicants are being advised to disaggregate more data on outcome and output indicators by gender.
- Gender is embedded in the Logframe (**Annex 3**), and included as Outcome Indicator 2.2 “Gender and social inclusion is advanced throughout the fund”.
- NIRAS recruited a new cross-BCF safeguarding specialist in December 2023 who is working to strengthen Defra’s assurance and support to projects to ensure SEAH to a high standard.
- A more robust assessment of risks and mitigations around GESI and SEAH safeguarding have been incorporated into the Risk Register (**Annex 10**).
- Following a cross-BCF deep-dive on GESI (including indigenous people and local communities), Defra is developing a multiyear strategy to action recommendations: the GESI Strategy and five-year action plan will set out how to ensure that all projects funded by the BCFs are sensitive to GESI by 2028.

Indicative results from an analysis of GESI scaling scores from Darwin Plus project Annual Reports written in 2024 (excluding Darwin Plus Local) found that that 83% of reporting projects were considered by independent review to meeting or exceeding GESI-sensitive minimum standard. Darwin Plus is committed to being a GESI-Sensitive fund. Not only is this an opportunity to strengthen the inclusivity, sustainability, and impact of the programme, it also ensures compliance with relevant legislation, including International Development Act 2002, and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as a statutory requirement under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

Please note that the **International Development Act 2002 specifically exempts the ODA eligible territories from the poverty reduction criteria that apply to the rest of the ODA budget**. While halting and reversing biodiversity loss and degradation is linked to poverty reduction, poverty reduction itself is not a goal of the Darwin Plus programme. However, the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 still applies to the OTs.

### Risk Management

**From the 2024 Risk Potential Assessment, the overall risk of the Darwin Plus programme is assessed as Low, (please see accompanying Risk Potential Assessment form).** Mitigations to reduce residual risk across the portfolio have been maintained or strengthened since the start of the FBC, (see the Risk Register in **Annex 10** which has been updated from the Risk Identification and Mitigation Framework in the FBC). This remains within Defra’s ODA Risk Appetite, which has been revised since the start of the FBC (the Darwin Plus Risk Appetite has been revised accordingly to fall within this).

**Table 9. Darwin Plus Risk Appetite**

Risk Type		Risk Appetite	
		Defra ODA	Darwin Plus
Strategic & Context	objectives undermined by a changing context, a lack of clarity or a weak evidence base	Open	Open
Delivery & Operational	capacity to effectively oversee programme implementation	Cautious	Cautious
Financial & Fiduciary	funds/assets not used for intended purposes or not accounted for.	Cautious	Cautious
Project / Programme	weaknesses in project delivery, or projects not aligned to priorities	Open	Open
Reputational	events damaging Defra's and/or the UK's reputation	Cautious	Cautious
Safeguarding	failure to establish and maintain strong safeguards to prevent harm	Cautious	Cautious

The Darwin Plus Risk Register is updated as needed and reviewed at least every quarter to assign risks, develop mitigating actions, update investigations of live issues and agree escalation processes through the established Defra Governance Structures. Continuing to operate through a challenge fund approach will help reduce risks by spreading low to high risks between multiple delivery partners, with established track records and processes, across multiple geographies.

Building on lessons learnt since its establishment, in addition to FCDO Programme Operating Framework (ProF) guidance, Darwin Plus uses tried and tested approaches to managing risk with in-built processes to further refine the approach to risk. All Darwin Plus Main and Strategic projects must provide Delivery Chain Risk Maps with their project-level Risk Frameworks, and will regularly monitor risks to inform and manage delivery, and will carry out at least annual review of risk, including these in their annual report.

**Fraud:** Numerous preventative and detective controls are in place to counter the risk of fraud. These include (but are not limited to) the summary below (a detailed fraud risk assessment is available upon request):

Preventative controls:

- All NIRAS and Defra staff must abide by a Code of Conduct and complete Anti-bribery and corruption training and declare any conflicts of interest. The DPAG must also abide by a Code of Conduct and declare any conflicts of interest.
- DPAG members are recruited based on their knowledge and expertise. They carry out detailed technical assessments and are responsible for assessing the technical competence for applications.

- NIRAS conducts financial checks on accounts and budget forms provided. Any concerns are flagged with Defra. Additional information is requested if there are any concerns.
- Defra finance and programme teams check all grant payments reconcile monthly against project budgets.
- FCDO are consulted for an assessment of the regional context and may identify overinflated budgets.
- Grantees are asked to submit annual accounts that have been independently examined or audited (N.B. not all submitted annual accounts are examined/audited - e.g. for small organisations, or for governments). NIRAS undertakes due diligence checks on all successful applications. Independent checks of annual reports/audited accounts are carried out. Any concerns are flagged with Defra. Additional information is requested if there are any concerns.
- To prevent grant duplication: Programme board decision making within Defra includes representatives from wider HMG, helping to identify any potential overlap with wider HMG funding. FCDO is made aware of all applications to the funds and can help identify duplications.
- Accurate records are required to be kept by Project Leads, including receipts and bank statements which gives proof that actions are being carried out. This must be submitted to claim payment.
- All grantees are asked to account for actual spend of funds and certify that the funds claimed each year meet Defra's guidance. Final/Actual claims are only processed and paid on satisfactory completion of independent review of project annual/final reports.

#### Detective controls:

- If the applicant is granted funding, fraud might become apparent as part of routine contact by the Fund Administrator or as part of 6-monthly progress reporting, which is required for each project and reviewed by the Fund Administrator and by Defra.
- Desk based spot audits are undertaken on 5% of live projects per annum and these could detect fraud. Spot audits are targeted at new organisations.
- Site visits can detect some types of fraud.
- To detect grant duplication: Checks are conducted on the Government Grants Information System (GGIS) which will flag additional funding from other government grants.
- Delivery partners are asked to provide evidence of activity, such as reports to include photograph, financial documentation, and schedule of spend. Accurate records are required to be kept, including financial reports that give proof that actions are being carried.
- Where possible, NIRAS will request beneficiary feedback, which should verify that activity has taken place when site visits cannot be made.
- Post auditing and monitoring processes are in place which should pick up where payments have been made to a recipient without entitlement.
- Defra checks NIRAS payments to projects to ensure that payments are made in line with initial forecast and within grant award.
- Grant awards are made public, and organisations will be made aware of awards either via social media or FCDO network contacts post award.

**Safeguarding:** All project leads must immediately notify the ODA Safeguarding team if they become aware of any actual or suspected breaches of the principles outlined in the Code of Conduct for Recipients of Government General Grants, any Personal Data Breach and any allegation credible enough to warrant an investigation of Safeguarding. In addition to self-declaration, checkpoints and controls are in place where risk and safeguarding issues are considered:

- Upon submission of change requests: if a project is submitting a change request, the project lead is prompted to ensure they are considering their project's approach to risk management.
- Project reporting: projects submit half year and annual reports, which are reviewed with any particular issues flagged and followed up with the project.

Through regular reporting or ad hoc communication with the Fund Administrator, the Fund Administrator may be alerted to suspected breaches. These issues would be investigated, often through direct conversations with grantees, escalated as necessary, and tracked via the monthly risk management meetings. For non-urgent issues, projects will be asked to report through their regular reporting cycle, responses to which would then be reviewed and tracked through subsequent reporting – for example, if there are recommended improvements to organisational policies or if we want to track follow-on actions following the resolution of a specific issue.

Following recommendations from the [2022-23 Darwin Plus Annual Review](#) and the 2023-24 Darwin Plus Annual Review, the Risk Identification and Mitigation Framework has been reviewed, strengthened and updated to the ODA Risk Register format. In response to a changing environment, it now includes a more robust assessment of risks and mitigations around GESI and SEAH safeguarding. In addition, references to Covid have been replaced with references to natural disasters and pandemics (**Annex 10**). **We have updated the AO, RPA and IAAP for the period of the extension, in light of the proposed changes. They are provided in the supporting documentation.**

**Climate and Environment risk:** Darwin Plus aligns with HMG's fossil fuel policy and would not knowingly fund projects which undermine partner countries' own climate plans. Projects are not expected to generate material amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It does not need to complete a Climate and Environment Risk Assessment because the FBC was published prior to 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 and this CCN is not considered new programming within the Paris Alignment legal obligations. However, a Climate and Environment Risk Assessment will be completed for the new FBC beyond March 2026.

### **3.8 Lessons identified and implemented**

The OTs require advance notice of Darwin Plus funding rounds in order to allocate their limited resources to the application process. Funding announcements are already well advertised globally on social media, but official level discussions have revealed a need to also advertise via in-Territory media. A portion of the additional funding being sought will be used to improve programme communications in-Territory, starting with advertisements on local newspaper and/or radio. Official level discussions between Defra and FCDO are underway.

### **3.9 Implications of non-approval**

**Darwin Plus is Defra's primary offer of support to the OTs.**

Any further reduction in funding availability and accessibility could also mean that fewer projects are able to be carried out across the OTs, and that project benefits for biodiversity, conservation and climate resilience cannot be realised.

The risk of funding not being available for new projects (i.e. those commencing 2025/26) has been clearly communicated to applicants on the Darwin Plus website. The same risk for existing projects (i.e. the 31 multiyear projects already agreed to in principle, continuing into 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28) has not been communicated. The inclusion of general termination rights would allow for this, but **the cancellation of live projects would be hugely disruptive**. Many of the OT Governments and OT-based NGOs have limited resource. Without continued UK Government support, live projects would most likely be forced to terminate early, resulting in sunk costs and reduced Value for UK and OT Money already invested, plus zero/limited outcomes for OT natural environments.

## **Annex 1: Darwin Plus programme**

Since the start of the FBC in April 2022, two new funding schemes, Strategic and Local, have been introduced. In addition, Darwin Plus Fellowships has been reviewed and rebranded as Darwin Plus People & Skills. The Darwin Plus programme now comprises as follows:

### **Darwin Plus Local**

**Summary:** Introduced in January 2023 to fund small-scale environmental projects in-Territory, with the aim of building capacity and contributing to local economies. Local funds projects of ≤£20k for individuals and ≤£50k for organisations ending within the financial year (i.e. lasting up to 12 months or 6 months, depending on which of the biannual funding rounds the project has applied to).

### **Darwin Plus Main**

**Summary:** Our original funding offer for environmental projects within the OTs, offering grants between £50k and £1 million, for projects lasting between 6 months and 3 years. The lower limit for grants has been changed from £100k to £50k to close the gap between this scheme and Local.

### **Darwin Plus Strategic**

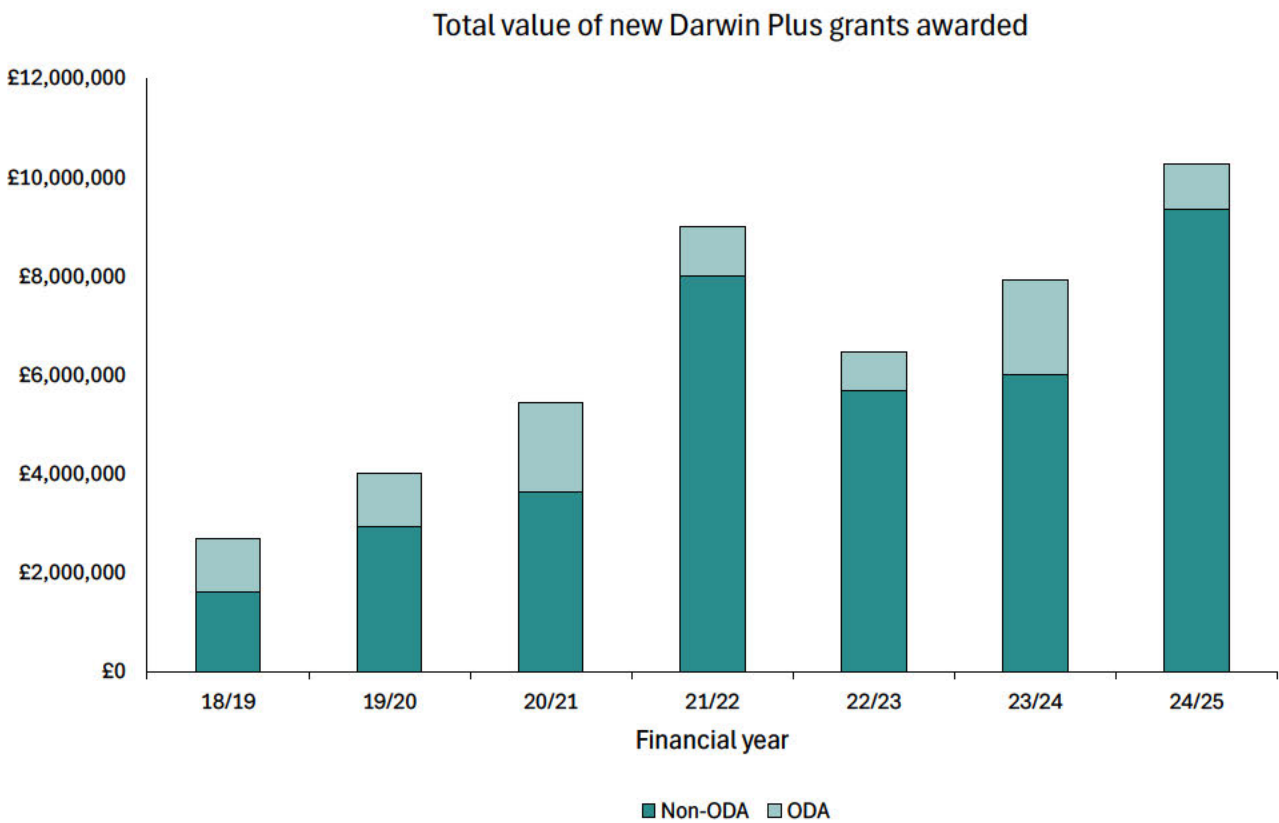
**Summary:** Introduced in April 2023 to fund large-scale, long-term transformative projects, capable of delivering transformative change and encouraging greater ambition and collaboration between OTs. This scheme offers grants between £1 million and £3 million for projects lasting between 3-5 years.

### **Darwin Plus People & Skills**

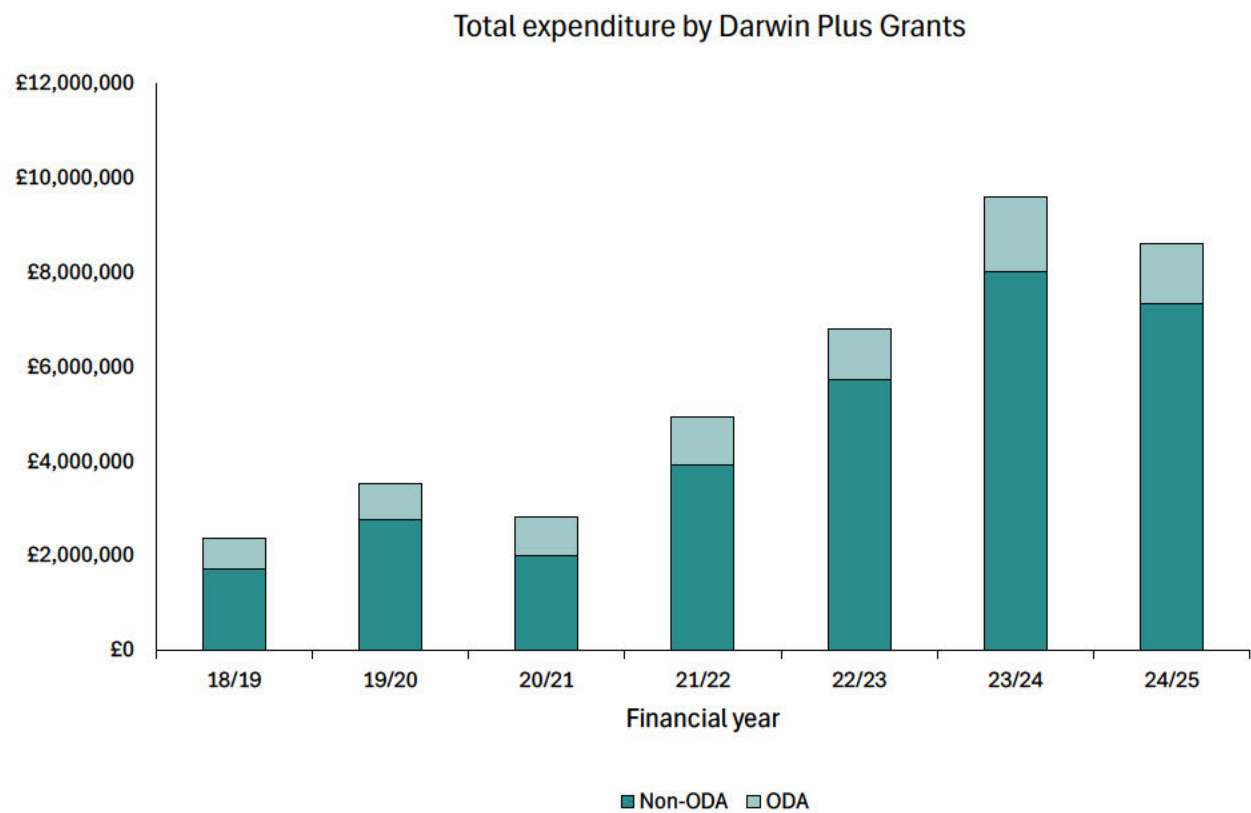
**Summary:** For upskilling OT nationals and long-term OT residents to increase their knowledge and ability to meet long-term strategic outcomes for their environment. This scheme offers grants of ≤£100,000 for projects lasting up to 24 months. Previously named Darwin Plus Fellowships, it was rebranded in 2024 to appeal to applicants beyond academia. The range of eligible activities has also been clarified, in particular that the funds can be used for upskilling teams by bringing in external trainers.

**Annex 2: Darwin Plus grant awards and expenditure**

**Figure 1:** Value of new Darwin Plus projects awarded from April 2018 to date.

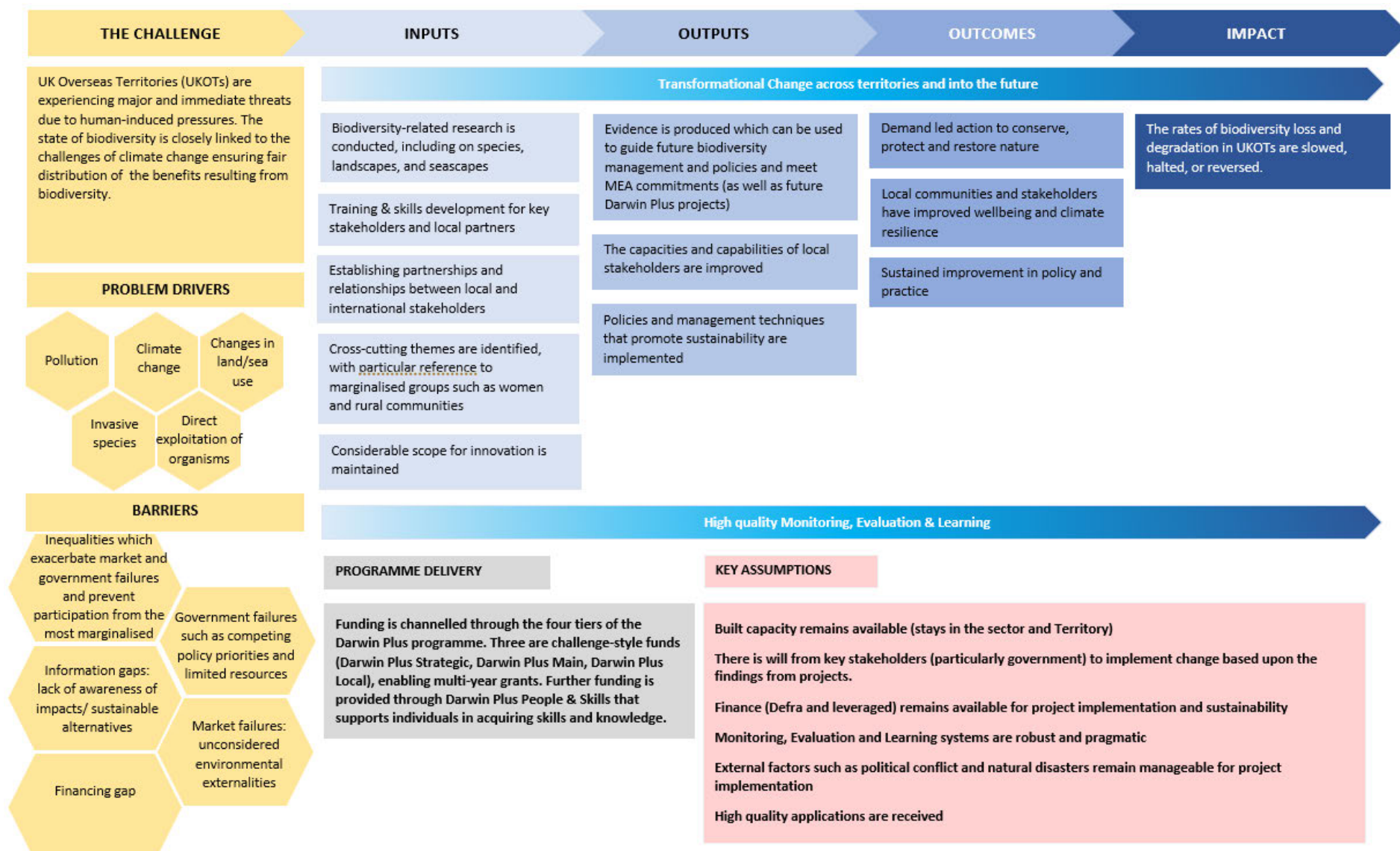


**Figure 2:** Total expenditure by Darwin Plus grants from April 2018 to March 2025.



## Annex 3: Revised Darwin Plus Theory of Change and Logframe

Figure 1: Revised Darwin Plus Theory of Change



### Theory of Change narrative

**IF** evidence is produced which can be used to guide future biodiversity management and policies **AND** the capacities and capabilities of local stakeholders are improved **AND** policies and management techniques that promote sustainability are implemented, **THEN** this will result in demand led action to conserve, protect and restore nature **AND** an improvement in wellbeing across diverse local communities and stakeholders **AND** sustained improvement in policy and practice **BECAUSE** the state of biodiversity is closely linked to the wellbeing of communities who rely on biological resources and who can be effective stewards of biodiversity when empowered with policy and support.

### **Output Assumptions:**

- Built capacity remains available (stays in the sector and Territory)
- There is will from key stakeholders (particularly government) to implement change based upon the findings from projects
- Finance available is appropriately managed, converts outputs into outcomes (ODA /non-ODA and co-financing), and is sufficient for both implementation and sustainability of outcomes
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems are robust and pragmatic
- External factors such as political conflict and natural disasters remain manageable for project
- High quality applications are received
- The barriers are proven to be true and can be addressed; no significant unforeseen barriers are identified.
- Stakeholders, communities, enterprises, local and national government bodies, non-governmental organisations, and academics are engaged early and appropriately.
- ODA eligible UKOTs do not graduate from ODA status during the project's lifetime
- Delivery partners' capability, stability, and professionalism is appropriate and does not negatively affect project activities.

## Darwin Plus Logframe

<b>Impact:</b>	<b>The rates of biodiversity loss and degradation in UKOTs are slowed, halted or reversed</b>
<b>Indicator 1:</b>	<b><i>Status of OT endemic threatened endemic species (indicator currently being developed alongside JNCC)</i></b>
<b>Indicator 2:</b>	<b><i>Extent and condition of terrestrial and marine protected areas in OTs (indicator currently being developed alongside JNCC)</i></b>
<b>Indicator 3:</b>	<b><i>National Biodiversity Strategies and action plans (methodology to be developed)</i></b>
<b>Indicator 4:</b>	<b>Transformational change (methodology to be developed) <u>(ICF KPI 15)</u></b>

<b>OUTCOME 1:</b>	<b>Demand led action to conserve, protect and restore nature</b>
<b>Assumptions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not exceeded by other negative pressures on biodiversity</li> <li>Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems are capable of assessing the outcome.</li> <li>No meaningful impact on functioning of programme from e.g. geopolitical tensions, natural disasters</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome Indicator 1.1:</b>	<b><i>Area under Ecological Management (ha) (DEFRA/ ICF KPI 17)</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Biome DPLUS-D01 Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices

<b>OUTCOME 2:</b>	<b>Local communities and stakeholders have improved wellbeing and climate resilience</b>
<b>Assumptions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems are capable of assessing the outcome.</li> <li>No meaningful impact on functioning of programme from e.g. geopolitical tensions, natural disasters</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome Indicator 2.1:</b>	<b><i>Number of people with improved or protected i) livelihoods (DEFRA KPI), ii) disaster/ climate resilience (ICF KPI 1; ICF KPI 4), iii) wellbeing, (iv) freedom of action and choice</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Gender; Sector  DPLUS-D03 Number of people with enhanced livelihoods DPLUS-D04 Number of people with enhanced wellbeing

	DPLUS-D05 Number of people whose disaster/climate resilience has been improved DPLUS-D06 Value of ecosystem services generated or protected DPLUS-D04g Number of people with improved freedom of action and choice
<b>Outcome Indicator 2.2:</b>	<b><i>Gender equality and social inclusion is advanced throughout the fund</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> Gender  DPLUS-D03 Proportion of projects assessed to be at minimum GESI-sensitive DPLUS-D04 Proportion of people with enhanced livelihoods and wellbeing who are women DPLUS-D05 Proportion of people whose climate and disaster-resilience has been improved who are women  Notes: Methodology for this indicator still under development. Indicator and reporting requirements implemented in 2024/25 Reporting period. Initial efforts to disaggregate have been limited so reporting on this will be challenging as we work with projects to improve things. No target set for proportion of projects assessed to be at GESI-sensitive as baseline assessment conducted in Year 1 of GESI Action Plan. Results represented here (for proportion of projects assessed to be at GESI-sensitive) are based on reviewer's scores of all Annual Reports submitted by mid-September 2024. It should be noted that as this is a pilot phase, there has been variance in how reviewers have responded to the GESI scaling question both across reviews and across schemes and the figures here represent general trends rather than absolute ratings of where project's sit on the scale. These figures will be used to inform the targets for next year and we will seek to further standardise the process following the pilot phase

<b>OUTCOME 3:</b>	<b>Sustained improvement in policy and practice</b>
<b>Assumptions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy and practice replicable and applicable in other UKOTs</li> <li>Capability sufficient to sustain outcomes for impact</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome Indicator 3.1:</b>	<b><i>Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; type (enacted, amended)  DPLUS-D07 Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended
<b>Outcome Indicator 3.2:</b>	<b><i>Finance mobilised for new activities building on evidence, best practices and projects</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> public/private source of finance.

<b>OUTPUT 1:</b>	<b>Evidence is produced which can be used to guide future biodiversity management and policies and meet MEA commitments (as well as future Darwin projects)</b>
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<b>Indicator 1.1:</b>	<b><i>Number of best practice guides and knowledge products developed, published and endorsed</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Language  DPLUS-C01 Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed
<b>Indicator 1.2:</b>	<b><i>Number of assessments conducted and published</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Taxa (Flora/Fauna/Fungi)  DPLUS-C02 Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published DPLUS-C03 New assessments of habitat conservation action needs published DPLUS-C04 New assessments of community use of biodiversity resources published DPLUS-C09 Number of records added to accessible databases
<b>Indicator 1.3:</b>	<b><i>Number of projects contributing data, insights and case studies to national MEA related reporting processes and calls for evidence</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Information type (data, insights, case studies, other)  DPLUS-C05 Number of projects contributing data, insights, and case studies to national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) related reporting processes and calls for evidence

<b>OUTPUT 2:</b>	<b>Capability and capacity of national and local stakeholders are improved</b>
<b>Indicator 2.1:</b>	<b><i>Number of people from key local and national stakeholders receiving training/ new skills <u>(ICF technical assistance KPI 2)</u></i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Gender (men, women, other)  Training typology (biodiversity, sustainable development, finance, programme management, safeguarding, gender etc.);  Proportion of trained people employed by their host organisation at the end of the project.  DPLUS-A01 Number of people from key national and local stakeholders completing structured and relevant training  DPLUS-A02 Number of secondments or placements completed by individuals of key local and national stakeholders

	DPLUS-A04 Number of people reporting that they are applying new capabilities (skills and knowledge) 6 (or more) months after training.
	DPLUS-A05 Number of trainers trained reporting to have delivered further training by the end of the project
<b>Indicator 2.2:</b>	<b><i>Number of key local and national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of the project</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> Organisation type (public, private, other)
	DPLUS-A03 Number of local/national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of project
<b>Indicator 2.3:</b>	<b><i>Number of people participating in community events and activities</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> Gender (men, women, other)
	Type of event/ activity
	DPLUS-A06 Number of people participating in community events and activities
<b>Indicator 2.4:</b>	<b><i>Evidence and lessons learnt are shared and made accessible</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Analytic type (reach, impressions, engagement, other); Gender (men, women, other); Media type (Internet, Print, Radio, Television, Podcast, Other)
	DPLUS-C06 Analytics for funded project-specific social media posts.
	DPLUS-C07 Number of webinar attendees
	DPLUS-C08 Number of media-related activities
	DPLUS-C10 Number of decision-makers attending briefing events

<b>OUTPUT 3:</b>	<b>Policies and management techniques that promote sustainability are implemented</b>
<b>Indicator 3.1:</b>	<b><i>Number of new/ improved biodiversity (species/ habitat) or community management plans available and endorsed</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Type (new, improved)
	DPLUS-B01 Number of new/improved habitat management plans available and endorsed
	DPLUS-B02 Number of new/improved species management plans available and endorsed
	DPLUS-B03 Number of new/improved community management plans available and endorsed

	DPLUS-B04 Number of new/improved sustainable livelihoods/ poverty reduction management plans available and endorsed
<b>Indicator 3.2:</b>	<b><i>Number of people with increased participation in local communities/ local management organisations</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Gender (men, women, other); Governance structure (New; Existing)  DPLUS-B05 Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement).
<b>Indicator 3.3:</b>	<b><i>Number of people with strengthened (recognised/ clarified) tenure and/or rights</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> UKOT; Gender (men, women, other)  DPLUS-B06 Number of people with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights

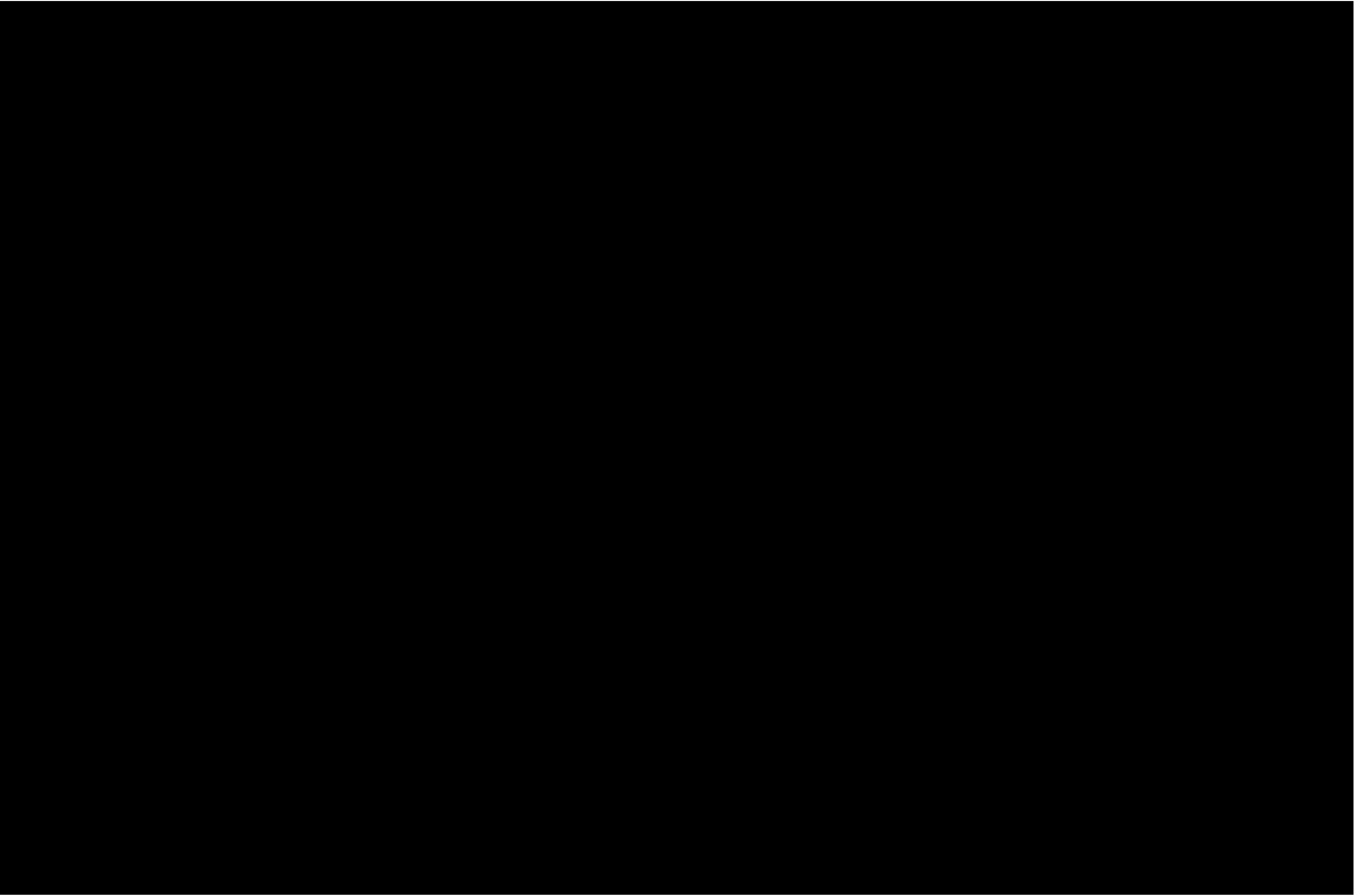
<b>OUTPUT 4</b>	<b><i>Programme management is good and adapts to strengthen the delivery of the challenge fund.</i></b>
<b>Indicator 4.1</b>	<b><i>Number of high-quality applications received</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> funding round, scheme (Local, Main, Fellows, Strategic)  New indicator for D+, not yet set
<b>Indicator 4.2</b>	<b><i>Annual Average Project Annual Report and Final Report Scores</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> funding round, scheme (Local, Main, Fellows/People & Skills, Strategic)  New indicator for D+, not yet set
<b>Indicator 4.3</b>	<b><i>Volume of finance secured to deliver Darwin Plus projects</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> public/private source of finance
<b>Indicator 4.4</b>	<b><i>Number of deep dives conducted in the building and applying evidence Workstream</i></b>
	<u>Disaggregation:</u> Study type (Process, thematic)

## Annex 4: Project case studies

[Redacted content]

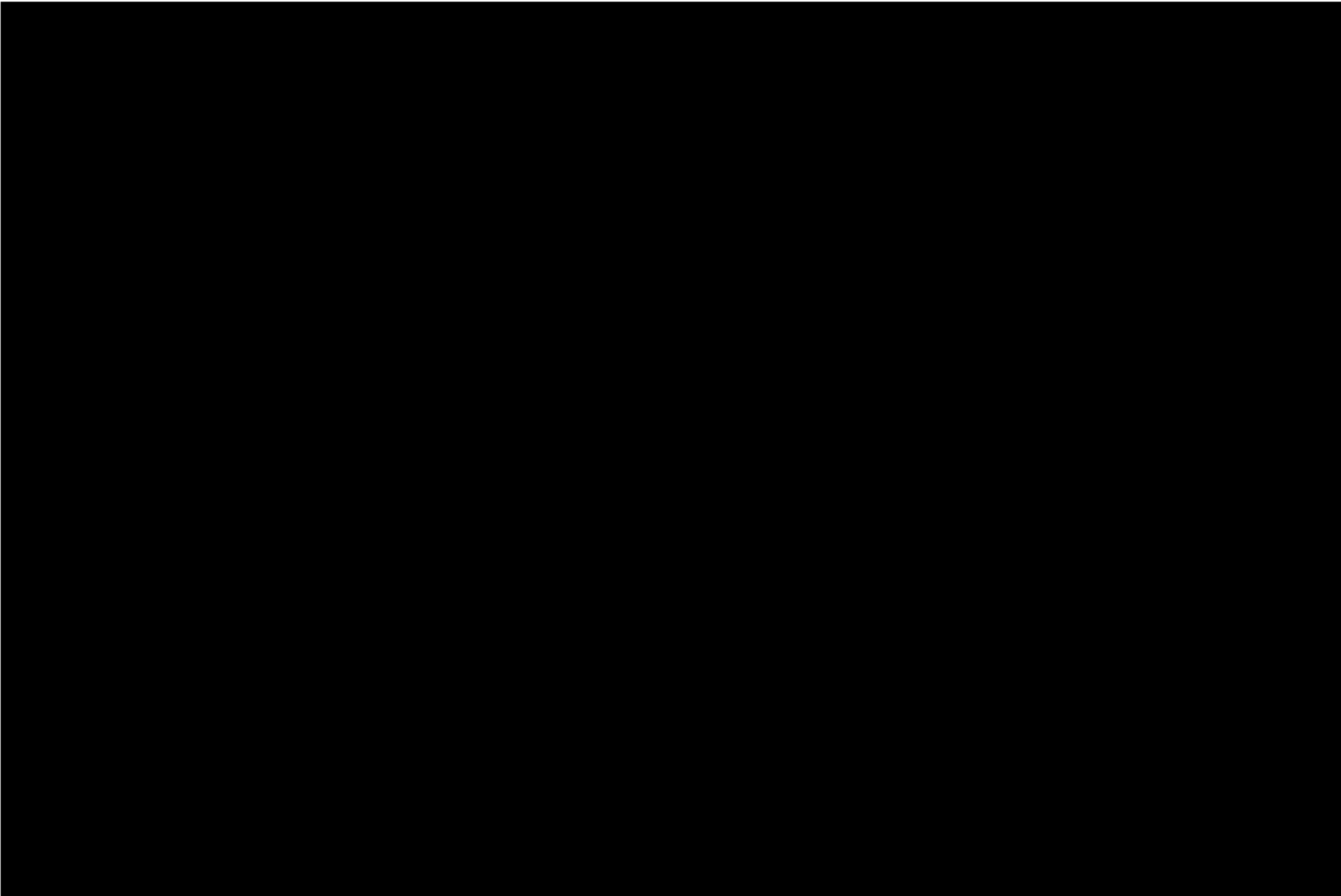
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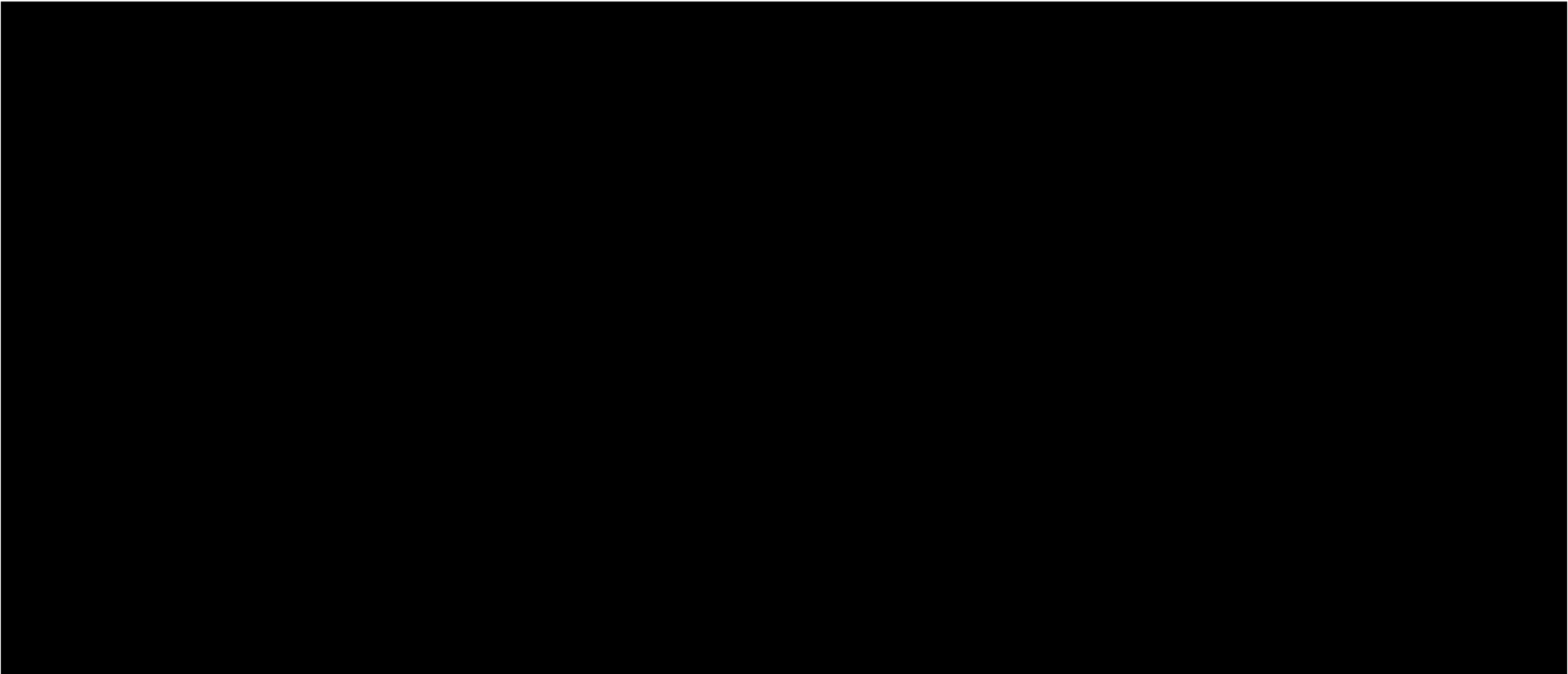












**Table 2:** Selection of photos from recent and ongoing Darwin Plus projects. More available on request.



*DPL00045 Developing biodiversity stewardship among Turks and Caicos Islands fishers through outreach and education.*

(Left) [REDACTED], employee of Provo Seafood processing plant, displays the regulations brochure with [REDACTED], FisherFolkFirst. Five Cays, Providenciales. Credit - [REDACTED]

(Right) Lobster gauge being used by a Turks and Caicos Islands fisher. Credit - [REDACTED]



*DPL00087 Building capacity for vegetation wildfire response in a changing climate*

Trainer [REDACTED] demonstrating the use of leaf blowers during wildlife practical training in Falkland Islands. Credit - [REDACTED]



*DPL00004 Building Capacity for Coral Restoration: Contributing to Bermuda's Blue Infrastructure*

Collecting rescue corals from oil dock pylons to be replaced. Credit - [REDACTED]



*DPL00074 Deep-diving behaviour of Caribbean reef sharks in the Cayman Islands*

Attaching tag to shark. Credit - [REDACTED]



*DPLUS168 Understanding increased Falkland Islands seal bycatch to inform bycatch Action Plan*

Male fur seal wearing satellite tracking device, which will monitor his movements at-sea for over 6-months. [REDACTED]



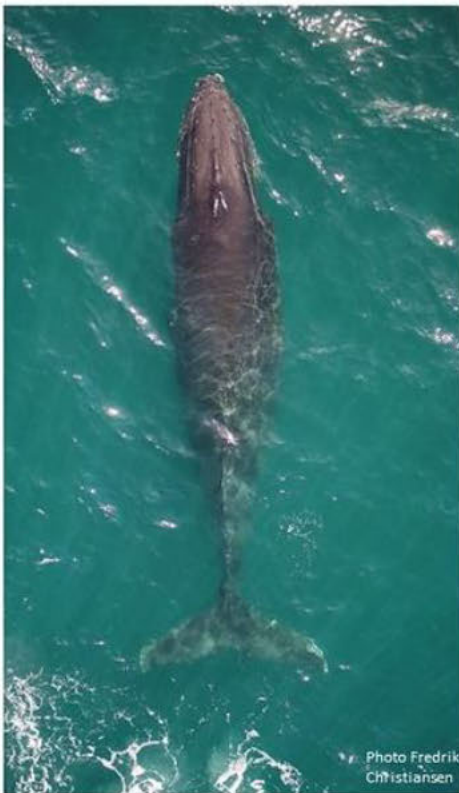
*Multiple Darwin Plus projects across Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia*

Environmental education and awareness raising events organised and/or attended by the Joint Services Health Unit. Credit - [REDACTED]

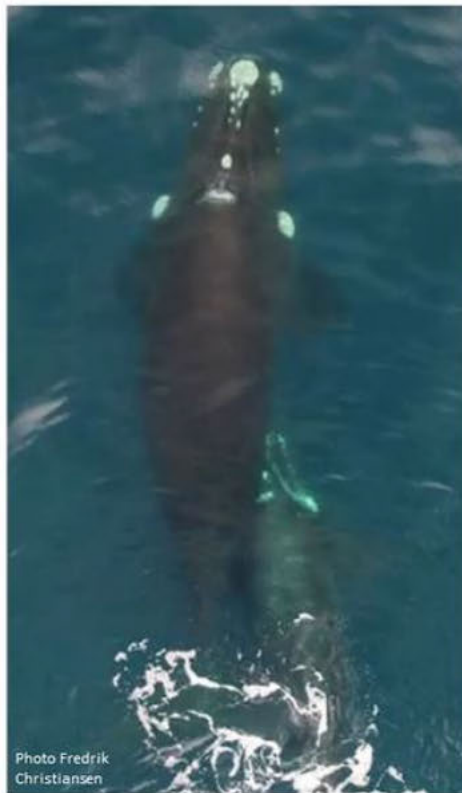


*DPLUS128 Safeguarding Cayman's sister islands from invasive species*

(Left) Green Iguana Night Search Volunteers and staff, (right) Green Iguana nest search volunteers and staff



Humpback Whale



Southern Right Whale  
Mother & Calf pair



Antarctic Blue Whale  
Mother & Calf pair

*DPLUS188 Hungry humpbacks: measuring seasonal foraging intensity at South Georgia*

Drone images of a Humpback Whale, a southern right whale mom and calf, and an Antarctic Blue Whale mother and calf. Credit - [REDACTED]. Images collected under scientific permit SGSSI RAP 2023-40.



*DPLUS125 Protecting Anguilla's biodiversity by building capacity in invasive plant management*

The field team in action. Credit - [REDACTED]



*DPLUS106 A Marine Turtle Action Plan for Montserrat*

Montserrat turtle tagging. Credit - [REDACTED]

## Annex 5: Darwin Plus project application assessment criteria

All eligible applications that meet the required standard will be assessed by the DPAG, who are independent experts within the area that the fund operates.

The DPAG follows a strict code of practice: if any member has been involved in or is closely associated with an application, the applicant or a project partner, they must declare their interest and play no role in its assessment (see the Conflict of Interest Policy set out in the [Biodiversity Challenge Funds Expert Groups Handbook](#)).

A basic overview of the typical assessment process:

1. **Initial Review:** Applications that are poor quality, incomplete or do not meet the eligibility criteria will be rejected. Applicants will be informed of the reasons for rejection. This assessment is completed by NIRAS.
2. **Independent Expert Assessment:** Applications are scored by at least three DPAG members against the assessment criteria to inform the discussion at the Sift Meeting.
3. **Sift Meeting:** Members discuss applications and agree the strongest proposals to recommend to Defra or invite to Stage 2 (followed by a second assessment and sift meeting). The meeting is headed by the DPAG Chair and overseen by Defra and NIRAS.
4. **Funding Decision:** Defra's Darwin Plus Programme Board reviews the DPAG recommendations within the context of Defra's principles (risk, political economy, finance etc.) and recommends to the Minister which grants to award. Defra reserves the right to apply more stringent assessment at the Initial Review if the number of applications is high to ensure that the DPAG can focus their reviews on those with the highest chance of being discussed at the Sift Meeting.

### Learning

Darwin Plus is an evolving programme; lessons learned from our various MEL activities continuously feed back into our processes and criteria, which are monitored through a BCFs recommendations tracker. Because of the commonalities between the three BCFs, areas identified for improvement in one will often be actioned in the other two for consistency and efficiency. The DPAG's expertise and opinion is greatly valued; the Sift meeting is accompanied by a Strategy meeting attended by the DPAG, NIRAS and members of the Darwin Plus Programme Board, where the DPAG are encouraged to give candid feedback on the programme and discuss future developments and ideas for further improvement.

### Assessment criteria

The following assessment criteria are used by the DPAG to score eligible applications for Darwin Plus Main project grants. Please note, a successful project does not need to meet all of the criteria listed below (although they must demonstrate good value for money). A score is generated against each of the three categories. The DPAG then use these three scores to determine the suitability of projects for funding.

#### Policy Priorities:

- The project implements existing proven environmental solutions, or tests promising innovative solutions;
- Any research or scoping work is clearly justified and shows how it will be applied for meaningful environmental outcomes on the ground;
- The project demonstrates substantial measurable outcomes in at least one of the themes of Darwin Plus, either by the end of the project's implementation or via evidenced mechanisms for post-project delivery;
- The project contributes to the delivery of existing commitments for individual Territories, such as those set out within the national biodiversity strategies, environmental action plans and roadmaps, or equivalent.
- The project supports commitments set out within the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) Communiqués or any commitments under international conventions extended to their Territory, such as contributing to the goals in the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;
- The project has good local ownership, as evidenced by commitment from relevant local stakeholders including UKOT Governments or UKOT civil society;
- The project outcomes will contribute to embedding good environmental decision-making in UKOT policies and processes.

#### Impact:

- The project applicant has the capacity and capability to deliver the project;
- The project contributes to environmental goods and services within the UKOT(s);
- The project is sustainable – the outcomes will be sustained after the funding is finished;
- The project demonstrates how it will strengthen the capability and capacity of local partners.

#### Technical Excellence:

- The project has been well-planned and has a clear goal, purpose and outputs;
- The activities are practical and achievable;
- The risks are identified, assessed and have clear mitigation actions;
- The monitoring and evaluation plan is adequately budgeted, ensures changes are measurable and exhibits a clear understanding of the evidence needed to demonstrate these changes, and how this evidence will be shared and made publicly available;
- A well-defined exit strategy is in place from the start of funding;
- The project represents value for money;
- The uncertainty and probability of the risk of negative or unintended outcomes is understood and will be managed effectively;

- The project addresses inequality, including gender inequality, through its design, monitoring and evaluation; and intentional or unintentional increases in inequality will be prevented.

#### Assessment scoring

Points	Description
6	Strong Demonstration of Evidence. Substantial evidence presented that it <b>meets all the of assessment criteria, with no concerns raised</b> ; the majority of which are met to a high standard. There may be a few minor issues which if addressed may improve the project, but they are unlikely to be detrimental to the delivery of the project and should not prevent it from being funded without changes being made.
5	Good Demonstration of Evidence. Good evidence presented that it <b>meets most of the assessment criteria, no major concerns identified</b> . The met criteria are mostly to a high standard. There are minor issues that could improve the project, but should not prevent it from being funded. It is likely to significantly contribute to the objectives of the fund.
4	Acceptable Demonstration of Evidence. The proposed project <b>meets most of the assessment criteria, no major concerns identified</b> . The criteria it does meet are often to a good standard. There are a few minor issues that would improve this project which they would be advised to consider if funded. It is likely to contribute to the objectives of the fund.
<b><i>Indicative scoring threshold of competitive applications</i></b>	
3	Emerging Demonstration of Evidence that the proposed project <b>meets many of the assessment criteria, some concerns raised</b> . Those met criteria are largely to an acceptable standard, and the concerns can be addressed. It has the potential to contribute to the objectives of the fund, if the issues are addressed to strengthen it.
2	Weak Demonstration of Evidence. The project <b>meets some of the assessment criteria, or has raised concerns</b> . Those criteria it does meet are to a modest standard, but the application requires important changes to address the concerns and assessment criteria in order to make it competitive.
1	Minimal demonstration of Evidence. The proposed project is unsatisfactory and <b>meets only a few criteria, or raises important concerns</b> . The proposal is likely to require significant revision.
0	No demonstration of Evidence. The project <b>fails to meet any of the criteria outlined and raises serious concerns</b> e.g. flawed approach, subject to serious technical difficulties or risks, unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, or is duplicative.

## Annex 6: Cost-benefit analysis of the preferred option against the do-nothing option

### Cost-benefit analysis

A cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken, assessing the impacts of the preferred option relative to the do-nothing option.

Although Darwin Plus is projected to achieve a range of benefits, the majority are not readily monetisable. However, the projected impacts of Darwin Plus Local against the following indicator are monetisable, using ecosystem service values<sup>9</sup>: “DPLUS-D01: Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices”. As such, a partial cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken, considering the following costs and benefits:

- The expected ecosystem service benefits achieved by Darwin Plus Local
- Defra programme costs of Darwin Plus
- Expected co-funding and mobilised finance costs of Darwin Plus

The following assumptions are used in the cost-benefit analysis:

- There is a 1-year lag between Defra spend in 2025/26 and benefit realisation in 2026/27.
- Benefit realisation only occurs for 1 year in 2026/27. This is a conservative assumption, as we may expect benefits to be sustained at some level beyond this.
- An indicative 25% overall leakage rate is applied to benefits. This includes, for example, the possible diversion of unsustainable practices into other habitats, reducing programme benefits.
- An indicative 10% discount rate has been used, reflecting that costs and benefits may be discounted at a higher rate in other countries, compared to the UK 3.5% domestic rate.
- Projects have 100% additionality, with the assumption that programme impacts, and any leveraged finance, would not have been realised without Defra funding for Darwin Plus.

There are significant uncertainties in the projects of the hectares of habitat brought under sustainable management practices and the subsequent ecosystem service benefits:

- Projections are based on reported outcomes for Darwin Plus Local projects funded in 2023/24. This is the most recent round of reporting available at the time of this cost-benefit analysis. This assumes that similar projects will be funded in 2025/26, however it is possible that they will have different scope and impacts.
- It is possible that data drawn from projects funded in 2023/24 could be under or overreporting results that have been used to inform projections.
- It is assumed that each hectare of habitat brought under sustainable management practices will result in a 5% increase in the value of ecosystem services associated with that hectare. This is an indicative assumption and there is significant uncertainty on the impact of sustainable management practices.
- The value of ecosystem services will vary by biome and geography. It is currently not possible to project which biomes and geographies future Darwin Plus Local projects will operate. As such, a mean ecosystem service value, across all biomes and geographies, is used to monetise benefits<sup>10</sup>. Disaggregation by biome

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<sup>9</sup> Drawn from the Ecosystem Services Valuation Database, based on HMT Green Book supplementary guidance: [ESVD](#)

<sup>10</sup> This includes the following biomes: marine, coastal systems, inland wetlands, tropical and subtropical forests, temperate forest and woodland, cold climate evergreen forest and woodland, shrubland and shrubby woodland, rangelands and natural grasslands, desert and semi desert, polar and alpine systems. Ecosystem service benefits linked to climate regulation are excluded, due to differences in carbon saving valuations compared to HMT Green Book guidance.

has now been made mandatory in Version 2.1 of the Darwin Plus Standard reporting Indicators, so this level of granularity will become available for future analyses.

Table 1 below presents value-for-money metrics for Darwin Plus. The range reflects:

- Uncertainty in the extent of results underreporting by Darwin Plus Local projects funded in 2023/24, used to inform projections.
- Uncertainty in the levels of leveraged finance, affecting social costs.

*Table 1: Value-for-money metrics for Darwin Plus*

Value-for-money metric	Darwin Plus (all components)
Benefit-cost ratio	28.2 – 35.1
Net present social value (2025/26 prices and present value)	£337.6m - £364.7m
Return on public sector costs	39.5 – 42.7

These estimates indicate very high value-for-money of providing funding for Darwin Plus in 2025/26, if similar results are achieved to projects that were funded in 2023/24. We expect additional non-monetised benefits, which include, but are not limited to:

- Increased disaster/climate resilience for residents of Overseas Territories
- Active restoration of degraded or converted ecosystems
- Improved capability for local/national organisations
- Development of habitat and species management plans
- Increased participation in local communities / local management organisations

As such, we could expect value-for-money to be significantly higher than the estimated benefit-cost ratio (BCR) range, when considering the additional value of these non-monetised benefits.

However, as outlined above, there are several uncertainties in the assumptions underpinning these estimates. These uncertainties could result in value-for-money being overstated. Therefore, a sensitivity analysis of these assumptions has been undertaken, to explore value-for-money further.

### **Cost-benefit sensitivity analysis**

Cost-benefit analysis of the preferred option was tested for key sensitivities, reflecting:

- The impact of different ecosystem service values, across different biomes.
- The required improvement in ecosystem services, per hectare of habitat under sustainable management practices, to allow Darwin Plus to break even.
- The required hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices, to allow Darwin Plus to break even.

For assumptions that are not being tested, the sensitivity analysis uses values underpinning the 'low' estimates presented in the main cost-benefit analysis. This allows a conservative analysis of programme value-for-money.

The biome with the lowest ecosystem service value is "polar and alpine systems", which is valued 96% lower than the mean value across all biomes. This reflects both a difference in the value placed on ecosystem services in

this biome, as well as more limited evidence to fully value its ecosystem services. Table 2, below, presents value-for-money metrics, if all hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices occurred in “polar and alpine systems”.

*Table 2: Sensitivity analysis of Darwin Plus value-for-money<sup>11</sup>*

Value-for-money metric	Darwin Plus (all components)
Benefit-cost ratio	1.0
Net present social value (2025/26 prices and present value)	£0.3m
Return on public sector costs	0.03

This sensitivity analysis shows that using pessimistic assumptions on ecosystem service values, Darwin Plus would be at the break-even point, with a BCR of 1.0. However, we would expect value-for-money to significantly exceed the break-even point under this scenario, due to the range of expected non-monetised benefits outlined above.

Further, analysis suggests that for Darwin Plus to break even in 2025/26:

- Each hectare of habitat brought under sustainable management practices would only need to improve the value of ecosystem services by 0.2%. This is significantly lower than the indicative 5% improvement assumed in the main cost-benefit analysis<sup>12</sup>.
- Projects funded in 2025/26 would only need to bring 20,671 hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices. This is significantly lower than the 583,709 hectares assumed for the ‘low’ estimates in the main cost-benefit analysis<sup>13</sup>.

Given the very low break-even values for these assumptions, this adds further confidence that Darwin Plus is likely to deliver very high value-for-money, if projects funded in 2025/26 deliver similar results to those funded in 2023/24.

<sup>11</sup> This assumes 583,709 hectares of habitat are brought under sustainable management practices, with a 5% increase in the value of ecosystem services per hectare.

<sup>12</sup> This assumes 583,709 hectares of habitat are brought under sustainable management practices, valued using a mean ecosystem service value across all biomes and geographies.

<sup>13</sup> This assumes a 5% increase in the value of ecosystem services, per hectare of habitat brought under sustainable management practices, valued using a mean ecosystem service value across all biomes and geographies.

## Annex 7: Programme commercial expenditure to date

Darwin Plus expenditure on commercial partners, from start of current Full Business Case (April 2022) to date.

**Table 1:** Expenditure against NIRAS contract to date.

Expenditure against contract to date	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Totals
Workstream 1 – Application Process				
Workstream 2 – Expert Groups				
Workstream 3 – Management of Projects				
Workstream 4 – Financial Management				
Workstream 5 – Building and Applying Evidence				
Workstream 6 – Capability and Capacity Building				
Workstream 7 – Communications				
Workstream 8 – General Contract Management				
<b>Total</b>				

**Table 2:** Expenditure against JNCC agreements to date

Expenditure against agreements to date	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Totals
Darwin Plus Local administration				
OTs Biodiversity Strategy Development				
K3/K4 indicator work				
ACAP				
<b>Total</b>				

**Table 3:** Expenditure against Fera Work Order Form to date

Expenditure against Work Order Form to date	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total
Pest ID service				

**Table 4:** Expenditure against APHA agreement to date

Expenditure against agreement to date	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total
OTs Biosecurity project				

**Table 5:** Expenditure against Forestry Commission agreement to date

Expenditure against agreement to date	2023/24
Vegetation wildfire training	£90,000

## Annex 8: Darwin Plus Indicative Evaluation Plan

### Introduction

Darwin Plus is a UK Government grants scheme that helps deliver long-term strategic outcomes for the unique biodiversity, the natural environment and improving resilience to climate change within the UK Overseas Territories (OTs). It consists of four grant schemes: Darwin Plus Local, Darwin Plus Main, Darwin Plus Strategic and Darwin Plus People and Skills (the new name for the long-standing Darwin Plus Fellowships scheme).

The programme forms part of Defra's Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCF) alongside the Darwin Initiative and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund.

The BCF analyst will procure an independent evaluation through an evaluation service provider. We will commission the evaluation of the three BCF together to enable cross cutting lessons to be identified at strategic and process level. There will be specific questions relating to Darwin Plus within the broader BCF evaluation.

### Purpose

The overall aim of the evaluation is to assess the relevance, performance (effectiveness and impact), Value for Money and sustainability of the BCF. The evaluation will go beyond the monitoring of outputs (which will be led by the Fund Administrator and PMO) to identify the mechanisms through which change takes place; and assess the likelihood of long-term benefits being sustained.

The evaluation will have two main purposes:

- (a) *Learning*: Darwin Plus is designed to be a transformational programme, and share lessons learnt on what works to tackle biodiversity loss in the UKOTs. This will be used to drive improvements to Darwin Plus, broader UK Government biodiversity programming, as well as strengthen the wider conservation evidence base. It will be a learning tool for use during programme implementation, as well as generate evidence that is applicable to future planning or other programmes.
- (b) *Accountability*: Darwin Plus is a significant investment of public funds (more than £55m for 320 projects since its 2012 establishment). From 2024, Spending Review bids submitted to HM Treasury will need to demonstrate evaluation evidence to make the case for future funding.

### Use, users and other audiences

The evaluation findings will be used to adjust how the programme is delivered, and to account for public funds. The primary audiences will be Defra senior managers, Darwin Plus leadership and delivery teams.

It will be used to improve current and future Darwin Plus (and BCF) interventions by providing the evidence for Defra and the Fund Administrator to make better decisions and fund more effective activities. The 2026 interim evaluation milestone will help ensure lessons learned are fed into ongoing Darwin Plus planning and implementation (currently a new Business Case is planned for April 2026 - March 2029).

Secondary audiences may include:

- (a) Other HMG programme decision-makers working to protect biodiversity and the natural environment in the UK and elsewhere, for example the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.
- (b) Other donors and international bodies (such as those under the Convention on Biological Diversity). This knowledge will be useful for grantees, other governments, NGOs and donors planning conservation interventions. It will also be useful for businesses, for example those managing or directly reliant on natural resources. It will be useful for academics and those in the conservation or climate change fields researching effective ways to tackle biodiversity loss and global warming.
- (c) Accountability bodies (e.g. the ODA Board, HM Treasury and parliamentary committees).

The evaluation will be published and made freely available when complete. The BCF communications strategy details the various channels that could be used for dissemination.

### Evaluation type and design

Type of evaluation: impact evaluation, and economic evaluation (Value for Money). Process evaluation is less important, as many of the process-oriented recommendations from the 2022 Ecorys BCF evaluation have been actioned, and recent deep dives (such as the 'Review of the Darwin Plus Local funding scheme') have made (or will make) recommendations that have been (or will be) incorporated into planning.

Many of evaluation questions and much of the effort will be targeted towards those Theory of Change assumptions where there are evidence gaps. Potential key questions for Darwin Plus evaluation:

#### Impact

- Have planned impacts (detailed in the Theory of Change) been achieved? For Darwin Plus this is: *"The Rates of biodiversity loss and degradation in UKOTs are slowed, halted or reversed"*
- Do Logframe outputs (e.g. evidence generation, capacity building, new/improved policies and management) lead to better outcomes?
- What is the legacy of Darwin Plus projects? Are project impacts and outcomes (and other benefits) sustained over time?
- What contribution has Darwin Plus made to tackling climate change (mitigation and adaptation)?
- Does Darwin Plus respond to local challenges, and do local engagement and capacity building efforts and new partnerships effectively benefit biodiversity and deliver community wellbeing?

#### Value for Money

- How does Value for Money compare with other conservation programmes?

The approach for evaluating Value for Money across the Darwin Plus programme and answering the above question will be heavily steered by outcomes from the (now finalised) Deep Dive on Value for Money across the BCFs (including Darwin Plus) and may therefore not feature strongly in the external BCF evaluation described here. This Deep Dive aims to:

- a. Explore the potential for a process of regular, systematic assessment of Value for Money in BCF-funded projects. This will be done through a brief review of processes at relevant grant

making facilities and other large-scale, systematic programmes focused on achieving impacts in biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

- b. Identify opportunities to collect higher quality data to inform enhanced assessment of Value for Money while acknowledging the need to keep reporting burdens to a minimum.

This will help to address the current limitations in assessing Value for Money across the programme.

As part of the Deep Dive, a **Value for Money framework** (see **Table 1**) has been developed, which maps indicators (many of which are already routinely recorded at the project level as Standard reporting Indicators) against the four E's: Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity. This will help to standardise and ensure high quality, disaggregated reporting on Value for Money across the programme.

**Table 1.** Extract from Darwin Plus Value for Money framework.

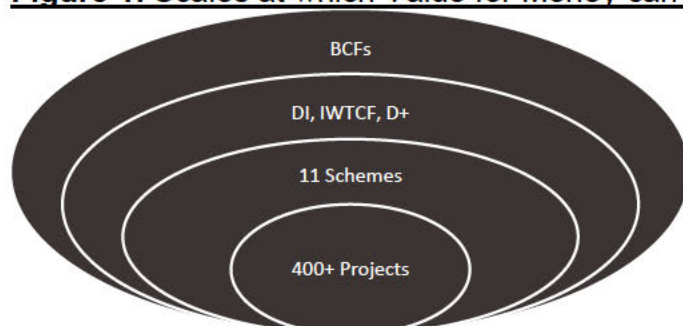
	Value for Money indicators	Assumptions
<b>Economy</b>	<b>Economy Indicator 1</b> Overhead costs as % of total programme spend	<b>Indicator 1</b> Overhead costs = Defra staff costs + Expert Group costs + NIRAS Fund Admin but not activities that are adding to quality (eg. Workstream 5 + Capability and Capacity + 50% comms)  <b>Indicator 2</b> is based on assessment of qualitative and quantitative info, requires accompanying word doc with concise narrative referring to Annual Report Section etc where info is stored.
	<b>Economy Indicator 2</b> Quality of procurement and personnel resource management processes (RAG)	
<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>Efficiency indicator 1</b> Cost per person in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training	<b>Indicator 1</b> considers only Capability and Capacity projects, assumes that full project budgets were spent to deliver training.  <b>Indicator 2</b> is qualitative, requires accompanying word doc with concise narrative referring to Annual Report Section etc where info is stored.
	<b>Efficiency indicator 2</b> Extent and quality of measures taken in last year to improve efficiency (RAG)	
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>Effectiveness indicator 1</b> DPLUS-A03 Number of local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity	<b>Indicators 1–3</b> taken from Synthesis  <b>Indicator 4</b> taken from all projects submitting a Final Report during the reporting period.
	<b>Effectiveness indicator 2</b> DPLUS-D01 Area of land or sea under ecological management	
	<b>Effectiveness indicator 3</b> DPLUS-D05a Number of people supported to better adapt to the effects of climate change	
	<b>Effectiveness indicator 4</b>	

	Value of co-funding leveraged (as % of total Defra spend)	
<b>Equity</b>	<b>Equity indicator 1</b> % of projects that are confirmed by reviewers to be GESI sensitive	<b>Indicators 1–2</b> All projects submitting an Annual Report or a Final Report  <b>Indicator 3</b> The suitability and ease with which this indicator can be measured is to be determined. This can be assessed during a pilot round of reporting results from the 2024/25 period
	<b>Equity indicator 2</b> % of projects that are confirmed by reviewers to be GESI empowering	
	<b>Equity indicator 3</b> % of project funding that goes directly to UKOT-based organisations	

The Deep Dive **explores the potential for more advanced VfM assessment across the BCFs, including a cost-benefit analysis**. Monetisation of benefits will be possible for some Darwin Plus projects. This information would be useful for programme Business Cases and Annual Reviews, for example to make a stronger case for investment by assessing cost-effectiveness through benefit-cost ratios, as well as to better understand the distribution of project benefits between different actors in a landscape or region. There is some potential to institute standardised reporting of monetised outcomes if Darwin Plus uses a Standard Indicator to quantify additional value of ecosystem services attributable to projects. For example, DPLUS-D01 “Area of land or sea under ecological management” could be used to produce monetised estimates of ecosystem service benefits from investment on a basic level, particularly if it is disaggregated by OT, biome and management type.

In addition, the Deep Dive explores **how Value for Money can be assessed and compared at four different scales within the BCFs**, in accordance with the nested structure of projects within schemes and funds shown in **Figure 1** below. The Deep Dive considers the challenges and limitations this approach poses.

**Figure 1. Scales at which Value for Money can be assessed**



Note: DI = Darwin Initiative; IWTCF = Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund; D+ = Darwin Plus

### Learning

- Are the assumptions in the Darwin Plus Theory of Change valid (especially those without a strong evidence base)?
- Have recommendations in the 2022 Ecorys BCF evaluation been addressed?

- Have BCF weaknesses identified in the 2022 Ecorys evaluation been addressed? Notably, have Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) issues been fully integrated across project design, and considering project-level GESI expertise and trade-offs?
- Have key lessons on project level processes from the Ecorys 2022 evaluation been addressed? For example:
  - Do projects have strong logframes and sufficient knowledge and experience of local context, and are they designed to be participatory and build upon and work with other projects?
  - Do projects adapt to changing circumstances, clearly identify risks during project design and integrate 'Do No Harm' principles into their work?
  - When working with partners, do projects clearly identify management structures; have regular and tailored methods of communication? When working with other stakeholders do projects ensure ownership and buy-in of local stakeholders and allocate sufficient time and resource for managing the relationship?
  - Do projects clearly plan their influencing strategy to influence changes in policy?
- What are the key evidence gaps in the context of conservation, and how can the Darwin Plus help address these?

## Method

- Theory-based methods such as contribution analysis, or process tracing.
- Mixed methods approaches to support triangulation and thus confidence in findings. Participatory methods (especially with grantees and where possible beneficiaries) will help ground-truth reported findings.
- Interviews and focus groups, surveys, cohort study, case studies.
- Level 2 in terms of NESTA standards of evidence predominantly expected. If control group identification is possible, NESTA level 3 may be possible in some areas.
- Analysis of data from ongoing Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning processes.<sup>14</sup> Sources include results measured and reported by delivery partners, collated via the Darwin Plus Logframe and results framework; mid-term and end-of-project reviews; Workstream 5 evidence deep dives; legacy evaluations; and project-specific evaluations. Care will be taken in the evaluation design to ensure that any new data collected complements, rather than duplicates, project-specific monitoring and evaluation.<sup>15</sup>
- Timing:
  - The evaluation will be composed of modules, and we may already be able to address some of these by the **interim evaluation planned for 2026**. The interim evaluation will feed lessons into ongoing BCF implementation.
  - A new Full Business Case and ensuing contract for 2026 - 2029 is currently planned for Darwin Plus. Hence, the **Darwin Plus evaluation end point is scheduled for 2029** (1 year

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<sup>14</sup> Including processes and literature planned / budgeted for by the Fund Administrator (but often externally contracted to secure sufficient expertise and ensure independence) under Workstream 5 on 'Building and Applying Evidence for BCFs'.

<sup>15</sup> Early in 2025, Defra will determine which of the intended evaluation questions will be answered fully or partially by data collected by Darwin Plus delivery partners. Defra will then assess whether data collection suffices to enable those evaluation questions to be answered and consider additional measures to ensure that the right data is available at the right time to answer the evaluation questions.

later than the other BCFs). A break clause will be inserted for 2026 should it become necessary to stop the evaluation at this point.

### Commissioning and governance

- External commissioning proposed to ensure independence. This will use the new external MEL international services provider contract.
- A Defra-led steering group<sup>16</sup> will guide evaluation commissioning and provide high-level steering to evaluation management. This will also include external expertise (potentially from biodiversity fields) to ensure independent scrutiny. The Lead BCF Analyst will manage the commissioning process, contract management and regular communication with the selected provider.
- Engagement with the evaluation from stakeholders is vital to ensure the purpose is clear, it is tailored to the needs of audiences, and to support a learning culture across the programme. We will actively involve key stakeholders, including Defra senior managers, the Darwin Plus Programme Board, delivery teams, grantees, beneficiaries, and external experts, at various stages of the evaluation process.

### Budget

A rule of thumb for a programme evaluation is roughly 3% of the overall programme budget, however this varies considerably from one programme to another, and given a longstanding robust evidence base already exists and significant existing MEL work is already planned and budgeted for, ~1% of the BCF contract value is recommended. In addition to this, MEL activities are already budgeted for individual projects: applicants for Darwin Plus grants are advised that “**Monitoring and Evaluation costs should be included in the [project] budget**, allocated to the appropriate budget line (e.g. Staff Costs, T&S etc.). As a guide, we would normally expect to see M&E costs of between 5 and 10% of your total budget cost.”

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<sup>16</sup> With representation from the Darwin Plus Programme Board, Darwin Plus Advisory Group, the Fund Manager and Defra Biodiversity Challenge Funds team.

## Annex 9: BCF Deep Dives

Round 2 BCF deep dives (underway or completed)

DD23-09	<b>Connecting project teams with impact evaluation specialists</b> Objective: To explore alternatives and recommend a process for to connect promising projects with specialists who can help them to design and implement projects in a way that generates one of the most robust forms of evidence available – experimental evidence.	Completed
DD23-10	<b>Scale and transformational change in the BCFs</b> Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Propose a framework through which to define and understand the concepts of scaling and transformation.</li> <li>Use the framework to identify 3–5 past or current BCFs-supported projects that have demonstrated potential to scale or to deliver transformational change.</li> <li>Adapt the framework for use in the BCFs, in particular to provide guidance to applicants and grantees on how to design projects with scale and transformation in mind, as well as to provide reviewers with guidance on how to evaluate with scale and transformation in mind. (articles, blogs, newsletters etc) published by the BCFs, project leaders and third parties</li> </ul>	Completed
DD23-11	<b>Opportunities for use of AI and Large Language Models (LLMs) to improve the efficiency of synthesis processes</b> Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build and test tailored AI tools on a selection of representative tasks across the fund management cycle and assess the quality and usefulness of the AI, plus make specific recommendations for how the AI could be used for the tasks</li> <li>Based on the experience from above, map the potential for using AI across all the BCFs' fund management broad task areas, identify the main AI tools that would be needed for each task area and how AI could be used</li> </ul>	Completed
DD23-12	<b>Scoping study on Value-for-Money assessment in the BCF portfolios.</b> Objectives Scoping exercise to identify: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how VfM is currently being assessed in the BCFs, and</li> <li>whether there is potential for VfM assessment to be used more extensively.</li> </ol>	Completed
DD23-13	<b>Sustainability in the BCFs – Phase 1</b> Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the different pathways by which BCF projects have brought about sustained benefits.</li> <li>Identify the key factors that mean that the positive impact of BCF projects will be sustained over time</li> <li>Develop guidance for those selecting, managing/supporting, and implementing projects to ensure projects have more sustained positive impacts over time. Guidance should be specific to Expert committees; the Fund Manager and Defra; and Grantees.</li> </ul> Phased approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phase 1 (underway) Develop evaluation framework and sampling approach</li> <li>Phase 2 Conduct evaluation of a cluster (or multiple clusters) of several closed BCFs projects to identify what they legacy has been – under Round 3</li> </ul>	Underway
DD23-14	<b>IWT Challenge Fund - Poverty Reduction Strategies</b> Objectives:	Completed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and assess the key characteristics of poverty reduction strategies within Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund (IWTCF) projects: examining how projects define and seek to tackle poverty, how they characterise the links between poverty and IWT, and how this varies across the IWTCF portfolio.</li> <li>Establish the primary poverty reduction challenges for the IWTCF, offer recommendations for revising the Theory of Change, provide direction for updating Standard Indicators, develop new guidelines for the IWT Advisory Group on assessing the poverty reduction elements of applications, and improve guidance for demand reduction projects aimed at changing consumer behaviour in wealthier communities.</li> </ul>	
DD23-15	<b>Markets and livelihoods in BCF projects</b> <b>Objectives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide an evaluation of livelihoods programming across the Biodiversity Challenges Funds (including the Darwin Initiative, the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus), comparing performance with current best practice in the economic development sector, and making recommendations for future livelihoods programming and fund management.</li> </ul>	Completed

Round 3 BCF deep dives (underway or still in planning phase)

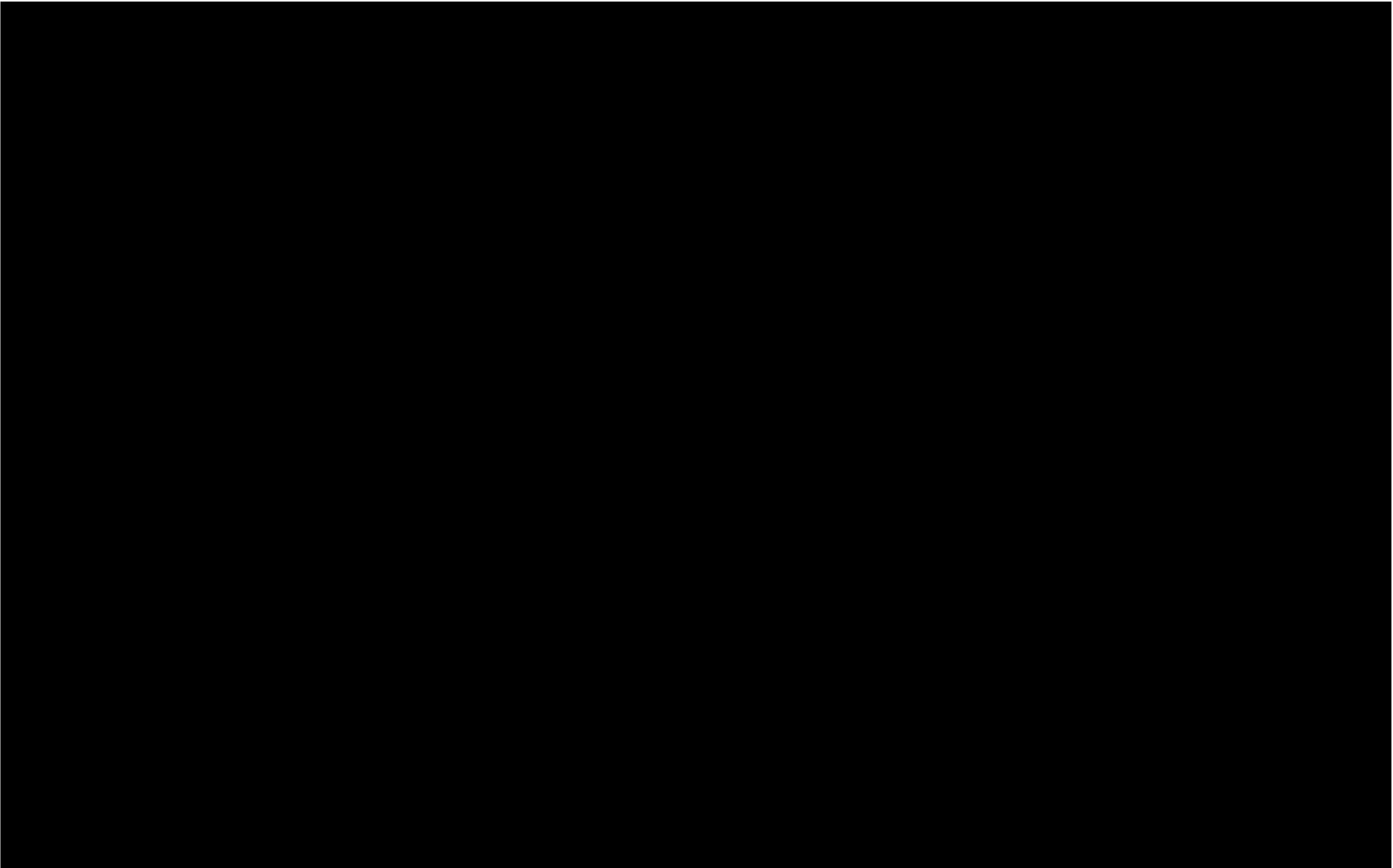
DD24-02	<b>Developing indicators and methods for the BCFs Results Frameworks</b> Will result in publication of guidance notes for selected BCFs Standard Indicators, prioritising those which align with DII and ICF KPI reporting. This will ensure more standardized reporting, enable us to more credibly and confidently report into ICF system.	Underway
DD24-03	<b>Darwin Plus Local</b> Assessment to understand early challenges and successes from first two rounds of the Darwin Plus Local scheme	Completed
DD24-04	<b>Embedding the use of AI in the BCFs</b> Building on directions identified in Scoping study (in round 2), identify use case and aim to have an AI tool developed, tested and embedded in Fund Management by the end of the deep dive	Underway
DD24-05	<b>Theory of Change mapping exercise</b> During ToC workshops Defra indicated that they would like to have detailed ToCs with the goal of specifying the relevant causal chains that are believed to be important for bringing about intended fund outcomes. This is a brief, high-level piece of work that will articulate evidence (e.g. external sources with high level of credibility) for causal chains. The ToC mapping will be done using a deductive, theory-based approach and informed by the perceptions key informants including those responsible for Fund Leadership in Defra.	Underway

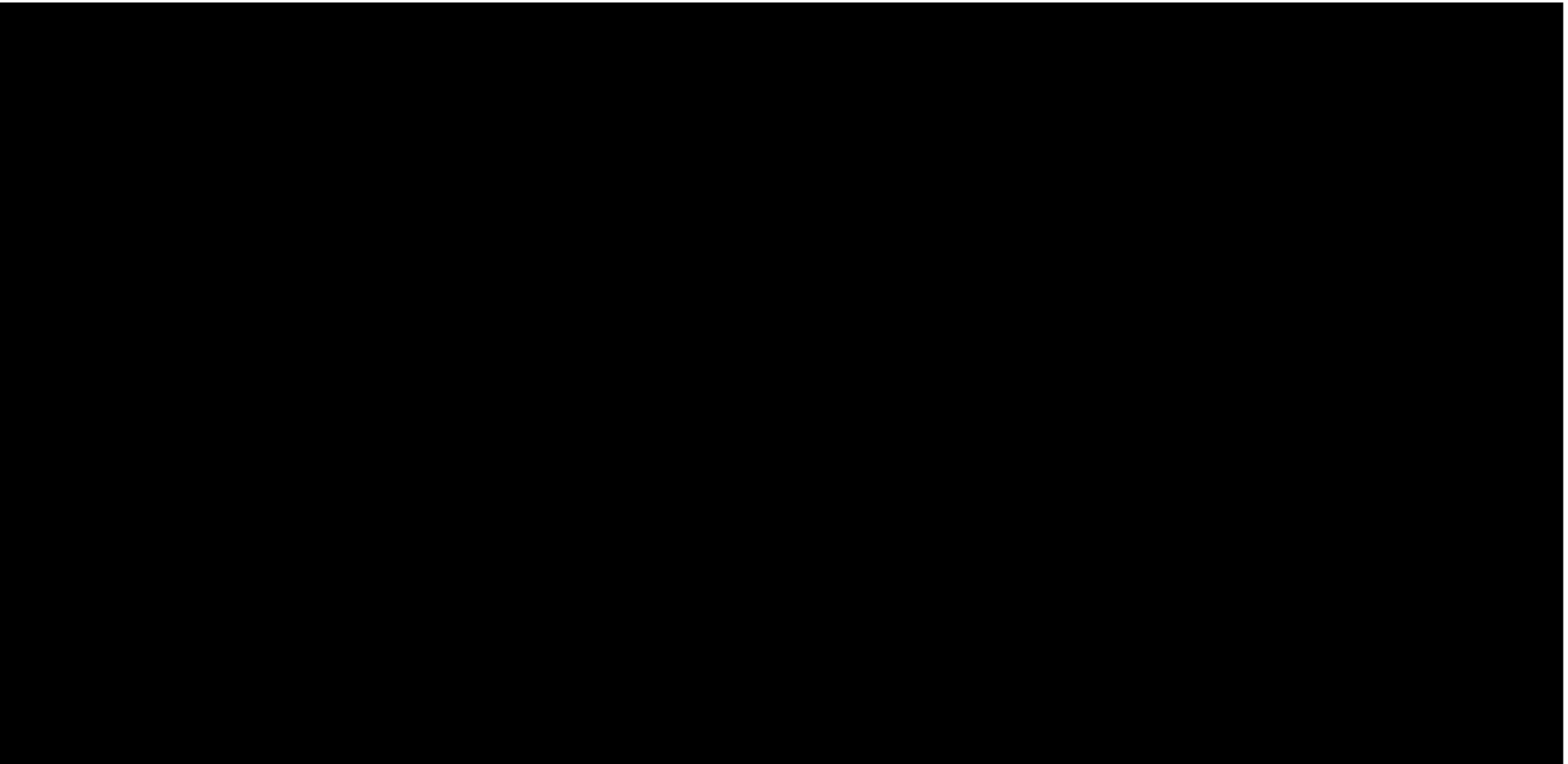




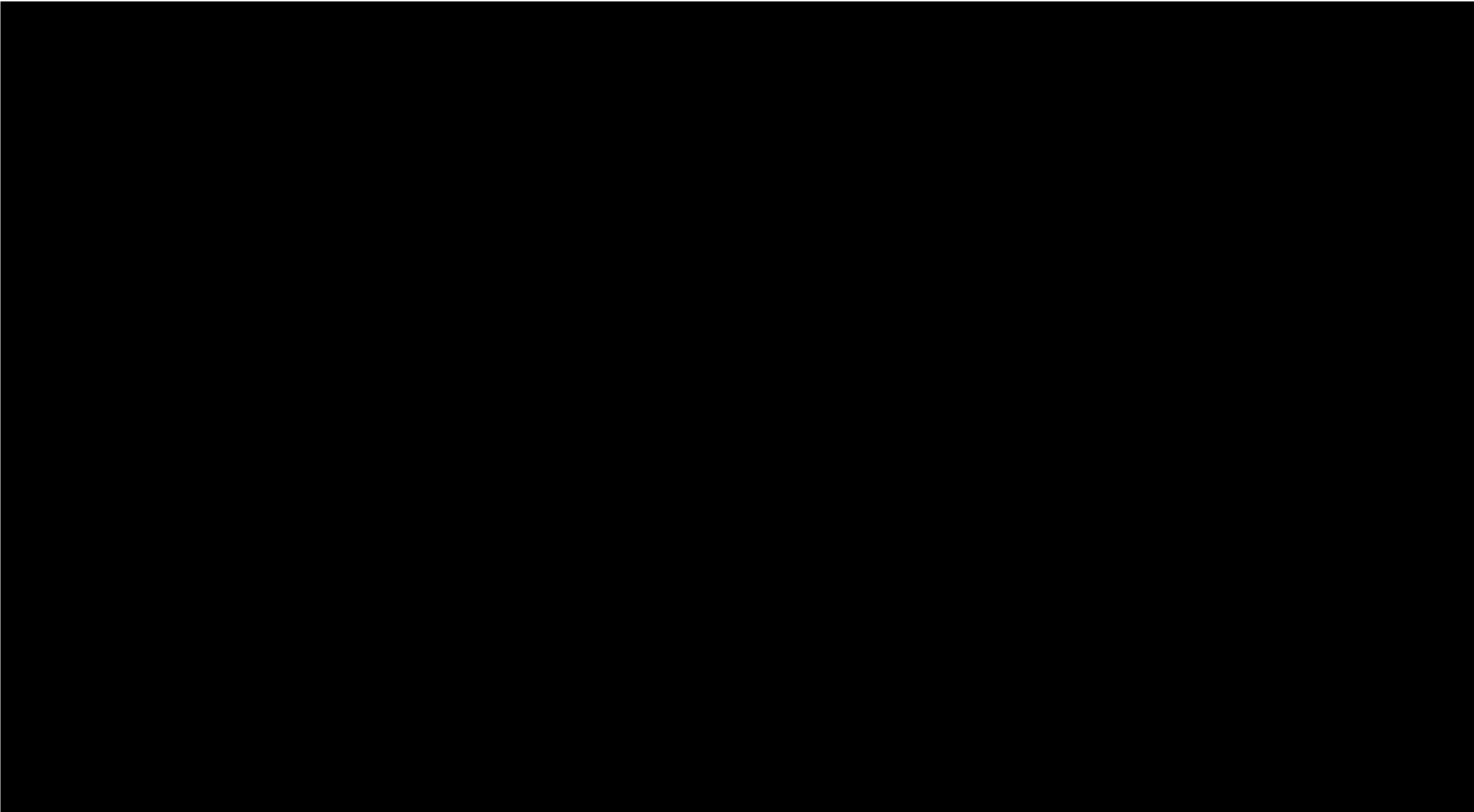








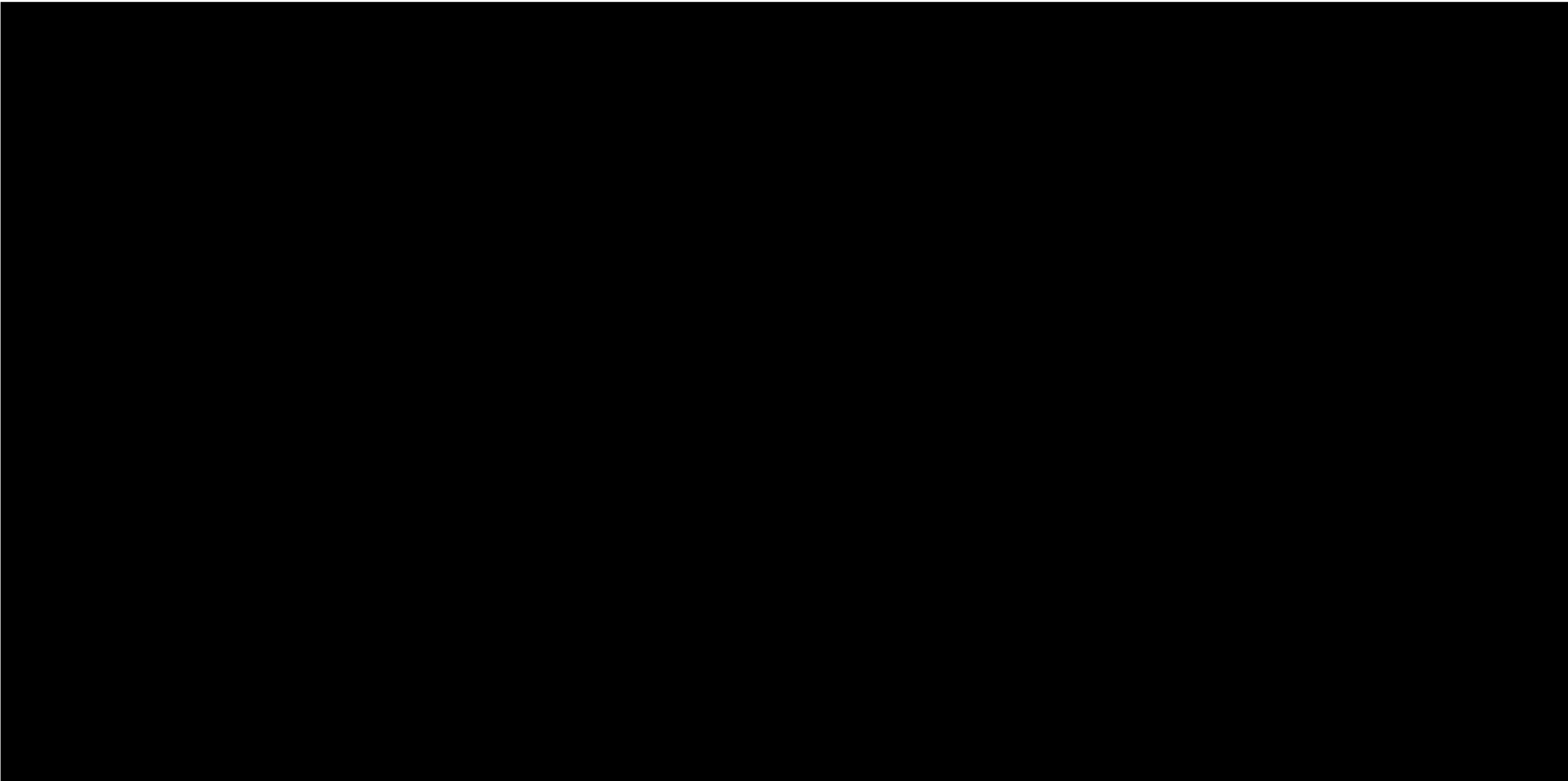












## Annex 11: Darwin Plus Funding Rounds Delivery Plan for 2025/26

Proposed scheduled for delivering Darwin Plus grant funding over 2025-26. Please note, we do not plan to invite new applications for projects until 2026/27 (i.e. until a new FBC for the programme is developed).

Timeline	Darwin+ Main	Darwin+ People & Skills	Darwin+ Local	Darwin+ Strategic
<b>April 2025</b>	Unsuccessful applicants informed of outcome.  Applications still under consideration informed of delays.	Unsuccessful applicants informed of outcome.  Applications still under consideration informed of delays.	Unsuccessful applicants informed of outcome.  Applications still under consideration informed of delays.	Unsuccessful applicants informed of outcome.  Applications still under consideration informed of delays.
<b>May 2025</b>	Updated CCN reviewed by ODA Programme Board			
<b>June 2025</b>	Updated CCN reviewed by Investment Committee MYSR concludes			
<b>July 2025</b>	Defra business planning concludes			
<b>August 2025</b>	Confirm funding options with applicants*  Caveats and Award paperwork	Confirm funding options with applicants  Caveats and Award paperwork	Confirm funding options with applicants  Caveats and Award paperwork	Confirm funding options with applicants*  Caveats and Award paperwork
<b>September 2025</b>	Delayed Round 13 projects start*	Delayed Round 13 projects start	Delayed Round 5 projects start	Delayed Round 13 projects start*
<b>April 2026</b>	Round 14 launches and invites applicants to Stage 1 of the process*	Round 14 launches and invites applicants*	Round 6 launches and invites applicants*	Round 3 launches and invites applicants*

\*Subject to confirmation of Darwin Plus funding for 2026-27 at the MYSR.