Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Darwin Plus

Full Business Case (FBC)

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Related Documents

This document needs to be read in conjunction with the following document/s:

Document Name	Version	Reference/Location
Darwin Plus Accounting Officer Assessment	1.0	Darwin Plus Accounting Officer Assessment.docx

Reviewer's List

This document has been reviewed by:

Name	Role (s)	Date
[redacted]	Finance Business Partners	24/10/2025
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Document Sign Off

The role of the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) is to ensure the delivery of a programme or project within an agreed budget and timeframe and as such should have authority to direct those involved in delivering the work. The SRO is responsible for delivery of benefits and is ultimately accountable. They must agree and verify the information and options put forward in this document.

This document has been signed off by the following:

Version	Role	Name	Approve	Date
1.0	Finance Business Partner	[redacted]	Yes	24/10/2025
1.0	Lead Analyst	[redacted]	Yes	27/10/2025

	(List of lead analysts)			
1.0	SRO Project Board Programme Board/Portfolio Board/Official Development Assistance (ODA)Board Investment Committee / ExCo (where applicable) Permanent Secretary HMT (where applicable)	[redacted]	Yes	24/10/2025

1. Executive Summary

This Full Business Case provides the case to invest £27.996m in protecting and restoring biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories between 2026 and 2029 through the continuation of the Darwin Plus programme (i.e. the full amount allocated from Defra business planning). The estimated Whole Life Cost (WLC) is up to £68,060,335. Three of the UK Overseas Territories (OTs) are eligible for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) funding, while the remaining UK Overseas Territories are not. The programme therefore combines both ODA and non-ODA funding. Spending between ODA and non-ODA is expected to be a ~20:80 split, which will approximately reflect the ratio between the number of Territories that are eligible for ODA funding.

This Business Case proposes the continuation of the Darwin Plus grants schemes and related OT activities (which includes Fera pest identification services, JNCC and APHA biosecurity services), building on the development and expansion of the programme as seen under the previous 2022-2025 Full Business Case. The programme will continue to consist of a portfolio of locally targeted projects delivered by a range of partners including environmental non-governmental organisations, OT governments and other organisations based globally. In addition, this programme will align with the implementation and monitoring of the new co-created **UK OT Biodiversity Strategy**[1], which was developed and published in November 2025 under the previous Full Business Case. All of the above activities will be included in the £27.996m package. Delivery will be overseen by a team in Defra, with support from a Fund Manager and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). The SRO is [redacted], within Defra's Strategy, Climate and Governance Directorate.

We have taken feedback onboard to address the concerns and queries raised by Investment Committee on 11 June 2025 when they approved the Change Control Note that extended the previous FBC into 2025/26. Principally, this was to review and consider refinements to the Theory of Change to provide greater clarity on how the outputs lead to outcomes as set out in the Outcomes Framework (please see Programme Governance Recommendation Report for the latest update).

The Darwin Plus programme is the UK's flagship international challenge fund for environmental projects in the OTs. The OTs hold over 90% of the UK's unique species but have limited local resources to safeguard them. The programme delivers high-impact conservation, builds scientific capacity, and helps territories adapt to climate change whilst delivering nature conservation including contributing to the UK's 30by30 goals, mainly for sea area (see Section 2.1). Darwin Plus helps to fulfil the UK's legal obligation to support their people's wellbeing, which includes protecting globally significant natural assets. [redacted]

Having emerged from the Darwin Initiative in 2012, the programme remains a part of the wider family of Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) – today sitting alongside the Darwin Initiative and Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund. The three Challenge Funds have the same delivery model and Fund Manager, but each focus on distinct geographies and needs.

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[1] Policy paper: UK Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-overseas-territories-biodiversity-strategy

Darwin Plus serves a unique function to protect and restore terrestrial and marine ecosystems in the OTs, while benefiting diplomatic relations between the UK and OT Governments. It complements *without duplication* Defra's other Challenge Funds and the FCDO's environmental offer to the OTs, including the Blue Belt Programme and the newly announced Climate Finance Support Programme. [redacted]

Over the next 3 years, we will evolve the Darwin Plus programme in line with the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy. Its role will increasingly focus on unlocking sustainable finance for conservation — attracting green, private, and philanthropic investment. This will over time help reduce the Territories' reliance on limited HMG funding while accelerating investment into these globally important ecosystems. The ongoing commissioned independent evaluation of the BCFs (including Darwin Plus) is providing critical insights to support this evolution, focusing on evidence of impact sustainability, policy influence, replication and transformative, system-level change since the programme's inception.

We will build on learning from Defra and wider HMG work on the green investment landscape to strengthen this shift. Darwin Plus will remain a critical component of the UK's international strategy, supporting delivery of our nature and climate commitments.

From 2020-2026, funding for Darwin Plus was uplifted from £2.75m per annum to more than £10m per annum, reflecting increased demand for support from within the Overseas Territories (in part, due to a loss of access to EU funding following EU Exit). For 2026-2029, HMG will continue to support both the ODA and non-ODA eligible Territories.

This Business Case:

- Makes the case for continuing the Darwin Plus programme until March 2029 at approximately the current scale.
- Delivers sustained outcomes for biodiversity conservation and environmental quality contributing to the UK's 30by30 goal (which six of the OTs feed into[2]), having brought over 46.3 million hectares of land and sea under ecological management since 2013, including nearly 1,409 ha of land and sea between 2022 and 2024 alone.
- Continues to enhance the capability and capacity of Territory partners and stakeholders, to ensure a long-term legacy of the programme and encourage locally-led action in the future, with 3,992 people from key national and local stakeholders having completed structured and relevant training between 2013 and 2024.
- Encourages projects to become scalable and transformational, with greater cross-collaboration across geographical regions which may have greater impact beyond the OTs.
- Encourages projects to incorporate matched funding and to explore and unlock green financing sources to ensure their sustained resourcing and impact beyond the grant's end date.
- Supports the continuation of long-term wider programme activities, delivering discrete projects for the benefit of all OTs through JNCC, APHA and Fera – organisations well-placed to achieve economies of scale.

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[2] Ascension Island, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

- Supports the implementation and monitoring of the new UK OT Biodiversity Strategy to ensure its success and that it remains fit for purpose.

Darwin Plus provides a scalable framework for successful individuals and organisations to access funding and to deliver innovative projects that fit applicants' needs, whether small projects or strategic interventions – benefitting all 14 of the OTs' unique environments.

The Economic Dimension of this business case assesses four long-listed options, analysing their alignment to the strategic goals, their value for money, affordability and achievability. Three options are shortlisted and analysed further with option 2 (the continuation of funding of Darwin Plus at the approximate current scale) as the preferred option. This is because Option 2 meets the requirements of contributing towards strategic goals; provides the greatest value for money in conserving biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories and has the greatest achievability in comparison to the other options presented.

The preferred option presents an investment of approximately £9.3m per annum. This option provides very high value for money, [redacted] It is affordable within current financial forecasts and allows Defra to scale down funding, if future budgets allocated to the Darwin Plus programme are lower than assumed.

Defra has already appointed, through open competition, a Fund Administrator for the Darwin Plus programme (as one of three ongoing Biodiversity Challenge Funds). The Fund Administrator contract runs until March 2027, with a new commercial contract due to be considered in Q4 of 2025/26. This commercial strategy delivers value for money through competition, and by harmonising and sequencing processes across the three funds.

The programme is managed through a strong and adaptive Defra-Fund Administrator partnership, with Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning at its heart. This will enable Defra and its Fund Manager to continue to refine each spending round to focus support effectively, responding to stronger evidence of what works; capitalise on opportunities; and address any poor performance in a timely manner.

The Darwin Plus programme will deliver greater impact than the sum of its individual projects by integrating evidence and learning into its operations, adapting its approach in response to project data and evidence, raising the quality of project delivery, and strengthening local action.

The programme also enables Defra and wider HMG to meet its **legal obligations to the UK Overseas Territories under Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations (UN)**[3], as well as the delivery of commitments under UK and OT policies, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and Sustainable Development Goals. This is important because the **UK is responsible for the OTs' adherence to international environmental treaties and conventions extended to them**[4] and may be challenged in international courts or by other states if an OT was not observing its duties under a treaty.

[3] Chapter XI: Article 73 — Charter of the United Nations — Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs — Codification Division Publications
[4] International treaties and the Overseas Territories - House of Commons Library

2. Strategic Dimension

2.1. Strategic Context

The strategic case for continuing Darwin Plus is straightforward: the UK Overseas Territories (OTs) hold globally significant biodiversity, yet face acute and growing threats from climate change, invasive species, and habitat loss. These ecosystems underpin local economies, resilience, and wellbeing, and the UK has both a legal and moral obligation to safeguard them. These environments are also critical for ensuring the UK meets its 30by30 goal, mainly for sea area.

Darwin Plus is the UK's proven mechanism for delivering this support—combining high value for money with measurable impact. Independent evaluations confirm that the programme has strengthened local capacity, restored habitats, and delivered outcomes that would not have been achieved without HMG investment. Continued funding is therefore essential to maintain momentum, protect hard-won gains, and enable both the UK and the OTs to meet international commitments on biodiversity and climate resilience. Furthermore, Darwin Plus is celebrated by the OTs as a flexible and impactful way of responding to locally defined needs, and a vital resource in a shrinking funding landscape. The OTs and eNGOs working in and with the OTs frequently lobby the UK Government for the continuation of Darwin Plus, and thus the programme holds **diplomatic value for UK-OT relations**, as well as supporting the UK's international reputation and position as an environmental leader.

Looking ahead, Defra's ODA approach is placing greater emphasis on securing sustainable finance for conservation. At the same time, the Overseas Territories have agreed a shared ambition to maximise opportunities for funding, partnership and collaboration, as set out in the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy. This includes commitments for the UK and OTs to understand the value of, and barriers to, investment in their blue and green economies, and to support mechanisms that are socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. The ongoing commissioned independent evaluation of the BCFs (including Darwin Plus) is providing critical insights to support this evolution, focusing on evidence of impact sustainability, policy influence, replication and transformative, system-level change since the programme's inception.

Darwin Plus is well-placed to help deliver these commitments and to support progress towards the UK's 30by30 target, given the global significance of OT ecosystems. For context, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) extends to six of the OTs[5]; these six make up just ~16.7k km^2 of land but >3.5m km^2 of sea, which is approximately 4 times the size of waters around mainland UK. Of these OT areas of land and sea, ~26.0% and ~79.5% respectively are covered by protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures[6]).

Over this FBC period, the programme will adapt its funding approach and priorities to support projects that strengthen long-term financial sustainability. This will elevate Darwin Plus' impact and contribute to a longer-term shift away from reliance on UK Government grants.

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[5] Ascension Island, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

[6] 25 Year Environment Plan Outcome Indicator K4: 2024 update on the extent of Protected Areas in the UK Overseas Territories | JNCC Resource Hub

2.1.1. Biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories

The UK's 14 Overseas Territories[7] (OTs) are global biodiversity hotspots. **Of the total number of unique species associated with the UK, 94% have been found to reside in the Territories** – twenty times over the number found on mainland UK[8], and this is likely to be an underestimate. **The OTs grant the UK the fifth largest ocean jurisdiction (6,732,963km²) in the world and the twelfth largest area of coral reef (5,500km²)[9].** The OTs also make the UK the only nation in the world to have sovereign land in all seven major oceans and seas (see map at Annex A). The OTs support every one of Earth's major ecosystems: from rainforests to polar ice caps, cactus shrub to mangrove forests. Their landscapes include diverse features from active volcanoes to salt lagoons and collectively host 4,712km^2 of tropical coral reefs[10].

Several of the OTs include wilderness areas which represent **some of the last remaining large-scale pristine tracts in the world**, from the Central Mangrove forests in the Cayman Islands to the remote rugged wilderness of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. Many millions of migratory seabirds, marine mammals and sea turtles are drawn to hundreds of key refuge sites across many of the Territories, with the OTs being habitat to more penguins than any other nation. The biggest of these breeding colonies also hold regionally and/or globally important concentrations or assemblages of species, such as Ascension Island, which is home to the second largest green turtle rookery in the Atlantic.

To date, 40,329 native species have been recorded in the Territories, including 1,851 endemics (those species found nowhere else on earth)[11]. However, baseline knowledge of species distribution and abundance varies widely across Territories, primarily due to differences in local monitoring capacity, available resources, and the focus of species recording efforts. For example, Bermuda – the wealthiest OT - has recorded four times more species than any other territory. Globally, invertebrates outnumber vertebrates in species richness, yet they remain comparatively understudied, especially as research tends to favour more charismatic organisms[12]. It is therefore estimated that the OTs may harbour up to 70,000 additional species yet to be documented, including 1,800 endemic species that have yet to be formally described[13].

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[7] The UK's OTs are: Anguilla; Bermuda; British Antarctic Territory; British Indian Ocean Territory; the British Virgin Islands; the Cayman Islands; the Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; the Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie & Oeno Islands; Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha (the St Helena Group); South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands; Sovereign Base Areas, Akrotiri and Dhekelia (Cyprus); and, the Turks & Caicos Islands. British Indian Ocean Territory will remain a Territory until the treaty signed 22 May 2025 is ratified, transferring sovereignty to Mauritius. Of the OTs, Montserrat; the Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie & Oeno Islands; Saint Helena, and Tristan da Cunha are eligible for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) funding.

[8] The UK's Wildlife Overseas: a stocktake of nature in our Overseas Territories, RSPB, 2015, DOI:10.13140/RG.2.1.4950.5121

[9] UNEP-WCMC (2001) World Atlas of Coral Reefs https://resources.unep-wcmc.org/products/WCMC_RT104

[10] Hamylton, S. and Andrefouet, S. (2013) An appraisal of the extent and geomorphological diversity of the coral reefs of the United Kingdom Dependent Territories, in Sheppard, CRC Coral reefs of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories. Vol 4. Springer DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-5965-7

[11] Defra (2025) UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy UK Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy - GOV.UK

[12] Tensen, L. and Teske, P.R.. Research monopolization in the biological sciences: Charismatic species are partly to blame. *People and Nature*. (2025) https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.70158

[13] Churchyard, T., Eaton, M.A., Havery, S. *et al.* The biodiversity of the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories: a stock take of species occurrence and assessment of key knowledge gaps. *Biodivers Conserv* **25**, 1677–1694 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-016-1149-z

Biodiversity in the OTs is the foundation of both ecosystem resilience and human wellbeing. It plays a critical role in maintaining the quality of soil, water and air – all natural assets essential for life. Defra's nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security[14] shows how global environmental degradation can disrupt food, water, health and supply chains, and trigger wider geopolitical instability. **For the 270,000 residents of the OTs, thriving ecosystems can support sustainable agriculture and climate resilience, mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events and offer vital protection against coastal and inland flooding.** Though hard to quantify, in 2019, JNCC estimated that the natural coral reef barrier in the BVI provided US$74.3m worth of protection against hurricanes and other disasters annually, equivalent to the same GDP the BVI earns from all its bars and restaurants[15]. Furthermore, for the 5 Caribbean OTs, coral reefs were found to underpin key economic sectors, contributing directly to saving over US$1 million in avoided damage costs from storm surge per annum[16].

Particularly in the Territories, **biodiversity has huge economic value.** Most OT economies are largely dependent on nature-based tourism, and several rely heavily on fisheries. In 2018, the Falkland Islands recorded 63.6% of its GDP derived from fishing and aquaculture[17]. In 2019, JNCC estimated that Anguilla's natural capital provided an annual value of around US$92 million[18] - contributing approximately 28% of its GDP[19]. In the Caribbean region, the environment was found to contribute at least US$345 million in annual value to the OTs in 2020, including over US$65 million to tourism, US$30 million to fisheries, and US$60 million through carbon sequestration[20]. Additional, but unquantified, value may come from protecting rare species that may be resilient to a changing climate outside of the OTs.

Of wider, non-monetisable value, biodiversity is also intrinsically linked to people's culture and heritage, providing a sense of wellbeing through connection to the natural environment. From recent consultations led by the JNCC[21][22], we know this to be especially true for those people living and working in the OTs.

However imperative to human wellbeing, development and economies, the value of the OTs' biodiversity is inherently fragile. Without proactive conservation and sustainable

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14 Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security - GOV.UK

15 Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions UK Limited. 2019. An assessment of the value of natural capital in the protective service against coastal and inland flooding in the UK Overseas Territory of the British Virgin Islands. Natural Capital in the UK's Overseas Territories Report Series – Supplementary Report (Caribbean Region). Contracted report to JNCC.

16 eftec (2020); Caribbean UK Overseas Territories 2020 Ecosystem Accounts Summary; Published as part of Darwin Initiative funded project, Darwin Plus 108: Caribbean Overseas Territories Regional Natural Capital Accounting Programme. https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPLUS108/ (accessed 18.09.2025)

17 Ranghetti, D., 2021. State of the Falkland Islands Economy 2020. Directorate of Policy and Economic Development Falkland Islands Government, [online]

18 Kuyer, K. Kharadi, N. Moylan, A. Middleton, A. Flemming, S. Rouse, C. Samuel, CA. 2019. Anguilla Natural Capital Accounting & Calculations. Natural Capital in the UK's Overseas Territories: Natural Capital in the UK's Overseas Territories Report Series – Supplementary Report (Caribbean Region). Contracted report to JNCC. Figure converted from the East Caribbean Dollar (EC$ 248 million) to USD.

19 See: Government of Anguilla Debt Portfolio Review 2018 (Last accessed 29/07/2025)

20 eftec (2020); Caribbean UK Overseas Territories 2020 Ecosystem Accounts Summary; Published as part of Darwin Initiative funded project, Darwin Plus 108: Caribbean Overseas Territories Regional Natural Capital Accounting Programme. https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPLUS108/ (accessed 18.09.2025)

21 Consultation: UK Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy - GOV.UK

22 Defra (2025) UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy UK Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy - GOV.UK

management, the Territories risk losing not only their irreplaceable species, but also the economic stability and cultural heritage tied to their natural environments.

Most of the OTs are small, geographically remote and/or low-lying islands, with a high incidence of and vulnerability to climate change impacts. Together, the OTs face mounting pressures from higher temperatures, rising sea levels and extreme climatic events such as tropical cyclones, storm surges and prolonged droughts – as visible from coral bleaching and glacial melt events.

Largely due to invasive species, land use change and climate change, the OTs' endemic and restricted range species are disproportionately threatened. Current conservative estimates suggest that over 10% (697 species) are known to be threatened with extinction[23], with figures likely to be an underestimate for less well-known species and species groups. **For their endemics, JNCC estimate 48.5% to be threatened with extinction[24].** While biologically rich today, the outlook for species across the Territories is deeply concerning.

A further, significant threat to OT biodiversity is the presence of invasive-non-native species (INNS). Island species such as those in the OTs are particularly vulnerable due to their previous isolation from diseases, competition and predators, with the introduction and proliferation of INNS often having a direct impact on their native counterparts. Birdlife International estimated in 2009 that invasive mammals posed a threat to almost all threatened or near-threatened endemic breeding birds of the OTs[25]. Just three species of rat (*Rattus spp)* have influenced many island extinctions and are documented as causing a negative impact in all 14 OTs[26,27,28] where they predate on eggs and chicks. For example, Cobb's Wren *Troglodytes cobbi* (Falkland Islands) and South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus* appear to be completely intolerant of rats[29,30].

Once established, INNS are logistically challenging and costly to control. Eradication is generally only feasible on small islands and needs meticulous planning and piloting if it is to succeed. Between 2018 and 2024, the Caymanian Government spent KYD$10,242,170 (roughly £9,217,953[31]) on a green iguana culling programme[32]. Despite this investment and over 1.6m invasive green iguanas being caught and destroyed during this time, eradication has still not been achieved: the Government continues to pay for a steady harvest of over 80k iguanas each year. To pause culling efforts would lead to a rapid resurgence of green iguanas to pre-culling levels, demonstrating how INNS management

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[23] Burns and others, 2023. State of Nature, page 171
[24] Farquharson, L.R. 2025. JNCC Report 795, JNCC, Peterborough, ISSN 0963-8091.
[25] Original reference no longer available. Referenced in Hilton, G. M., & Cuthbert, R. J. (2010). The catastrophic impact of invasive mammalian predators on birds of the UK Overseas Territories: a review and synthesis. *Ibis*, *152*(3), 443-458.
[26]Varnham, K. 2006. Non-native species in UK Overseas Territories: a review. JNCC Report No. 372, JNCC, Peterborough, ISSN 0963-8091.
[27] Harper G.A and Bunbury N. (2015). Invasive rats on tropical islands: Their population biology and impacts on native species. Global Ecology and Conservation Volume 3, January 2015, Pages 607-627. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2015.02.010
[28] Hilton, G. M., & Cuthbert, R. J. (2010). The catastrophic impact of invasive mammalian predators on birds of the UK Overseas Territories: a review and synthesis. *Ibis*, *152*(3), 443-458.
[29]Prince, P.A. and Croxall, J.P., 1996. The birds of South Georgia. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, *116*(2), pp.81-104.
[30] Hall, J.R., Woods, R.W., Brooke, M.D.L. and Hilton, G.M., 2001. Factors affecting the distribution of landbirds on the Falkland Islands. *Bird Conservation International*, *12*(2), pp.151-167.
[31] KYD/GBP 0.9027 (▲0.0011%) | Google Finance (accessed 06/08/2025)
[32] Presentation given by Jane Haakonsson, Department of Environment, Cayman Islands Government, on 15/05/2025.

is a cost in-perpetuity. The best defence is biosecurity to prevent INNS from ever arriving or establishing.

An additional threat to OT biodiversity is the potential impact of emerging threats from disease such as Avian Influenza (HPAI) which pose a risk to vulnerable populations of birdlife. HPAI represents a significant emerging threat in the OTs, with confirmed presence in both the Falkland Islands and South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. Its spread poses ecological risks to vulnerable populations of Wandering Albatross combined with other environmental pressures. In addition, HPAI is zoonotic, so requires measures to prevent disease spread from birds to mammals, including humans which can be onerous and costly, but necessary to avoid the suspension of trade. The threat of HPAI and other potential diseases poses a risk to economic stability in the OTs, where wildlife plays a central role in local environmental tourism. Therefore, the potential disruption to biodiversity from the risk of disease outbreak may have a profound impact on the livelihoods of local communities that depend on nature-based tourism.

Beyond the local level, OT biodiversity is of recognised global importance, with many species protected through different Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), conventions and regional agreements. Protecting the health of the OTs' peatlands, kelp forests and mangrove systems can positively impact climate regulation, as can protecting their species safeguard future medicinal discoveries, offering wider value.

Given the acute pressures and threats faced by biodiversity in the OTs – which is central to their inhabitants' way of living and of benefit to us all – this funding is targeted at improving outcomes for the OTs' unique species, habitats and ecosystems.

2.1.2. The rationale for UK Government support

The UK government has a **legal obligation to support the wellbeing of the people of the OTs[33] under the UN**, with Defra responsible for delivering support for their natural environments. Additionally, the **UK government is accountable for ensuring that the OTs adhere to international environmental treaties and conventions** that they have had extended to them.

Primary responsibility for biodiversity conservation and wider environmental management in the OTs has been devolved to OT governments[34]. With the support of UK government, the OTs are responsible for developing appropriate, applicable and affordable environmental policies, legislation and standards[35].

Defra is HMG's lead department for nature. **Darwin Plus directly supports Defra's Outcomes Framework priority outcome for ensuring nature's recovery**, supporting:

- Clean, biologically diverse seas and resilient ecosystems;
- The creation of a resilient biodiverse environment; and
- International action on nature and climate change (i.e. Territories overseas).[36]

[33] Chapter XI: Article 73 — Charter of the United Nations — Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs — Codification Division Publications

[34] Loft, Philip / House of Commons Library. The UK Overseas Territories: Climate change and biodiversity https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9290/CBP-9290.pdf

[35] See: The Overseas Territories (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[36] Defra group Outcomes Framework

In addition, the programme holds the ambition to increase private finance into nature's recovery.

The OTs, Darwin Plus and/or the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy are directly referenced in and/or feed into Defra and wider HMG environmental strategies, including:

- **The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2025**[37]. While the EIP 2025 is for England only, it states that "we are committed to supporting the overseas territories to deliver their conservation priorities, as set out in the new UK Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy";
- **Defra's 30by30 goals;**
    - The Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework, which sets the foundation of 30by30, is extended to six of the OTs (Ascension Island, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands). These OTs are included in the UK's 30by30 figures.
- **The Environmental Indicator Framework (EIF)**[38], specifically the outcome indicators below whose monitoring by JNCC is funded through the Darwin Plus programme;
    - **Outcome Indicator K3:** Status of endemic and globally threatened species in the UK Overseas Territories
    - **Outcome Indicator K4:** Extent and condition of terrestrial and marine protected areas in the UK Overseas Territories. This indicator **contributes directly to Defra's 30by30 goals** and **<u>the UK's position as an environmental leader in the CBD.</u>** Work funded through Darwin Plus and Blue Belt, will help to further improve these figures.

- **Blueprint for Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss: the UK's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) for 2030**[39], which directly references the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy, stating "It is vital that we protect and restore these natural assets for future generations";
- **UK Small Island Developing States (SIDS) strategy 2026 to 2030**[40]**,** which directly references Darwin Plus and the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy as tools to support the strategy;
    - Six of the OTs (Anguilla; Bermuda; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Montserrat; Turks and Caicos Islands) are members of the SIDS group as Associate Members of UN Regional Economic Commissions. The strategy outlines how the UK will support SIDS' economic and climate resilience, whilst protecting nature and the ocean. Defra is also flagged as a major partner for SIDS on the ocean, including the protection of biodiversity, addressing risks to marine livelihoods and promoting sustainable blue economies.
- **UK Antarctic Strategy to 2035**[41]**,** which "recognises that protecting Antarctica is essential not only for the continent itself and surrounding ocean, but for the health and stability of the entire planet" and states that the UK remains "fully committed" to

[37] Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2025 - GOV.UK
[38] Environmental Indicator Framework - GOV.UK
[39] National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan | United Kingdom Biodiversity
[40] UK Small Island Developing States Strategy 2026 to 2030
[41] UK Antarctic Strategy to 2035 - GOV.UK

the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources[42] (CAMLR Convention) and the full implementation of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (Environmental Protocol)[43]. Darwin Plus contributes to this cause, and projects in the region, particularly those lead by British Antarctic Survey (BAS), directly inform and advise the CAMLR Convention.

- **Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world[44]**, which identified climate change and biodiversity loss as the only risks which are guaranteed to worsen over the next decade, and states that "The UK will also work with the Overseas Territories… to protect and re-establish critical biodiversity, respond to disasters, and support long-term zero-carbon economic and social development";
- **2030 Strategic framework for international climate and nature action[45],** which directly references Darwin Plus as a tool under Challenge 3: Increase protection, conservation and restoration of nature and tackle key drivers of nature loss; and
- [redacted]

It is important to note that <u>the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy is itself a published policy paper</u>, like those listed above. It sets out commitments from the UK Government and its ALBs (see section 2.2.1. for details). Not only does this FBC provide administrative support for the implementation of this strategy by monitoring progress against the goals, co-ordinating UK Government support and facilitating information exchange, the Darwin Plus programme and related activities funded through this FBC feed directly into its goals, priorities and commitments to help make it a success.

In addition to the policies above, the UK government has publicly expressed its commitment to supporting OT biodiversity at the 2025 UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council:

"The Overseas Territories are a shining example of biodiversity and continued stewardship of these unique ecosystems is critical in the face of global environmental change. Our collective efforts to protect the diverse environments that the OTs are responsible for contribute to the achievement of the global goals and targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity. These invaluable marine and terrestrial environments and their unique and endemic species contribute directly and indirectly to livelihoods, quality of life and cultural identity in the Overseas Territories…

… We reaffirm our joint ambition to protect these ecosystems and address the climate and nature crises. We welcome the publication of the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity

[42] CCAMLR Convention | UNEP - UN Environment Programme
[43] Environmental Protocol | Antarctic Treaty
[44] Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world - GOV.UK
[45] 2030 Strategic framework for international climate and nature action - GOV.UK

Strategy. This marks the beginning of a new journey towards improvements in policy, legislation, support, collaboration and engagement, for the benefit of our flora and fauna, habitats and ecosystems. ***We welcome and encourage continued UK support this year for Overseas Territories environments and biodiversity through Darwin Plus and for the marine environment through the Blue Belt Programme****"*[46]

…and in the UK Statement at the UN Fourth Committee:

"We are committed to supporting the Territories on their priorities, including environmental protection."[47]

In recent consultation with the OTs, **a lack of access to sufficient funding streams was identified as a key barrier to tackling environmental challenges in the OTs**. Post-EU exit has left a gap where funding streams were previously accessible[48] (e.g. EU BEST Initiative). **Without sovereignty, the OTs are also ineligible from accessing most international funding streams** (e.g. UNFCCC, Global Environment Facility) and therefore rely heavily on UK Government support. Darwin Plus helps fill this gap.

Supporting the natural environment and biodiversity of the OTs drives their economic and social development, supporting livelihoods indirectly. For example, investment can help sustain and improve their tourism, fisheries and resilience to climatic change impacts. Funding made available by UK Government can support the OTs to meet commitments made under MEAs and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) This is important because, **as the sovereign state, the UK is responsible for the OTs' adherence to international environmental treaties and conventions extended to them**[49]. These include the:

- **Convention on Biological Diversity** (CBD) and its Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (including the foundation for **Defra's 30by30 target**);
- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species** (CITES);
- **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species** (CMS);
- **Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels** (ACAP);
- **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**;
- **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change** (UNFCCC);
- **Bern Convention**;
- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 for life below water:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; and
- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 15 for life on land:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Should an OT be found to be non-compliant with international obligations, the UK Government could be challenged in international courts or by other states.[50] Any breach of international obligations is a breach for which the UK is liable as a matter of international

[46] UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council 2025: communiqué - GOV.UK
[47] The UK is committed to supporting its Overseas Territories to deliver their priorities: UK Statement at the UN Fourth Committee (16 October 2025)
[48] 2024 UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council communiqué - GOV.UK
[49] International treaties and the Overseas Territories - House of Commons Library
[50] International treaties and the Overseas Territories – House of Commons Library, page 5

law. **It is therefore in the UK's strategic interests to ensure the OTs are supported to meet their environmental obligations, protecting both global biodiversity and the UK's international reputation.**

[redacted]

2.1.3. The Darwin Plus Programme

Darwin Plus is a competitive UK government grants programme that provides funding for environmental projects in the OTs. Since 2012, Darwin Plus has invested more than £64 million in almost 400 biodiversity and conservation projects of benefit to the OTs.

Annex B provides a high-level summary of the programme to date, including data around applications, projects and funding amounts. Annex C details the most recent list of projects approved through the annual application cycle. Annex D (Results Framework reporting) provides a useful account of what the programme has delivered since the start of the last Full Business Case in 2022. Further, Annex E provides several case studies illustrating the impact of the programme's delivery to date.

In 2023, Defra improved and expanded the programme to introduce two new funding schemes, providing a fuller offer of support to the OTs. Now four schemes, the programme includes:

- **Darwin Plus Main:** Defra's original funding offer for projects costed between £50k and £1 million, lasting 1-3 years.
- **Darwin Plus Local (new as of 2023):** aimed at smaller-scale, shorter-term projects, for building capacity in-territory and contributing to local economies. Open to individuals (for projects up to £20,000) and organisations (for projects up to £50,000) based in the OTs for projects lasting 6 months-1 year.
- **Darwin Plus Strategic (new as of 2023):** for larger-scale, longer-term projects able to drive ambitious outcomes in and between OTs. Support is for £1-3 million and covers projects lasting 3-5 years.
- **Darwin Plus People & Skills** (**rebranded from Fellowships in 2024**): for supporting OT Nationals and long-term residents[52] to increase their knowledge and ability to meet long-term strategic outcomes for their natural environment. Support is for up to £100k for projects lasting up to 24 months.

Darwin Plus emerged from the Darwin Initiative programme which began in 1992. Darwin Initiative now focuses on ODA-eligible countries[53] (*excluding* the ODA-eligible OTs), while Darwin Plus focuses exclusively on the OTs (*including* those that are ODA-eligible (St

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[redacted]

52 Or, as is the case with the uninhabited OTs, those with a long-term relationship to an OT.

53 www.darwininitiative.org.uk

Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Montserrat and the Pitcairn Islands [54]). The International Development Act 2002 sets out powers to provide ODA funding to the OTs without requiring such funding to meet the poverty reduction criteria that is attached to all other funding provision in the Act. This represents an **important distinction between Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus**. 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. The International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 still applies to the OTs.

Together, the programmes are a cornerstone of the UK's bilateral aid to tackle biodiversity loss. They aim to fund projects that are innovative, scalable, replicable, and support the building of local capabilities and capacity. The two programmes also work alongside a third challenge fund, Defra's Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund (IWTCF). **To exploit economies of scale and standardise best practice, these three Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) share the same fund manager and benefit from shared monitoring, learning and evaluation.**

The UK Government's other main offer of support to the OTs is the Blue Belt programme. Administered by the FCDO, the Blue Belt programme is wholly targeted at OT marine ecosystems and ocean governance. Funding is provided directly (rather than competitively) and only to a select number of OTs; those with large marine zones. With Darwin Plus being available to all 14 OTs and designed to benefit both terrestrial and marine environments, the programme is, therefore, **a fuller and more complementary offer of support than Blue Belt alone.**

2.2. Case for change

2.2.1. Improving outcomes for OT biodiversity

Darwin Plus is the UK's flagship environmental programme for the OTs. Under all four schemes, the programme competitively awards grants to projects that can demonstrate substantial measurable improvements in at least one of the following four themes:

- **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 OTs to support the environment in the short- and long-term.

To achieve value for money and surface locally relevant proposals, Darwin Plus awards grants using a demand-led competitive challenge fund mechanism. Applicants are assessed independently – either by an independent Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG) or by select members of the JNCC – who recommend projects based on technical merit to Defra. Processes are administered by a Fund Administrator.

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[54] Whilst Pitcairn is not listed on the DAC ODA eligible country list, in 1994, the OECD granted an exception allowing Pitcairn to receive ODA funds from the UK only.

Recognising the different economies of the OTs, Defra will explore how the programme can be targeted both where needs are strongest and in projects with the highest potential for mobilising additional public and private investment. For example, grant applicants with proposals benefitting the non-ODA eligible OTs may be asked to justify why a project's objectives cannot be achieved through a territory's own resourcing. Applicants across both ODA and non-ODA eligible OTs could be required to demonstrate how their project will increase local commitment to, and investment in, conservation and build local capacity and capability for the longer term.

Adapting to HMG's evolving international approach

As referenced earlier in Section 2.1., Defra's is seeking to shifting the focus of its ODA portfolio more on securing sustainable finance for conservation. While Darwin Plus is only part-ODA, adopting this same approach across the programme will help to ensure its sustainability, potentially increase the overall volume of activity by levering in additional funds, and ultimately reduce the OT's reliance on UK Government grants. This direction also aligns with the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy Goal 3: Maximise opportunities for funding, partnership and collaboration (see further down this section).

As a Challenge Fund, Darwin Plus grants already prioritise 'one-off' system-strengthening projects that cannot be funded through other means, and encourage applicants to seek matched funding. Recurrent costs, such as provision of UK-based biosecurity expertise and monitoring the EIF outcome indicators, are instead funded directly by the programme and delivered by ALBs, such as APHA and JNCC.

Over the course of this FBC, we will work with the other Challenge Funds and colleagues across UK Government to explore routes to securing sustainable finance for OT nature conservation via Darwin Plus' competitive grants programme. Potential routes may include:

- Prioritising grant applications with the potential to unlock green financing opportunities;
- Further encouraging applications to seek out matched funding (e.g. from private finance);
- Supporting applicants and award holders by offering training on sustainable and green financing via NIRAS as part of their capability and capacity-building work strand; or
- Ensuring there is green finance expertise within NIRAS and/or on the DPAG to assess the financial sustainability of applications.

Adapting to evolving, local priorities: the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy

To focus investment in the unique conservation priorities of each OT, Defra has developed with OT Governments and Administrations a **new UK OT Biodiversity Strategy**. Published in November 2025, **the strategy will serve as a guide for future investment decisions in Darwin Plus** – enhancing the programme's ability to deliver targeted, high-value outcomes. The strategy will be adopted by DPAG and JNCC assessors in evaluating the relative importance of new project proposals for each OT. This will help direct Darwin Plus funding and external resources toward locally meaningful outcomes and help safeguard against 'parachute science' – a practice whereby research agendas are set by visiting scientists and often fail to align with the challenges of local populations.

Developed following 18 months of extensive consultation and clearance with OT leaders, the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy unites all territories around an agreed joint ambition to conserve, protect, and restore biodiversity in the OTs, and to champion the benefits of nature. This ambition is underpinned by **six common goals** to:

Reconnect people with nature

Develop skills and talent

Maximise opportunities for funding, partnership and collaboration

Strengthen and implement management and regulatory frameworks

Enhance environmental resilience

Champion the benefits of nature

The strategy then includes a **bespoke chapter for each OT** – setting out their own national priorities under the six common goals, building on their national environment/biodiversity plans and tailored to their unique challenges and opportunities for conservation in-territory.

To ensure the strategy remains fit for purpose, the UK Government will chair an annual roundtable with OT environment ministers as part of a 3-year review phase. Using this forum to understand and maximise impact, the UK and OTs will agree updates to the strategy to ensure its common goals and individualised actions remain fit for the future.

Following its release, Defra will consult OT Governments and Administrations on how best to align strategy and funding by, for example, requiring Darwin Plus applicants to demonstrate how their projects will contribute to the agreed goals for all OTs, and priority actions for the relevant OT. Such a mechanism will, in turn, maximise the impact of UK investment locally – ensuring Darwin Plus funding is put to optimal use.

This FBC will provide the administrative support to implement the UK Overseas Biodiversity Strategy following its publication. This includes co-ordinating support across the UK Government's Departments and Agencies to identify and address gaps against UK commitments, and facilitating UK-OT and OT-OT information and knowledge exchange. This administrative support will be essential to ensuring the strategy's success and continued relevance.

Evidence of a high performing, high value for money programme

Even before the UK OTs Biodiversity Strategy was introduced, a 2025 deep dive[55] by the fund administrator, NIRAS, into the headline achievements of Darwin Plus provides a validating snapshot of its overall impact to date. The deep dive outlines the caveats and limitations to consider when using these data, many of which mean that data is likely to under-represent actual impacts/results achieved. For example, reporting against Standard Measures was voluntary for projects up until 2022, so the results are likely to be underreported, and projects were not routinely followed up after funding ended. It is also worth noting that, between 2011-2019, the programme only operated on £2.75m p/a, which is less than a third of the current budget, so impact would likely have been at a proportionately smaller scale over this period. Taking this into account, some notable results include:

- **Over 46.3 million hectares of land and sea brought under ecological management** since 2013, including nearly 1,409 hectares between 2022 and 2024 alone;
- **Over £15,171,000 funding mobilised** to support project delivery and additional post project activities (between 2013 and 2024);
- 186 species and habitat management plans produced for OT stakeholders (since 2013);
- 3,992 people provided with structured and relevant training (2013-2024 data);
- 252 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (between 2013 and 2024);
- 14 permanent facilities or organisations established in host countries between 2013 and 2022 only; and
- 76 journal articles that published or accepted for publication in peer review journals between 2013 and 2022 only.

Between 2012 and 2022, Darwin Plus projects set their own indicators, meaning that Defra assessed the performance of each project individually. Project reports published on the Darwin Plus website suggest that most projects achieved good value for money and many made lasting contributions to biodiversity protection. To provide just one example, Darwin Plus funded the transition of the Cayman Islands' Blue Iguana Recovery Programme and supported the monitoring of 1,000 released iguanas across 900 acres of protected reserve, ensuring the successful adaptation and survival of a once critically endangered (and suspected functionally extinct) species in the wild[56]. Tangible impacts from a sample range of other projects are captured in Annex E.

In 2022, Defra introduced a new approach to results measurement. Since then, projects have begun measuring impact, outcomes and outputs against a common set of standard indicators, enabling Defra to aggregate results reported by multiple different projects and to compare these results with the same projects' expected achievements. Data available

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[55] These results are likely an underestimate of actual impact and thus are heavily caveated. Project reporting against standard measures was only on a voluntary basis during this period and projects were not routinely followed up after funding ended, reducing the data available for impact analysis.
[56] Darwin Plus Project

from a small set of early reporting projects indicates that Darwin Plus is on track to deliver ambitious outcomes and impact. Notable impacts reported **between 2022-25 only** include:

- Outcomes:
    - 1,420 ha of land and sea brought under ecological management;
    - £1,841,015 mobilised for new activities building on evidence, best practices and projects;
    - 9,809 people with improved climate and disaster resilience;
- Outputs:
    - 78 new/improved habitat management plans available and endorsed;
    - 156 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed;
    - 10 new or improved community management plans created and endorsed by relevant local stakeholders;
    - 195 new conservation or species stock assessments published;
    - 2,725 people from key national and local stakeholders completing structured and relevant training;
    - 1,842 people with supported increased participation in governance; and
    - 233 key local and national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of projects.

At scheme level, a 2023 review of Darwin Plus People & Skills[57] (formerly branded Fellowships) found overwhelmingly positive anecdotal evidence of increased capacity in-territory. A 2025 deep dive found that, while this scheme makes up only a small part of the programme (with just 22 such awards since 2012 at the time of analysis), it had made a significant measurable impact, with:

- Over 20 Fellows receiving advanced training, and at least 53 additional individuals trained through workshops and events;
- At least 4 MSc or equivalent degree students supported;20 new databases or digital platforms created;
- 110 dissemination and engagement events, including workshops, school visits, and citizen science activities;
- At least 8 management plans or policy guidelines supported or developed;
- Over 50 scientific papers, posters, and manuscripts produced or in preparation.

The introduction of two new grant schemes since (Local and Strategic) has been well-received by OT stakeholders, and we have strong evidence that the Local scheme is high-performing. Introduced in 2023/24, the Local scheme generated a major uptick in applications and accounted for 74% of all new projects awarded that year – of which, 87% were found to have met or exceeded expectations.

At programme level, a 2022 independent evaluation[58] of the programme found that Darwin Plus:

- Had a strong, positive impact on the capacity of OTs to deliver long-term strategic outcomes for their natural environment.
- Contributed to the implementation of sustainable policies and management techniques, with several indicators exceeding or meeting targets.
- Strengthened the capability and capacity of national and local stakeholders, with most indicators showing strong performance.

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57 3-bcf-review-of-fellowships-final-to-publish.pdf
58 Information Notes

- Supported the generation of robust scientific evidence to guide future biodiversity management and policy decisions.

Since 2022, the programme has been monitored with annual performance reviews. Darwin Plus scored an A in both its 2022/23 and 2023/24 Annual Reviews for its high indicative performance and continuous improvement: **all Outcome Indicators for which we have data on were found to be exceeding their planned milestones in the 2023/24 review**. Data for the 2024/25 Annual Review is currently being processed.

2.2.2. Future needs

Darwin Plus funds both multiyear and single year projects. Spend is prioritised for ongoing projects before new commitments are started. Both legacy projects and new projects are budgeted from the same overall funding envelope each year, hence only a fraction of Defra's annual budget is spent on new projects, as existing projects roll-on.

Darwin Plus continues to receive high-quality project proposals each year. In its most recent funding rounds, the programme received eligible proposals with a lifetime value exceeding £17m in spend, but due to projects already in the pipeline, only £8m could be made available. In recent years, demand has primarily been for projects in the non-ODA eligible OTs – a trend which is expected to continue.

2.3. Investment Objectives: Benefits, Outcomes, Disbenefits and Risks

The intended impact of Darwin Plus is:

The rates of biodiversity loss and degradation in the OTs are slowed, halted or reversed.

As detailed in Section 2, by investing in Darwin Plus through the funds sought by this Business Case, Defra expects to generate the following impacts (please note these figures include the Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes only; additional impacts are expected to be generated under the Strategic and People & Skills schemes):

- Up to ~1,431,524 hectares under Sustainable Management Practices[59];
- Up to ~118 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed;
- Up to ~605 new conservation or species stock assessments published;
- Up to ~22 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed;
- Up to ~75 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed;
- Up to ~1,950 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training; and
- Up to ~279 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity.

(Additional quantified benefits are expected – see Section 3.4 and Annex F.)

N.B. These predicted benefits are likely impacts based on the past performance of projects. As a challenge fund, Darwin Plus' impacts will be dependent on the targets set by the individual projects funded under the programme. Darwin Plus will support the strongest project applications that are likely to achieve the most significant beneficial impacts.

Darwin Plus will continue to measure its impact using a series of programme-wide key performance indicators (KPIs) for assessing whether programme management is on track, and Standard Indicators (SIs) for measuring impact. These SIs, captured in the programme's log frame, are specific, measurable, attributable, relevant and timebound (SMART). The SIs and KPIs also include several of Defra's overall KPIs and HMG's cross-departmental International Climate Finance (ICF) indicators[60] (e.g. ICF 17 for area under sustainable management) allowing Darwin Plus to contribute to Defra's overall reporting of impact, and HMG's overall ICF reporting.

To achieve this impact, Darwin Plus will deliver the following outcomes:

- *Demand led action to conserve, protect and restore nature*
- *Local communities and stakeholders have improved wellbeing and climate adaptation*
- *Sustained improvement in policy and practice*

To monitor delivery, Darwin Plus will monitor the following outcomes, where wholly or partially attributable to individual projects:

[59] Guidance on methodologies used for applying various indicators included in the Darwin Plus Standard Indicator Guidance for grantees.
[60] ICF only applies to ODA spend.

- Area under Ecological Management (ha) (DEFRA/ ICF KPI 17)
- Number of people with improved or protected i) livelihoods (DEFRA KPI), ii) disaster resilience/ climate adaption (ICF KPI 1), iii) wellbeing, (iv) freedom of action and choice
- Gender and social inclusion is advanced throughout the fund
- Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended.
- Finance mobilised for new activities building on evidence, best practices, and projects.

To achieve these outcomes, Darwin Plus will deliver the following outputs at programme level:

- *Evidence is produced which can be used to guide future biodiversity management and policies and meet MEA commitments (as well as future Darwin projects)*
- *Capability and capacity of national and local stakeholders are improved*
- *Policies and management techniques that promote sustainability are implemented*
- *Programme management is good and adapts to strengthen the delivery of the challenge fund*

Investing in Darwin Plus will add value beyond the outcomes of individual projects that form the portfolio in several ways, such as:

- In achieving these outputs, co-benefits will be realised, including for climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Investing in capacities and capabilities of in-territory stakeholders will have positive spillovers. Not only will these stakeholders better deliver Darwin Plus projects, many will also attract additional funding from other sources and continue to work on biodiversity conservation, with indirect and often sustained benefits for nature as a result.
- Using learning from past and current projects to better design future projects and inform wider donor investments in environment and biodiversity. We will ensure this by continuing to co-deliver a central workstream *'Building and applying evidence'*, for which the fund manager and Defra have set aside staff time and budget to commission research, share findings, aggregate project results to assess fund performance and conduct short evaluations and analysis to strengthen understanding of specific challenges and approaches.
- Influencing how organisations deliver conservation programming - supporting delivery partners to raise the standards of grant management (Safeguarding, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, Finance and Risk) and positively influencing how those organisations deliver both their Darwin Plus projects and other projects where Darwin Plus is not involved.

From the 2025 Risk Potential Assessment, the overall strategic risk of the programme to Defra is assessed as low.

We do not anticipate any disbenefits resulting from further funding to Darwin Plus. We have considered potential unintended consequences and judge these unlikely. Section 6.8 describes key risks and measures that Defra and its delivery partners will take to mitigate them.

Annex G, the programme theory of change, visualises how investment in Darwin Plus will deliver the desired outputs, outcomes and impact, and outlines the constraints (barriers) which the programme seeks to overcome, underlined by our key assumptions (dependencies).

2.4. Paris Alignment

The UK is committed to extending its ratification of the Paris agreement to all Overseas Territories who are eligible, and those who request it, which brings them into scope of the UK's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). It is for each Territory to decide if it would like to request extension. To date, the UK has extended its ratification of the Paris Agreement to Gibraltar in 2022, with the UK working with the Cayman Islands on the extension of the Paris Agreement.

Darwin Plus is demand-led with applicants required to articulate how their proposals align with national policy, including but not limited to National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). Projects are expected to deliver net benefits for biodiversity by contributing towards the objectives of slowing, halting, and reversing rates of biodiversity loss and degradation.

Darwin Plus aligns with HMG's fossil fuel policy and would not fund projects which misalign with partner territory climate plans. Darwin Plus projects are not expected to generate material amounts of carbon dioxide emissions. A Climate and Environment risk assessment for the programme has been completed and has found it is low risk given established policies to manage risk and the alignment of the programme objectives to the Paris Agreement.

2.5. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Darwin Plus remains committed to being a GESI empowering programme, with an ambition for all projects to meet the expected standard of GESI empowering, whilst supporting projects with higher ambitions to go further.[61]

All Darwin Plus grantees will, at minimum, be expected to ensure projects do no harm to gender, equality and social inclusion, and be required to explain how they have considered GESI in project design. This is important because interventions to conserve biodiversity can affect women and men differently, and other groups in society such as local communities can likewise be affected differently. As no action is neutral, by not giving due consideration to GESI, our actions could unintentionally exacerbate inequalities, reinforce barriers or cause harm to already disadvantaged groups.

[61] Defra defines GESI empowering as understanding the social context that programmes are operating in. A GESI empowering approach applies social and gender analysis to demonstrate programming will give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equal opportunities and foster good relations between those that share protected characteristics and those that do not who may otherwise be impacted by biodiversity loss.

The majority of Darwin Plus projects investments strengthen GESI. For example, many projects seek to achieve greater inclusion of marginalised communities in the management of biodiversity in and around where they live within the territories to enable communities to derive greater benefit from this biodiversity.

Darwin Plus' approach to GESI is informed by the independent evaluation (Ecorys, 2022) and 2023 report[62] that collected and synthesised evidence and lessons of incorporating GESI across Defra's three (BCFs) With this as the evidence base, a multi-year strategy has been established to strengthen the BCFs' approach to GESI across:

- Core concepts & Building Awareness (resources, training, workshops/webinars)
- Internal Process & management
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

The programme's OECD DAC gender marker is 1/ 'Significant' meaning that Gender Equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the programme.[63] Darwin Plus already meets the criteria to be marked as "significant": gender analysis has been conducted; informing programme design; data and indicators are disaggregated by sex where applicable; Darwin Plus is firmly committed to adding at least one Gender equality-specific objective and indicator in its log frame; and monitors and reports on the gender equality results it achieves via evaluations.[64]

Likewise, the programme's OECD DAC disability marker is 'significant' meaning that disability inclusion is an important objective, but is not a principal reason for undertaking the programme. The project reporting outcome indicator "Gender equality and social inclusion is advanced throughout the fund" has been included in the results framework, and data against other indicators is disaggregated where possible (e.g. by gender).

Sustainability Impact Assessment

Questions	Is the question relevant? Have you considered it?		Specify how your proposal will have a positive, negative, or neutral sustainability impact.	Are there any proposals to mitigate any negative impacts?	Identify any sustainability benefits. How do you intend to promote these?
	Relevant	Considered			
What is the current environmental impact of your options?	Y	Y	Positive global sustainability impacts – addressing biodiversity loss as a core purpose, with secondary benefits for climate mitigation and adaptation.	Negative impacts are not expected – projects supported will only be selected partly on the basis of the sustainability impacts they are expected to achieve.	The programme will support projects that deliver a range of sustainability benefits – improved ecosystem and

[62] Building & Applying Evidence in the Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Gender Equity and Social Inclusion. Defra, Date: 15 June 2023.
[63] Gender Equality and the empowerment of Women and Girls, OECD, 2022, page 97
[64] biodiversity-challenge-funds-gesi-ambition-final.pdf

					biodiversity management, enhanced local capacity and capabilities, evidence and knowledge sharing. Benefits will be realised through benefits reporting.
What are the key environmental impacts of your project delivery?	Y	Y	Delivery of some projects will involve international travel.	Guidance and procedures will be put in place to ensure projects are implemented sustainably.	N/A
What is the post project impact?	Y	Y	Strong positive overall sustainability impacts through direct action on global biodiversity and long-term capability building.	As above.	As above.

3. The Economic Dimension

3.1. Introduction

The Economic Dimension will set out the economic rationale behind the intervention, consider a longlist of options for appraisal, then assess the relative costs and benefits of a shortlist and highlight the preferred option on value for money grounds.

Darwin Plus and comparable options deliver a wide range of specific outputs and outcomes, many of which are difficult to monetise. As such we have not sought to undertake a full monetised cost-benefit analysis of the options. Instead, we have used a mix of quantitative and qualitative information to assess the relative costs and benefits of the different options.

Biodiversity is under pressure globally due to the following combination of market and governance failures, justifying intervention of some kind:

- **Public goods**: these are goods whose consumption cannot be limited to a certain group of people (non-excludability) and whose consumption by one party does not reduce the ability of another party to consume it (non-rivalrous). They are typically under-provided by markets due to insufficient economic incentives. Biodiverse ecosystems, which in the OTs provide a range of ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, crop pollination and water purification, are examples of public goods. According to the OECD, global ecosystem services are worth an estimated $125-140 trillion per year (i.e. more than one and a half times the size of global GDP)[65]. Given their public good characteristics, without government intervention, biodiverse ecosystems are likely to be under-provided by private markets.

- **Externalities:** these occur when social costs or benefits are not adequately reflected in the market price of a good of service. When markets are left to themselves, this can result in the under- or over- production or consumption of a good or service relative to what would be socially optimal. This can often occur with economic activities such as agriculture and aquaculture (both prevailing in the OTs), where the impact on ecosystems and the wider services they provide – both now and in future – is not reflected in market prices.

- **Information failures:** the link between biodiversity and the services nature provides is not always known or understood, and often means biodiversity is systematically undervalued by market actors. Lack of information or information asymmetries can lead to markets not delivering socially efficient outcomes. For example, consumers or producers of products or services may lack information on the impact of their provision on biodiverse ecosystems, information which could have affected their behaviour. In the OTs, insufficient data and limited public awareness were both highlighted as barriers to improving outcomes for biodiversity, during recent consultation with OT stakeholders led by the JNCC.

- **Governance failures:** governments and stakeholders - at national, regional and/ or local levels - may lack the capacity and/or capabilities to correct for market failures. They may not take sufficiently long-term approaches or effectively integrate impacts on biodiversity and natural capital into policy and decision-making, resulting in the

[65] OECD (2019), *Biodiversity: Finance and the Economic and Business Case for Action*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/a3147942-en.

under-provision or loss. In the OTs, a lack of human and technical capacity, combined with institutional and bureaucratic structures, are both reported as barriers to tackling biodiversity challenges[66].

- **Distributional inequalities:** The global distribution of the above failures is skewed, since biodiversity loss brings disproportionately negative impacts for vulnerable groups, including poorer people, women and indigenous groups – whose livelihoods are more dependent on biodiverse ecosystems[67]. For all these reasons, there is justification to address OT biodiversity loss.

[66] Call for Evidence on Safeguarding the environment in British Overseas Territories (OTs): Summary of responses (2020)

[67] IPBES (2019): Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. S. Díaz, J. Settele, E. S. Brondízio, H. T. Ngo, M. Guèze, J. Agard, A. Arneth, P. Balvanera, K. A. Brauman, S. H. M. Butchart, K. M. A. Chan, L. A. Garibaldi, K. Ichii, J. Liu, S. M. Subramanian, G. F. Midgley, P. Miloslavich, Z. Molnár, D. Obura, A. Pfaff, S. Polasky, A. Purvis, J. Razzaque, B. Reyers, R. Roy Chowdhury, Y. J. Shin, I. J. Visseren-Hamakers, K. J. Willis, and C. N. Zayas (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 56 pages. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3553579

3.2. Critical success factors

In line with HM Treasury Green Book guidance and based on the needs set out in the strategic dimension, the following Critical Success Factors (CSFs) were identified to assess long-listed options to determine the short-listed options for more detailed appraisal.

Table 1. Critical Success factors

Critical Success Factor		Measurement Criteria	Importance
1	Strategic alignment	Addresses biodiversity loss and degradation in the OTs. Supports demand-led action to conserve, protect and restore nature. Improves the wellbeing and climate resilience of local communities and stakeholders. Improves policy and practice in a sustained way.	High
2	Potential value for money	Delivers high social value (social, economic and environmental) relative to potential costs, benefits and risks.	High
3	Supplier capacity and capability	Matches the ability of potential suppliers to deliver the required services and appeals to the supply side.	High
4	Potential affordability	Can be financed from available funds and aligns with sourcing constraints.	High
5	Potential achievability	Is likely to be delivered given an organisation's ability to respond to the changes required. Matches the level of available skills required for successful delivery.	High

3.3. Long list appraisal

A long list of options was developed and assessed by a team of Defra staff, drawing on the options filter categories (scope, service solution, service delivery, service implementation, funding) in HM Treasury's Green Book. Given the need for the interventions to deliver impact across a range of biodiversity challenges, narrower options were discounted. The following long-list options were identified, covering a mix of bilateral and multilateral options.

0. *Do nothing/Business As Usual (BAU).* The Darwin Plus programme would be discontinued at the end of March 2026. No further funding rounds would be launched. All ongoing projects would be terminated early.

<u>Bilateral options</u>

1. *Fund ongoing Darwin Plus projects only.* No further funding rounds would be launched after March 2026. All ongoing projects would continue to be supported to completion.

2. *Extend and continue to fund Darwin Plus to March 2029.* New funding rounds would be launched from April 2026 annually for Darwin Plus Main, Strategic and People & Skills schemes, and biannually for the Darwin Plus Local scheme.

3. *Distribute funds directly to OT Governments and Administrations.* OT authorities would allocate funds to local conservation projects and initiatives within an agreed scope aligned with the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy and report on progress to Defra.

4. *Allocate funds directly to a single or small number of eNGOs working across the OTs.* These eNGOs would deliver conservation projects within an agreed scope aligned with the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy and report on progress to Defra. Example eNGOs include[redacted]

[redacted]

For several of the above long-list options based on considerations of scope, solution, delivery and implementation, different sub-options could be identified based on different levels of scale. We have identified three variants of option 2 (extend and continue to fund Darwin Plus) on this basis:

2a. Continue funding Darwin Plus at any scale below the current funding level of £10m p/a (likely scenario being ~£7.5m p/a: ODA £1m RDEL; non-ODA £3m CDEL, £3.5m RDEL, with up to an additional ~3% over-programming of total programme budget).

2b. Continue funding Darwin Plus at approximately current scale at approximately £9.3m p/a (likely scenario being ODA £1.5m RDEL; non-ODA ~£3.8m CDEL, ~£4m RDEL, with up to an additional ~2.5% over-programming of total programme budget).

2c. Continue funding Darwin Plus with scale increasing to a level and at a speed considered to be broadly manageable (likely scenario being ~£11.5m p/a: ODA £2m RDEL; non-ODA £4m CDEL, £5.5m RDEL, with up to an additional ~2% over-programming of total programme budget).

Options 3 and 4 (distribute funds directly to OT authorities, and allocate funds directly to eNGOs) could realistically be pursued at levels up to the current scale of Darwin Plus for the period of this business case. Analysis of different levels of scale these options above has not been presented as they each scored red against at least one CSF (see scoring below) and thus were not material for the shortlisting decisions.

The long-listed options, including the ‘do nothing/BAU’ option, were assessed against the CSFs to determine which options should be shortlisted for more detailed appraisal. The longlist options were assessed using the following scoring system to determine whether the option should be carried forward to the shortlist analysis:

Red: does not achieve CSF at all
Amber: partial achievement of the CSF
Green: substantial achievement of the CSF

Longlisted options needed to score at least amber in all CSFs to be selected for the shortlist appraisal. A summary of the assessment of options against the CSFs is provided in the table below and a more.

Table 2. Longlist options assessed against CSFs (Green = Fulfils CSF, Amber = Partially fulfils CSF, Red = Fails to mee CSF) and shortlisting decision

			Option	CSF 1 Strategic alignment	CSF 2 Potential value for money	CSF 3 Supplier capacity and capability	CSF 4 Potential affordability	CSF 5 Potential achievability	Shortlist
0	**Do nothing/BAU**		Discontinue Darwin Plus at the end of March 2026. Terminate all ongoing projects.	Red	Red	Green	Green	Amber	Not shortlisted
1	**Fund ongoing Darwin Plus projects only**		Support all ongoing projects to completion only.	Red	Amber	Green	Green	Amber	New Baseline Option 0
2	**Extend Darwin Plus to 2029**	a.	Reduced scale (~£7.5m p/a)	Amber	Amber	Green	Amber	Amber	New Option 1
		b.	Approximately current scale (~£9.3m p/a)	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	New Option 2
		c.	Increased budget (~£11.5m p/a)	Green	Green	Amber	Amber	Green	New Option 3
3	**Distribute funds directly to OT Governments and Administrations.**		Distribute budget directly to OT authorities to distribute to local conservation projects/activities.	Amber	Amber	Red	Green	Red	Not shortlisted
4	**Allocate funds directly to a single or small number of eNGOs working across the OTs.**		Allocate money directly to select eNGOs to deliver conservation projects/activities.	Red	Amber	Amber	Green	Red	Not shortlisted

The analysis behind assessments and decisions of the long-listed options is summarised as follows:

Option 0. Do nothing/(BAU). Under this option, Darwin Plus would be discontinued at the end of the current FBC. No future funding rounds would be launched from April 2026, and all ongoing projects would be terminated early. This would come at an estimated ~£131k RDEL in administrative costs from NIRAS.

CSF1 Strategic alignment: Would not address biodiversity loss and degradation in the OTs, and would result in the sudden loss of resources, momentum, partnerships, capacity, knowledge and skills for OT governments and stakeholders. Would partly hamper Defra's delivery against the 25 Year Environment Plan, Environmental Improvement Plan and UK OT Biodiversity Strategy.

CSF2 Potential value for money: Would result in loss of biodiversity benefits arising from funds already invested.

CSF3 Supplier capacity and capability: Would release up to 3.2 FTE capacity for other purposes at Defra. Contract with NIRAS would be continued for a limited period only to terminate projects.
CSF4 Potential affordability: Contract with NIRAS would be continued for a limited period only to terminate projects, at an estimated cost of ~£131k RDEL (of which ~£39k ODA and ~£92k non-ODA).
[redacted]
This option was not shortlisted.

Option 1. Fund ongoing Darwin Plus projects only. Under this option, no new funding rounds would be launched after April 2026.
CSF1 Strategic alignment: Would lead to a more gradual but still significant loss of biodiversity benefits. Not funding new projects would partly hamper Defra's delivery against the 25 Year Environment Plan, Environmental Improvement Plan and UK OTs Biodiversity Strategy. Ongoing projects may underperform without the incentive of future funding for follow-on projects.
CSF2 Potential value for money: Working with a shrinking portfolio would reduce economy of scale.
CSF3 Supplier capacity and capability: Once contracts had expired, would release up to 3.2 FTE for other purposes at Defra. Contract with NIRAS would be continued at a steadily reduced size as projects reach the end of their lifespan.
CSF4 Potential affordability: All existing grants would be honoured at a legacy cost of ~£8.96m over 2026/27-2027/28 (of which ~£1.56m ODA and ~£7.40m non-ODA) [redacted]
CSF5 Potential achievability: Would open up UK Government to similar reputational damage and legal challenge as described in Option 0, and the same undermining of reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection.
This option proceeds to shortlist only as the baseline Option 0 against which to compare other shortlisted options.

Option 2a. Extend and continue to fund Darwin Plus to March 2029 at a reduced scale.
CSF1 Strategic alignment: Would continue to result in biodiversity benefits, but to a smaller extent than the current model. Reducing the scale of Darwin Plus would partly reduce Defra's delivery against the 25 Year Environment Plan, Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 and the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy, but still provide Defra with oversight of future investment (i.e. funding projects which score highly against its own technical criteria).
CSF2 Potential value for money: Would result in some loss of economy of scale.
CSF3 Supplier capacity and capability: Would be deliverable, scaling down an existing operation.
CSF4 Potential affordability: With Defra business planning complete and applications received for Darwin Plus Local projects starting from April 2026, it is now understood that **this option would not be affordable without at least 3% over-programming invested**

[redacted]

in ODA. This option is still included to explore the benefits of funding Darwin Plus at different scales.
CSF5 Potential achievability: Would open up the UK to some reputational damage and legal challenge, for the same reasons as covered in Option 0, and cause some undermining of its reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity conservation.
<u>This option was shortlisted as the 'do minimum/preferred way forward' option at a reduced scale, and as new Option 1.</u>

Option 2b. Extend and continue to fund Darwin Plus to March 2029 at approximately current scale.
CSF1 Strategic alignment: Would meet the strategic alignment, although further scale up of Darwin Plus would be desirable given the scale of the challenge facing the OTs. Maintaining Darwin Plus at its current scale would continue to support Defra's delivery against the 25 Year Environment Plan, Environmental Improvement Plan and UK OT Biodiversity Strategy.
CSF2 Potential value for money: Would continue to support good value for money, as demonstrated by the current model.
CSF3 Supplier capacity and capability: Would remain deliverable with the same capacity and capabilities as under the 2022-26 business case.
CSF4 Potential affordability: This is confirmed as affordable, using the full Darwin Plus allocation following Defra business planning, with the same capacity and capabilities as under the 2022-26 business case.
CSF5 Potential achievability: Would remain achievable with the same capacity and capabilities as under the 2022-26 business case, and maintain the UK's reputation in supporting the OTs to meet their global biodiversity commitments.
<u>This option was shortlisted as the 'do minimum/preferred way forward' option at a maintained scale, and as new Option 2.</u>

Option 2c. Extend and continue to fund Darwin Plus to March 2029 at an increased scale.
CSF1 Strategic alignment: Considered to meet the strategic alignment, and to a greater extent than option 2b through scaling up. Continuing Darwin Plus at an increased scale would strengthen Defra's delivery against the 25 Year Environment Plan, Environmental Improvement Plan and UK OT Biodiversity Strategy.
CSF2 Potential value for money: Considered to offer potential value for money, and to a greater extent than option 2b through upscaling.
CSF3 Supplier capacity and capability: Taking financial inflation since 2022 into account, a ~20% increase in programme budget would not result in significantly increased pressure on existing operating structures compared to the previous FBC.
CSF4 Potential affordability: With Defra business planning complete and applications received for Darwin Plus Local projects starting from April 2026, it is now understood that **this option would not be affordable within the confirmed Darwin Plus allocation.** This option is still included to explore the benefits of funding Darwin Plus at different scales.
CSF5 Potential achievability: Would be considered deliverable, having already delivered the operation at a slightly smaller scale under the 2022-2026 business case. An increased budget would be welcomed by OT governments and stakeholders and help strengthen the UK's reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection.
<u>This option was shortlisted as the 'do minimum/preferred way forward' option at a more ambitious scale, and as new Option 3.</u>

Option 3. Distribute funds directly to OT governments and administrations. Under this model, Defra would allocate funds otherwise set aside for Darwin Plus directly to the OT governments and administrations, which they would allocate to local projects of their

choice but within an agreed scope aligned with the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy. OT governments and administrations would report back to Defra on project progress and achievements in-territory.

CSF1 Strategic alignment: Would lead to biodiversity gains and give OT governments and administrations the flexibility to address local needs and within a strategic scope agreed with Defra (such as that set by the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy). However, delegating the project selection process and post-award monitoring and management to OT governments and administrations, even within an agreed scope, could still risk a substantial loss of Defra accountability and governance over the use of funds. [redacted] No clear benefits to Defra's delivery against the 25 Year Environment Plan, Environmental Improvement Plan or the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy above/beyond current model.

CSF2 Potential value for money: Pressures on capacity within the OTs could result in less detailed or less frequent reporting, reducing the data available to evaluate and evidence impact, lessons learned or value for money. May lead to increased administrative costs for OT governments and administrations, coupled with reduced economies of scale and value for money.

CSF3 Supplier capacity and capability: Grant management (i.e. project assessment and selection, administration, risk management, monitoring and reporting requirements etc) could add a significant burden to OT authorities, who already report limited capacity.

CSF4 Potential affordability: Would save [redacted] grant admin fees that could be used to increase available budget for projects within the programme or elsewhere across Defra.

CSF5 Potential achievability: Concept may be received positively by some OTs, but there are diplomatic challenges in achieving equality and equity of how funds are distributed. Allocating budget across OTs proportionally, rather than through a demand-led approach, is not straightforward; there are multiple and sometimes conflicting valid criteria for calculating portions (e.g. population size, GDP, landmass, ocean area, number of threatened species, size of priority ecosystems, etc). [redacted]

This option was not shortlisted.

Option 4. Allocate funds directly to a single or small number of eNGOs working across the OTs. Under this model, Defra would allocate funds otherwise set aside for Darwin Plus directly to a single or small number of eNGOs working across the OTs, which they would use to deliver projects of their choice but within an agreed scope aligned with the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy. [redacted]
The eNGOs would report back to Defra on project progress and achievements in-territory.

CSF1 Strategic alignment: Would give eNGOs increased funding and greater opportunity to deliver larger and more transformative projects, leading to increased biodiversity benefits. However, there would also be a substantial loss of Defra accountability, governance and strategic influence over use of the funds, resulting in no clear delivery against the 25 Year Environment Plan, Environmental Improvement Plan or UK OT Biodiversity Strategy. Taking a 'top-down' approach to conservation, the option may not meet local needs and priorities and would be unlikely to build the same capability and capacity as under the current model. Furthermore, delegating the project selection process to a limited number of eNGOs, even when working within an agreed scope, could risk some local communities, species, geographies, and/or methodologies etc being underfunded or under-supported, with potential negative implications for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI).

CSF2 Potential value for money: Risk of insufficient capacity at eNGOs to deliver projects with rapidly increased budget. This could result to deadweight and displacement of funds (i.e. funding activities that the eNGOs would have still delivered without the extra budget).
CSF3 Supplier capacity and capability: Risk of insufficient capacity amongst eNGOs to spend funds with rapidly increased budget.
CSF4 Potential affordability: Would save [redacted] grant admin fees that could be used within the programme or elsewhere across Defra.
CSF5 Potential achievability: This 'top down' approach would be negatively received by the OTs, who would collectively lose influence on how the funds are spent. It would contradict the principle of "nothing about you without you" as set out in the communiqué that followed the 2024 UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council[69] and result in reputational damage to UK Government.
This option was not shortlisted.

3.4. Short list appraisal

In this section, the costs and benefits of the shortlisted options are assessed to determine their relative value for money. Most benefits were not monetisable and hence it has not been possible to produce full cost-benefit ratios. A partial cost-benefit analysis was carried out against the monetisable benefit "DPLUS-D01a: Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices".

To project quantifiable benefits from Darwin Plus, projected outcomes against the Standard Indicators have been modelled by using data on recent rounds of Darwin Plus Main and Darwin Plus Local. Darwin Plus Fellows/People & Skills and Darwin Plus Strategic were excluded from this analysis because the available data for modelling projections was more limited:

- Darwin Plus Main indicators were developed using actual and projected results for rounds 10-12.
    - These were adjusted for underreporting and differences in funding, to model potential results for rounds 13-15, across the 4 options.
    - The range reflects whether round 10 is included/excluded (alongside rounds 11 and 12) to model future results.
- Darwin Plus Local indicators were developed using results for rounds 1-4
    - These were averaged and adjusted for differences in funding, to model potential results for future rounds, across the 4 options.
    - The range reflects different adjustments used for potential underreporting (one based on the level of spend captured by reporting, one reflecting the number of projects captured by reporting)
- An additionality adjustment of 90% was applied to projected outcomes. Further details on this adjustment are provided in section 2.6.

The full list of projected benefits for Darwin Plus Main and Darwin Plus Local is included in Annex F.

This approach to modelling is consistent with the programme's theory of change and rests on the same assumptions about how HMG investment will lead to slowing, halting and reversing of the rates of biodiversity loss and degradation in the OTs. In practice, we could

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[69] 2024 UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council communiqué - GOV.UK

expect stronger results than those projected, particularly for later years, given mechanisms being built in for learning, feedback and continuous improvement over time. In addition, outputs/outcomes from Darwin Plus People & Skills and Darwin Plus Strategic, which weren't included in the analysis, will add to these results.

Table 3. Summary of cost-benefit analysis of short-listed options.

Option	Assumptions	Lifetime costs over 3 years (Nominal)	Benefits	Rank
0. Baseline: Fund ongoing projects only	[redacted]	[redacted]	**Benefit-cost ratio:** 1.2 – 2.6 **Net present social value:** £2.2m - £15.8m **Return on public sector costs:** 0.2 – 1.6 **Example quantified benefits (Darwin Plus Main + Local schemes only):** 155,584 – 182,394 Hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUSD01a). ~35 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01). 311 - 377 new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02). 7 - 10 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02) 11 - 12 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01) 354 - 374 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01). 109 - 119 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUSA03). **Disbenefits:** Substantial damage to HMG's reputation and relationship with the OTs from winding down Darwin Plus. Increased likelihood of current projects underperforming without prospect of future funding to aim for. Undermining the UK's reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection.	N/A

[redacted]

1. Do minimum/preferred way forward at reduced scale	[redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]	[redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]	**Benefit-cost ratio:** 18.6 – 39.6 **Net present social value:** £212.9m - £465.1m **Return on public sector costs:** 9.5 – 20.8 **Example quantified benefits (<u>Darwin Plus Main + Local schemes only</u>):** 979,117 – 1,070,137 hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUS-D01a) 90- 93 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01). 417 - 526 new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02). 13 - 19 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02) 53 - 56 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01) 1,400 – 1,488 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01). 210 - 229 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUS-A03). **Non-quantified benefits:** Benefits to OTs from JNCC-led project - portfolio. Benefits to OTs from APHA's biosecurity support. Benefits to OTs from Fera's pest identification service. **Disbenefits:** Some damage to HMG's reputation and relationship with the OTs from scaling down Darwin Plus. Undermining the UK's reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection.	3

[redacted]

2. Do minimum/preferred way forward at approximately maintained scale	[redacted]	[redacted]	**Benefit-cost ratio:** 18.5 – 39.2 **Net present social value:** £302.6m - £661.4m **Return on public sector costs:** 10.9 – 23.9 **Example quantified benefits (<u>Darwin Plus Main + Local schemes only</u>):** 1,312,649 – 1,431,524 hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUS-D01a) 113 - 118 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01). 473 - 605 new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02). 16 - 22 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02) 71 - 75 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01) 1,834 – 1,950 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01). 255 - 279 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUS-A03). **Non-quantified benefits:** Benefits to OTs from JNCC-led project -portfolio. Benefits to OTs from APHA's biosecurity support. Benefits to OTs from Fera's pest identification service. Maintaining HMG's reputation and relationship with the OTs by maintaining current funding levels of Darwin Plus. Supporting the UK's reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection. **Disbenefits:** Reduction of financial support to the OTs since 2022 in real terms due to inflation. This is likely to be met with disappointment by some stakeholders.	1

[redacted]

3. Do minimum/preferred way forward at a more ambitious scale	[redacted]	[redacted]	**Benefit-cost ratio:** 17.7 – 37.6 **Net present social value:** £393.8m - £861.9m **Return on public sector costs:** 11.6 – 25.4 **Example quantified benefits (<u>Darwin Plus Main + Local schemes only</u>):** 1,704,040 – 1,869,172 hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUS-D01a) 150 - 156 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01). 635 - 836 new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02). 22 - 32 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02) 94 - 99 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01) 2,420 – 2,579 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01). 342 - 377 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUS-A03). **Non-quantified benefits:** Benefits to OTs from JNCC-led project -portfolio. Benefits to OTs from APHA's biosecurity support. Benefits to OTs from Fera's pest identification service. Strengthening HMG's reputation and relationship with the OTs by upscaling Darwin Plus. Supporting the UK's reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection. **Disbenefits:** Increasing Darwin Plus funding will set a precedent and stakeholder expectation for this scale to be maintained beyond 2028/29.	2

[redacted]

Option 0. Baseline: Fund ongoing projects only

Social Costs

Under this option, ongoing (legacy) grants would be honoured but no new grants would be awarded after March 2026. This would result in a gradual winding down of the programme. Contracts with APHA, JNCC and Fera would not be renewed after this date.

- This option would spend ~£8.96m in legacy grants over a 3-year period (2026/27-2028/29), noting that some ongoing grants are not due to end until 2029/30. Of this, ~£4.14m would be spent on the Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes). [redacted]
- Darwin Plus would still pay [redacted] towards the BCFs independent evaluation over the first two years, as this work is valuable for understanding the impact of the programme and lessons learned for the benefit of other programmes.

Social Benefits

- The results of funding over 3 years (calculated for Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes only) are expected to include:
  - 155,584 – 182,394 Hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUSD01a).
  - ~35 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01).
  - 311 - 377 new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02).
  - 7 - 10 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02)
  - 11 - 12 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01)
  - 354 - 374 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01).
  - 109 - 119 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUS-A03).

Wider impacts

- There are no expected significant disbenefits from funding Darwin Plus projects; projects with expected disbenefits sifted out by the DPAG during the selection process.
- However, there would likely be significant, unquantifiable disbenefits under this option from winding down the programme, including reputational damage to UK government from withdrawing this valued source of support to the Overseas Territories, and loss of national influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection. Indirect disbenefits could include impacts for persons in the UK working in international conservation, sustainability, science and trade.
- The distributional impacts of this option would differ across societal groups and OTs. Smaller local conservation groups and OTs with limited financial resources and capacity would be disproportionately affected, as they are least able to offset the loss of funding opportunities. Larger UK-based and/or international conservation organisations may also be required to scale back activities that previously supported the OTs. Consequently, those OTs most dependent on external organisations for skilled capacity would face the greatest negative impacts.
- Similarly, marginalised groups within OT societies could face disproportionate negative impacts. The composition of these groups varies across OTs as shaped

by local culture, community dynamics, infrastructure and individual intersectionality. For example, in terms of access to natural landscapes, those with reduced mobility may experience differing levels of disadvantage depending on personal financial resources and the availability of health resources and transport infrastructure.

- Darwin Plus projects are required to be at least GESI-sensitive. Scaling back the programme would therefore eliminate existing Darwin Plus funded benefits tailored to marginalised groups and diminish opportunities for new ones. Marginalised groups in mainland UK are unlikely to be affected differently from non-marginalised groups.

Option 1. Extend and continue to fund Darwin Plus to March 2029 at a reduced scale.

Social Costs

Under this option, the competitive grants element of the programme would continue at a reduced scale. Contracts with APHA, JNCC and Fera would be renewed from April 2026 at a similar scale to 2025/26.

- This option would spend ~£19.34m in legacy and new grants over a 3-year period (2026/27-2028/29). Of this, ~£11.20m would be spent on the Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes. [redacted]
- Darwin Plus would pay [redacted] towards the BCFs independent evaluation over the first two years.
- This option would spend a further £2.36m on contracts with JNCC, APHA and Fera over a 3-year period.

As a reminder, with Defra business planning complete and applications received for Darwin Plus Local projects starting from April 2026, it is now understood that this option would not be affordable without at least 3.04% over-programming invested in ODA. This option is still included to explore the benefits of funding Darwin Plus at different scales.

Social Benefits

- The results of funding over 3 years (calculated for Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes only) are expected to include:
    - 979,117 – 1,070,137 hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUS-D01a)
    - 90 - 93 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01).
    - 417 - 526 new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02).
    - 13 - 19 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02)
    - 53 - 56 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01)
    - 1,400 – 1,488 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01).
    - 210 - 229 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUS-A03).
- Maintaining contracts with JNCC, APHA and Fera would bring significant unquantifiable benefits:
    - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of JNCC's portfolio of activities under this programme, including implementation of the new UK

    OT Biodiversity Strategy, support on the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). In addition, the UK Government will benefit from continued K3/K4 Outcome Indicator monitoring as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan.
  - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of APHA's biosecurity support, which provides capacity to OTs for biosecurity legislation, regional training and rapid responses to emerging threats.
  - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of Fera's identification service of invasive invertebrate pests and diseases.

Wider impacts

- There are no expected significant disbenefits from funding Darwin Plus projects; projects with expected disbenefits sifted out by the DPAG during the selection process.
- However, there would be significant, unquantifiable dis-benefits under this option by reducing the Darwin Plus offer, including reputational damage to UK government and loss of national influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection. Indirect disbenefits could include impacts for persons in the UK working in international conservation, sustainability, science and trade.
- The distributional impacts of this option would differ across societal groups and OTs. Dis-benefits would still be felt, although to a lesser extent than in Option 0, and benefits would be felt to a lesser extent than Option 2 or 3. Smaller local conservation groups and OTs with limited financial resources and capacity would be disproportionately affected, as they are least able to offset the reduced funding opportunities or compete for a smaller funding pot. Darwin Plus already provides a variety of resources for applicants to *partly* mitigate this impact and support a more balanced distribution of funds across the OTs. Larger UK-based and/or international conservation organisations may also be required to scale back activities that previously supported the OTs. Consequently, those OTs most dependent on external organisations for skilled capacity would face the greatest negative impacts.
- Similarly, marginalised groups within OT societies could face disproportionate negative impacts. The composition of these groups varies across OTs as shaped by local culture, community dynamics, infrastructure and individual intersectionality. For example, in terms of access to natural landscapes, those with reduced mobility may experience differing levels of disadvantage depending on personal financial resources and the availability of health resources and transport infrastructure.
- Darwin Plus projects are required to be at least GESI-sensitive. Scaling back the programme would therefore eliminate existing Darwin Plus funded benefits tailored to marginalised groups and reduce opportunities for new ones. Marginalised groups in mainland UK are unlikely to be affected differently from non-marginalised groups.

Option 2. Extend and continue to fund Darwin Plus to March 2029 at approximately current scale.

Social Costs

Under this option, the competitive grants element of the programme would continue at a maintained scale. Contracts with APHA, JNCC and Fera would be renewed from April 2026 at a similar scale to 2025/26 (noting that this still at a reduced scale to 2022-25 contracts).

- This option would spend ~£24.83m in legacy and new grants over a 3-year period (2026/27-2028/29). Of this, ~£13.34m would be spent on the Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes).
- [redacted]
- Darwin Plus would pay [redacted] towards the BCFs independent evaluation over the first two years.
- This option would spend a further £2.36m on contracts with JNCC, APHA and Fera over a 3-year period.

As a reminder, this option is confirmed as affordable, using the full Darwin Plus allocation following Defra business planning, with the same capacity and capabilities as under the 2022-26 business case.

Social Benefits

- The results of funding over 3 years (calculated for Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes only) are expected to include:
    - 1,312,649 – 1,431,524 hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUS-D01a)
    - 113 - 118 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01).
    - 473 – 605 new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02).
    - 16 -22 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02)
    - 71 - 75 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01)
    - 1,834 – 1,950 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01).
    - 255 - 279 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUS-A03).
- Maintaining contracts with JNCC, APHA and Fera would bring significant unquantifiable benefits:
    - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of JNCC's portfolio of activities under this programme, including implementation of the new UK OT Biodiversity Strategy, support on the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). In addition, the UK Government will benefit from continued K3/K4 Outcome Indicator monitoring as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan.
    - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of APHA's biosecurity support, which provides capacity to OTs for biosecurity legislation, regional training and rapid responses to emerging threats.
    - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of Fera's identification service of invasive invertebrate pests and diseases.

Wider impacts

- There are no expected significant disbenefits from funding Darwin Plus projects; projects with expected disbenefits sifted out by the DPAG during the selection process.
- Maintaining current funding levels would have some mixed unquantifiable benefits and disbenefits. On the one hand, this option would maintain HMG's reputation and relationship with the OTs by maintaining a valued programme and support the UK's reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity

protection. Indirect benefits could include impacts for persons in the UK working in international conservation, sustainability, science and trade. On the other hand, this would represent a reduction of financial support in real terms due to inflation, which is likely to be met with disappointment by some vocal stakeholders.
- The distributional impacts and benefits from this option would vary on different societal groups or OTs. This would maintain the status quo; Smaller local conservation groups and OTs with limited financial resources and capacity would be able to maintain approximately their current level activities, but would still face the challenge of competing with other OTs and groups for grants in an oversubscribed programme. Darwin Plus already provides a variety of resources for applicants to *partly* mitigate this obstacle and support a more balanced distribution of funds across the OTs. Larger UK-based and/or international conservation organisations would be able to maintain approximately their current level activities that benefit the OTs, and thus OTs that rely the most on these organisations to bring in skilled capacity will receive a maintained level of support.
- Marginalised groups within OT societies would continue to benefit from Darwin Plus projects, which are required to be GESI-sensitive at minimum, and some of these benefits may be cumulative over time. Marginalised groups in mainland UK are unlikely to be affected differently from non-marginalised groups.

Option 3. Extend and continue to fund Darwin Plus to March 2029 at an increased scale.

Social Costs

Under this option, the competitive grants element of the programme would continue at an increased scale. Contracts with APHA, JNCC and Fera would be renewed from April 2026 at a similar scale to 2025/26 (noting that this still at a reduced scale to 2022-25 contracts).

- This option would spend ~£31.34m in legacy and new grants over a 3-year period (2026/27-2028/29). Of this, ~£17.09m would be spent on the Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes).
- [redacted]
- Darwin Plus would pay [redacted] towards the BCFs independent evaluation over the first two years.
- This option would spend £2.36m on contracts with JNCC, APHA and Fera over a 3-year period.

As a reminder, with Defra business planning complete and applications received for Darwin Plus Local projects starting from April 2026, it is now understood that this option would not be affordable within the confirmed Darwin Plus allocation. This option is still included to explore the benefits of funding Darwin Plus at different scales.

Social Benefits

- The results of funding over 3 years (calculated for Darwin Plus Main and Local schemes only) are expected to include:
    - 1,704,040 – 1,869,172 hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUS-D01a)
    - 150 - 156 best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01).

    - 635 - 836 new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02).
    - 22 - 32 new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02)
    - 94 - 99 new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01)
    - 2,420 – 2,579 people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01).
    - 342 - 377 local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUS-A03).
- Maintaining contracts with JNCC, APHA and Fera would bring significant unquantifiable benefits:
    - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of JNCC's portfolio of activities under this programme, including implementation of the new UK OT Biodiversity Strategy, support on the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). In addition, the UK Government will benefit from continued K3/K4 Outcome Indicator monitoring as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan.
    - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of APHA's biosecurity support, which provides capacity to OTs for biosecurity legislation, regional training and rapid responses to emerging threats.
    - The OTs would benefit from the continuation of Fera's identification service of invasive invertebrate pests and diseases.

<u>Wider impacts</u>

- There are no expected significant disbenefits from funding Darwin Plus projects; projects with expected disbenefits sifted out by the DPAG during the selection process.
- Other significant unquantifiable benefits from upscaling Darwin Plus include strengthening HMG's reputation and relationship with the OTs, and supporting the UK's reputation and influence as a global leader in biodiversity protection. This would indirectly benefit the general UK population, particularly those working in international conservation, sustainability, science and trade through increased funding opportunities, improved cross-border relations and a heightened UK profile.
- The distributional impacts and benefits of this option would vary across societal groups and OTs. Expanding the budget for grants would enable the programme to support a greater number of high-quality projects, creating broader opportunities for smaller local conservation groups and OTs with limited financial resources and capacity. This would allow them to expand their activities more effectively. Larger UK-based and/or international conservation organisations would also benefit by extending their initiatives in support of OTs. As a result, OTs most dependent on external organisations for skilled capacity would experience amplified benefits.

Marginalised groups within OT societies would see proportionally greater benefits from the increased number of Darwin Plus projects. These projects are required to be GESI-sensitive at minimum, and some of the resulting benefits may accumulate over time. By contrast, marginalised groups in mainland UK are unlikely to be affected differently from non-marginalised groups.

3.5. Preferred option

Table 3 summarises the key elements of the cost-benefit analysis across the shortlisted options and shows multipliers for each option's quantified costs and benefits relative to those under BAU. Key conclusions are:

- Options 1-3 all indicate similar and very high value-for-money, relative to the baseline option (Option 0), from the partial cost-benefit analysis.
- Benefits are assumed to scale with the level of spend, without diminishing marginal benefits. This is because the programme at its current budget level is oversubscribed with high quality applications, despite limited advertisement (advertisement is currently only via BCFs social media and the programme website; local OT newspapers, radio and other routes and connections have not been explored in depth). For example, in Round 13 the DPAG recommended funding 13 Main projects with a combined lifetime value of >£6.6m, but only 5 projects worth £3m could be awarded. Similarly, the DPAG-recommended three high quality applications to the Strategic scheme with a combined lifetime value of >£8.7m, but only one worth £3m could be awarded. Therefore, we are confident that we would receive enough high-quality applications to fulfil Darwin Plus at an increased scale (Option 3), particularly if additional advertisement efforts are explored.
- [redacted]
- **Overall, Option 2 (continue to fund Darwin Plus at approximately the same scale as the 2022-2026 FBC) is preferred**, as it offers very high value for money in terms of delivering the breadth of UK objectives for this investment at a sustainable rate.

The four 'Es' of value for money (VfM) for the preferred option

We can assess the preferred option (Option 2) in terms of both Defra's cost-benefit analysis framework, in line with HMT Green Book principles, and FCDO's 'four Es' framework[77] (see below).

Further to this, the overall Value for Money of Darwin Plus is monitored annually against a **Value for Money framework** (see annex H) where the four E's are assessed against Value for Money indicators. This framework was developed as part of the Scoping Report on the use of Value for Money Assessment in the BCFs, published in February 2025.

Economy (relative cost of inputs): This is expected to be achieved as a result of the relatively low costs associated with administering the Darwin Plus programme, partly as a result of sharing the grant administrator contract with the other BCFs, and through the competitive mechanism of awarding Darwin Plus grants, with an expert committee (the Darwin Plus Advisory Group – DPAG) informing the selection of projects that demonstrate economy in sourcing inputs.

[77] In line with FCDO's PrOF guidance for ODA spending.

Efficiency (cost-effectiveness of outputs): This is expected to be delivered through the competitive mechanism for selecting projects, with expert advice built in, the monitoring of project outputs through standard reporting indicators and the results framework, aligning with the programme's Log Frame and Theory of Change, and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation at both project and overall fund level. The Darwin Plus Strategic scheme facilitates economy of scale by enabling larger-scale, longer-term, multi-OT collaborative projects.

Effectiveness (cost-effectiveness of outcomes): Similarly to above, this is expected to be delivered through the competitive mechanism of selecting projects and monitoring of project outcomes through standard reporting indicators and the results framework.

Equity: This will be delivered through funding projects that meet the GESI Sensitive minimum standard. Defra's Biodiversity in the OTs team and NIRAS are working with the Defra ODA Hub to ensure all funded Darwin Plus projects are being supported to meet this standard by December 2025, as part of the BCFs GESI Strategy and 5-year action plan. GESI is embedded in the ToC review. The results framework at the fund level will make provide data disaggregating project beneficiaries by gender and age group. Improved disaggregated monitoring will allow a clearer understanding of how the Darwin Plus performs in terms of promoting GESI and where improvements can be made. Furthermore, the Darwin Plus Local scheme is specifically designed to be more accessible to individuals and smaller organisations, who often have the most practical experience and local expertise but limited capacity.

3.6. Cost-benefit analysis

A cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken, assessing the impacts of Options 1-3 relative to the baseline option (Option 0).

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[78]: "DPLUS-D01a: 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 and benefit realisation.
- Benefit realisation only occurs for 1 year. This is a conservative assumption, as we may expect benefits to be sustained at some level beyond this[79].

[78] Drawn from the Ecosystem Services Valuation Database, based on HMT Green Book supplementary guidance: ESVD

[79] This reflects that Darwin Plus Local funding is only provided for one-year. Therefore, it cautiously assumes that impacts only occur whilst ODA funding is provided.

- 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[80].
- 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 90% additionality, with the assumption that 10% of programme impacts and leveraged finance would have been realised without Defra funding for Darwin Plus[81].

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 and 2024/25. 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 2026/27 – 2028/29, however it is possible that they will have different scope and impacts.
- It is possible that data drawn from projects funded in 2023/24 and 2024/25 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 2.5% to 5.0% 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. This range is reflected in the low and high value-for-money estimates[82].
- 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 in. As such, a mean ecosystem service value, across all biomes and geographies, is used to monetise benefits, taken from the ESVD[83].

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[80] This rate has been chosen to reflect standardised assumptions used for ICF KPI reporting: International Climate Finance KPI 8 Methodology Note Feb 2023: Ecosystem loss avoided (Ha) as a result of international climate finance

[81] There are very limited alternative funds available to UKOTs, to support projects covered by Darwin Plus. The results delivered by Darwin Plus Local projects are particularly unlikely to occur without HMG funding, as grants support organisations/individuals that do not typically receive funding. As such, additionality is modelled as 90%, to reflect the limited likelihood of alternative support to deliver projects.

[82] These indicative rates were chosen to reflect the median value of “Food”, “Opportunities for recreation and tourism”, and “Moderation of extreme events” ecosystem services, relative to the total ecosystem service value for relevant geographies/biomes (based on TEEB services classifications). These ecosystem services are key benefits of ecosystem protection for UKOT economies. Therefore, this assumption takes a conservative approach, by reflecting that hectares of habitat brought under sustainable management by Darwin Plus Local may only generate ecosystem service benefits linked to “Food” (2.5%) or “Food”, “Opportunities for recreation and tourism”, and “Moderation of extreme events” (5.0%). It is likely that habitats brought under sustainable management practices will generate other types of ecosystem service benefits, therefore this is a conservative assumption range.

[83] This includes the following biomes, where it is feasible Darwin Plus Local projects could operate: 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. Ecosystem service values were summed for each biome across each TEEB service classification to give a total biome ecosystem service value. The mean average value was then taken across all biomes. The values drawn from the ESVD were not limited by geography, reflecting the global spread of UKOTs. The ESVD also applied relevant controls to remove extreme values, based on the distribution of values. Further details on these controls are available on the ESVD website: ESVD

Disaggregation by biome 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 4 below presents partial 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 and 2024/25, used to inform projections.
- Uncertainty in the marginal improvement in ecosystem services, resulting from habitats being brought under sustainable management practices.

Table 4: Value-for-money metrics for Darwin Plus

Option	Benefit-cost ratio	Net present social value (2025/26 prices, 2026/27 present value)	Return on public sector costs
Option 0	1.2 – 2.6	£2.2m - £15.8m	0.2 – 1.6
Option 1	18.6 – 39.6	£212.9m - £465.1m	9.5 – 20.8
Option 2	18.5 – 39.2	£302.6m - £661.4m	10.9 – 23.9
Option 3	17.7 – 37.6	£393.8m - £861.9m	11.6 – 25.4

Note that as Option 0 is the baseline option, its value-for-money is measured relative to 'do nothing' where no further costs or benefits are incurred by Darwin Plus. The value-for-money of Options 1-3 are all measured relative to the baseline Option 0.

These estimates indicate **very high value-for-money across Options 1-3,** if similar results are achieved to projects that were funded in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Benefits are assumed to scale with the level of spend, without diminishing marginal benefits. Therefore value-for-money is similar across Options 1-3.

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) ranges, when considering the additional value of these high-impact 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.

3.7. 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.

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 5, below, presents value-for-money metrics, if all hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices occurred in "polar and alpine systems".

Table 5: Sensitivity analysis of Darwin Plus value-for-money[84]

Option	Benefit-cost ratio	Net present social value (2025/26 prices, 2026/27 present value)	Return on public sector costs
Option 0	0.1	-£8.9m	-0.9
Option 1	1.4	£5.2m	0.2
Option 2	1.4	£7.3m	0.3
Option 3	1.4	£8.6m	0.3

Note that as Option 0 is the baseline option, its value-for-money is measured relative to 'do nothing' where no further costs or benefits are incurred by Darwin Plus. The value-for-money of Options 1-3 are all measured relative to the baseline Option 0.

This sensitivity analysis shows that using pessimistic assumptions on ecosystem service values, Darwin Plus could present negative value-for-money under Option 0 i.e. incurring social costs, as a result of funding. However, for Options 1-3, the benefit-cost ratio is above the break-even point of 1.0, demonstrating positive value-for-money. Further, this scenario reflects highly pessimistic assumptions. 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. It is also highly unlikely that all ecosystem service improvements would occur in "polar and alpine systems" given the characteristics of OTs.

Further, analysis suggests that for Darwin Plus to break even across Options 1-3 each hectare of habitat brought under sustainable management practices would only need to improve the value of ecosystem services by approximately 0.14%. This is significantly

[84] This assumes a 5% increase in the value of ecosystem services per hectare.

lower than the pessimistic 2.5% improvement assumed in low range of the main cost-benefit analysis.

The low break-even value for this assumption **adds further confidence that Darwin Plus is likely to deliver very high value-for-money,** if projects funded in the next SR period deliver similar results to those funded in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

4. The Commercial Dimension

The economic dimension provides a high-level justification for the proposed intervention; the following Commercial Case sets out the delivery model and, procurement options.

4.1. Introduction

Darwin Plus and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund evolved from the Darwin Initiative. As a result, all three BCFs share the same delivery models, quality assurance and due diligence, and are delivered under the same Fund Administrator contract.

The case to procure the current BCFs Fund Administrator contract was made in the Darwin Initiative Business Case, approved by Ministers in 2021.

4.2. Procurement (Commercial) Strategy

With the granting of Ministerial approval in 2021, a new contract for the provision of the BCFs Fund Administrator was deemed to be required. This was due to the existing contract ending with no option to further extend, and the scaled-up ambition of the new business case.

An assessment of the procurement options was conducted in 2021, and included Direct award to a Fund Administrator, Use of a framework from FCDO, Use of Crown Commercial Services (CCS) Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) RM6172 Grant Services or Procure via open market. Procuring via open market was determined to be the only viable route.

The Procurement Strategy was approved on 13 August 2021 by Defra's Category Delivery (CD) Board, followed by Invitations to Tender (ITT) documents being published on the Defra e-Tendering system on 19 October 2021 to secure a Fund Administrator for all three BCFs. In compliance with appropriate legislation, Government policy and Defra group Commercial guidance, a contract was awarded to NIRAS LTS International Ltd. (now called NIRAS Group (UK) Ltd. following a restructuring of the company).

The implied grant administration fees compensating the suppliers (NIRAS, plus JNCC for Darwin Plus Local administration only) relative to the anticipated funding [redacted]. This excellent evidence of value for money as other Defra outsourced grant management services typically cost between 5-10% of the grant funding.

An Independent Evaluator was appointed in 2025, using the Service Order Form call off process from Defra’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Services (MEL Services) contract. The overarching MEL Services contract was awarded to ITAD/OPM in 2024, the contract provides independent monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) services for Defra’s international programming. The ITAD/OPM consortium includes 38 organisations who provide a full range of methodological, thematic and geographical expertise to meet multiple MEL requirements. The first MEL report is currently in draft and is expected to be published in March 2026 assesses the impact, sustainability, contribution to transformational change and value for money of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

4.3. Contractual terms

The 2022 BCF Fund Administrator Contract is based on Defra's Standard Terms and Conditions, and performance is monitored via an established Performance Management Framework.

The Contract is publicly available on Contract Finder (http://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/) as ODA Biodiversity Challenge Funds Administration Manager ecm_64416

4.4. Performance Management Framework

As part of Defra's continuous drive to improve the performance of all Contractors, a Performance Management Framework (PMF) (Annex I) is used to monitor, measure, and control all aspects of the Fund Administrator's performance of contract responsibilities.

The PMF purpose is to set out the obligations on the Contractor, to outline how the Contractor's performance will be evaluated and to detail the sanctions for performance failure.

Defra holds quarterly contract meetings with the Fund Administrator to review performance and implementation of the funds.

The use of a service credit regime accompanied by a proactive approach to correcting failures and addressing their cause improves the relationship between Defra and the Fund Administrator, enabling a trusting partnership to be maintained.

Each Key Performance Indicator (KPI) includes a subset of indicators that are monitored on a regular basis and form part of the contract performance review as set out in Annex I

4.5. Annual Reviews

Since 2022, the programme has conducted annual reviews to monitor the progress of the programme, scoring an "A" in 2022/23 and "A" in 2023/24. Significant progress has been made regarding the contractor's performance in meeting KPI indicators which is detailed in an annual fund manager report which feeds into the overall programme annual review.

Several key milestones have been achieved including:

- Significant improvements to building and applying evidence, introducing amendments to application and reporting templates.
- Improvements to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds websites in 2024, to enhance user experience and easier access to finding relevant application resources.
- The completion of 5 new deep dives in 2024 contributing towards generating evidence of the impact the Biodiversity Challenge Funds have in biodiversity conservation.
- The delivery of 17 webinars / workshops across the Biodiversity Challenge Funds, providing information to applicants on various points in the lifecycle of grants.

4.6. Procurement route and timescales – New requirement

The current BCF Fund Administrator Contract is for 3 financial years+ up to 4 further financial years, with annual break points, starting from 30 March 2022 and ending by latest 29 March 2029. The contract cannot go beyond this date: given the contract has already been extended via a Contract Change Notice, to extend the contract further would exceed the total value expressed in the original award notice. As such, a new contract will be commissioned.

The new Grant Administration contract C27824 is the recommended route to the market to commission services for 2027/28 and beyond, a comprehensive Commercial review of route to market options will be considered in Q4 2025/26.

The Grant Administration Services contract reduces the time and cost against using individual calls for competition (2-4 weeks v 3 to 9 months). Commercial and policy colleagues are meeting to discuss the Grant Administration Services contract in December 2025, with a view to engaging the Lead Delivery partner (Ernst & Young) in an exploratory, no-commitment conversation in early 2026. Once a specification has been issued to the lead delivery partner, they must provide a fully costed proposal within a Service Order Form (which serves as the contract) within 14 working days. It is important to note that one of the Key Delivery Partners for this contract is NIRAS, who are the incumbent grant administration supplier for Darwin Plus. Policy, supported by commercial will review the proposal and if approved, contracting can be finalised and work can commence with limited disruption to the existing service given the ongoing involvement of NIRAS. Commercial will recommend policy colleagues engage with the Grants Hub early in the New Year, to ensure the Grants Administration Services contract delivery option has their approval.

All contracting arrangements will take place in accordance with Procurement Act 2025, including if we were to commission via the Grant Administration Services contract or another existing framework. Commercial will establish the route to market and follow the Plan, Define, Procure and Manage procurement steps. All decisions and the relevant evidence will be captured in a Commercial Strategy document which will be subject to Commercial governance.

Due to the value of this Business Case, the Cabinet Office spend controls team were contacted as the £20m spend threshold has been surpassed. While the total value of this Business Case is £27,996,000 (plus up to 2.45% over-programming), the value is disaggregated across Grant expenditure, admin costs and commercial contracts. Therefore, Commercial have confidence this falls outside the scope of Cabinet Office spend controls. Consideration will be given as to whether the change of delivery partner for services from 2027/28 and beyond will result in existing grants agreements needing to be novated from one organisation to another. There may be TUPE implications and a need for robust exit planning processes. The timing of the Grant rounds under the incumbent supplier contract will also need to be assessed, any in flight grant rounds would be impacted by a potential change in delivery partner.

4.7. Commercial Resource

Commercial resource requirements are presently limited to supporting the development and delivery of Contract Change Notices. The need for additional commercial resource is anticipated in the assessment of procurement options, and the subsequent procurement method to secure a Fund Administrator Contract in 2027/28. It is expected that these needs will be met by existing ODA commercial resource.

4.8. Fraud Risk Assessment

An independent Fraud Risk Assessment (FRA) for the BCFs was commissioned by Defra covering grant eligibility risks, grant management risks, grant payment risks and other risks.

The recommendations arising from the FRA have been incorporated into the risk framework, tender documents, and subsequent contract where appropriate and feasible, and operationalised. For example, the FRA has identified a series of potential fraud risk areas such as intentional grant mismanagement or falsification. NIRAS have therefore increased the number of projects that are subject to mid-term reviews and financial spot audits to counter the risk of grants not being used for intended purpose and claims for non-allowable costs. In addition, checks of payment amounts between forecasted and actual are made by both NIRAS and Defra to ensure payments are in line with original application requests and grant agreements.

Under the Fund Administration Contract, new financial systems have been informed by the FRA's recommendations and ambition to further strengthen the ability to assess, mitigate and prevent fraud and error (see section 6.8.4).

With the new financial systems established in 2023, a new independent BCFs FRA was completed in 2024 to comprehensively test the new processes and make recommendations for further improvements, which have been considered in the design of the new processes developed under the 2025 Fund Administration Contract.

A separate FRA applies to the Darwin Plus Local scheme – the smaller grant scheme open to both individuals (for grants of ≤£20,000) and organisations (for grants of ≤£50,000). This FRA captures additional controls such as requiring individuals to open a separate (project) bank account for funds and providing proof of identification and solvency, plus spot audits conducted by the JNCC (Fund Partner) when in-territory.

The FRAs act as a living document, updated annually assessing the risk of fraud risk across the BCFs, recognising higher and lower risk countries or territories. A 2025 update of both the BCFs and bespoke Darwin Plus Local FRA was completed in November 2025.

A separate FRA will be undertaken on any new requirement.

An irregularity report for 2024-25 was conducted for the three BCFs to assess the effectiveness of the measures implemented to prevent fraud and error across the BCFs. A sample of 85 projects (a third of live BCF projects) was undertaken, finding one case of irregularity to a value of £7, amounting to 0.00% of total grant expenditure for 2024-25.

4.9. Commercial Governance and Approvals

The current BCFs Fund Administrator Contract is managed by the Head of Biodiversity Challenge Funds, in the Darwin Initiative Policy Team (see figure 1). No substantive changes are required to be made to the Fund Administration contract as a result of this new business case. All required commercial approvals were secured before awarding the

Fund Administrator contract in 2021. Any new requirement will be subject to DgC internal controls in line with its scheme of delegation.

4.10. Commercial Risk

The initial contract period commenced on 30 March 2022, with an initial end date of 29/03/2025. In March 2025, the contract was extended via Change Control Note with a revised end date of 29 March 2027.

With the Fund Administration contract delivering the BCFs, Darwin Plus has a dependency on the continued successful delivery of its related funds: Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund and the Darwin Initiative. If any of these funds cease or change significantly, then the Fund Administration Contract may require renegotiation. The programme has been assessed to be compliant with the current subsidy control regimes, and controls are in place to prevent it coming within scope.

Contract failure would be likely to create a critical gap in the ability to manage the programme, so carries a High Risk. To mitigate this risk and other commercial risks, a number of actions and controls are in place including the:

- Contract that sets clear delivery expectations and how issues that may impact its implementation will be managed.
- Full Delivery Partner Review conducted in 2022 by KPMG to assess the capability and capacity of the Fund Administrator, including Governance, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Programme Delivery Capacity and Downstream Partner Management.
- Performance Management Framework to monitor the implementation of the contract, and
- strong working relationship between the Contract Manager, Defra delivery team and the Fund Administrator.

4.11. Additional Partners

A small proportion of funding will continue to support relevant activity by trusted delivery partners, for which separate contracts and/or Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) will be renewed in 2026. These Partners have included and will continue to include:

- **APHA:** delivery partner for a longstanding OTs biosecurity project since 2016. Initially funded by the UK Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) before being transferred under the Darwin Plus Business Case in 2022. This project provides capacity to the OTs for biosecurity legislation, regional training, rapid responses to emerging threats and support to Darwin Plus projects. The partnership will be renewed with a three-year MoU lasting until March 2029.
- **Fera:** delivery partner for identification service of invasive invertebrate pests and diseases in the OTs since 2009, commissioned under a long-term service agreement with Defra and subsequently brought under the Darwin Plus Business Case in 2022. The partnership will be renewed with a three-year contract lasting until March 2029.

- **JNCC:** delivery partner for the Darwin Plus Local grant scheme; development and implementation of the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy; OT indicators commissioned by the 25 Year Environment Plan (K3 and K4[85]); and ACAP since 2022. The partnership will be renewed with a three-year MoU lasting until March 2029.

[85] See K3: Status of endemic and globally threatened species in the UK Overseas Territories; and K4: Extent and condition of terrestrial and marine protected areas in the UK Overseas Territories

5. The Financial Dimension

The Financial Dimension establishes that the preferred delivery option, identified in the Economic Dimension, is affordable and that the principles of sound financial management of public funds are followed.

5.1. Financial summary

The spending has been profiled over an indicative multiyear timeframe (Table 6); this includes the delivery of pre-existing commitments from previous funding rounds (legacy grants spend). Spend will be contingent upon successful programme reviews, with provisions to curtail activities if considered necessary. N.B. Defra staff costs are funded through core Defra, and do not form part of the overall programme budget.

This business case seeks approval from Investment Committee to invest the full funds allocated to Darwin Plus as a result of Defra business planning following the 2026/27 – 2028/29 Spending Review. This is expected to be composed of approximately £9.3m per annum (i.e. the full amount allocated following Defra business planning), of which £1.50m is ODA and £7.83m is non-ODA, plus up to ~2.5% over-programming.

Darwin Plus is designed to be flexible, whilst maintaining value for money, by adjusting the number of new grants awarded each year where to fit with our financial planning. If future ODA or non-ODA funding were to fall far short of current planning assumptions, the Darwin Plus Administrator could also deliver further savings by activating break clauses in grant agreements with existing project delivery partners to ensure HMT limits are not breached.

As set out in this business case, the Darwin Plus budget is composed of both ODA and non-ODA funds at a ratio of around 20:80. All Darwin Plus ODA finance is ODA International Climate Finance (nature) as it will result in strong outcomes for climate change mitigation and adaptation and biodiversity.

Table 6. Overall Indicative Financial Summary

Item		Budget		Financial year 2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total	Proportion %
Grant expenditure	Legacy grants	non-ODA	RDEL	£1,619,330.28	£502,598.45	£280,762.40	**£2,402,691.13**	86.26
			CDEL	£2,585,215.11	£2,076,849.00	£335,325.00	**£4,997,389.11**	
		ODA	RDEL	£702,334.51	£486,295.80	£191,708.60	**£1,380,338.91**	
			CDEL	£83,407.00	£63,446.00	£37,053.00	**£183,906.00**	
	New grants	non-ODA	RDEL	£964,275.38	£2,303,576.29	£2,698,094.89	**£5,965,946.56**	
			CDEL	£1,746,125.56	£2,002,323.27	£3,584,675.00	**£7,333,123.83**	
		ODA	RDEL	£327,160.47	£618,910.61	£939,473.75	**£1,885,544.84**	
			CDEL	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	**£0.00**	
	total grant expenditure			**£8,027,848.31**	**£8,053,999.42**	**£8,067,092.65**	**£24,148,940.38**	
Administration costs*	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
		[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
		[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
	[redacted]			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Independent Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
		[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
	[redacted]			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Commercial contracts	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
		[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
		[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
		[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
	[redacted]			[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	
	Total costs (not including up to 2.5% over-programming)			**£9,338,000.00**	**£9,329,000.00**	**£9,329,000.00**	**£27,996,000.00**	**100.00**
		non-ODA	RDEL	£3,335,000.00	£3,579,000.00	£3,859,000.00	£10,773,000.00	38.48
			CDEL	£4,503,000.00	£4,250,000.00	£3,970,000.00	£12,723,000.00	45.45
			Total non-ODA	**£7,838,000.00**	**£7,829,000.00**	**£7,829,000.00**	**£23,496,000.00**	**83.93**
		ODA	RDEL	£1,377,310.43	£1,397,627.83	£1,462,947.00	£4,237,885.26	15.14
			CDEL	£122,689.57	£102,372.17	£37,053.00	£262,114.74	0.94
			Total non-ODA	**£1,500,000.00**	**£1,500,000.00**	**£1,500,000.00**	**£4,500,000.00**	**16.07**

**This does not include Defra staffing costs, which are funded by Core Defra and are not part of the programme.*
***This is exclusively the Independent Evaluation, and excludes project level monitoring, evaluation and learning (5-10% of project budgets), and project and programme-level monitoring, evaluation and learning activities delivered by NIRAS.*

The indicative profile in table 6 assumes Darwin Plus will continue to be affordable through business planning and provide value for money. **It is based on the budget provided following the multiyear spending review and uses the full funds available (N.B. if ODA CDEL is not available for the programme, then ODA RDEL will be reclassified in-year to ensure the programme remains affordable).**

Value for money will be tested following an independent interim evaluation in 2026, with a full evaluation end point in 2028-29, to assess the impact of all three BCFs. This will be accompanied by a new business case come April 2029 onwards that could, if justified, enable new grants to be awarded and Darwin Plus maintained at the ambition level set in the 2022 business case of at least approx. £10m/pa – maintaining longevity of the fund.

5.2. Contracted costs

Defra Commercial advises that Fund Administrator costs should typically fall within 5-10% of total programme costs, depending on its size, level of risk and responsibilities undertaken, and should be no higher than 15%. As a benchmark, the comparable HMG programme, Global Centre on Biodiversity for Climate, estimates fees [redacted] Building on experience to date, we estimate Darwin Plus Fund Administrator costs to within 5-10%.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning expenditure is estimated to be between 5-10% of total programme funds, inclusive of the activities delivered by grantees, fund administrator (Workstream: Building and Applying Evidence) and the Independent Evaluator contract.

Defra will manage the Fund Administrator and Independent Evaluator contracts, so will pay these suppliers directly according to the terms of the contracts. Invoices under the NIRAS and Independent Evaluation contracts are provided exclusive of VAT as it is recoverable.

Payments will be made in arrears following satisfactory milestones, KPIs and other measures as stipulated in the contractual agreements; this is expected to be monthly for the Fund Administrator and on the production of key deliverables for the Independent Evaluator.

5.3. Funding sources

5.3.1. Powers to spend and ODA

The legal basis for Defra to fund Darwin Plus is Section 153[(1)(s)] of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This states how Darwin Plus may provide “support for the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources and habitats and for the furtherance of the aims of the Convention on Biological Diversity”. This gives the Secretary of State the power to give financial assistance to Darwin Plus with HMT’s consent. Section 153(3) allows the Secretary of State to give financial assistance in such form and on such terms as they see fit.

Additionally, spending in the ODA-eligible OTs is permitted under the International Development Act 2002, which provides a power for the Secretary of State to “provide any person or body with development assistance if he is satisfied that the provision of the assistance is likely to contribute to a reduction in poverty". Funding here will adhere to the rules for spending ODA.

Please note that the International Development Act 2002 sets out powers to provide ODA funding to the OTs without requiring such funding to meet the poverty reduction criteria that is attached to all other funding provision in the Act. 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.

Funding will be provided to delivery partners in the form of a grant. It is not a loan programme, nor does it provide any other complex type of finance to recipient OTs.

5.3.2. Financial resources and budgets

The full costs will be up to £27.996m (of which £23.496m of non-ODA and £4.5m ODA (International Climate Finance)), i.e. the full amount allocated following business planning, subject to the outcomes of future Spending Reviews, associated affordability tests and Ministerial views. **Up to ~2.5% over-programming will be sought from savings elsewhere in Department; if they are not available then the programme will fund fewer project grants accordingly (expected to be 1 Main project per annum).**

HMT expect existing Darwin Plus commitments to be part of Defra's first call on funding Spending Review allocations, over launching new Defra programming. If this proves insufficient, funding rounds and existing commitments will be curtailed or halted with a robust prioritisation process to protect value for money.

In line with standard commercial practice, the Fund Administration contract and Terms and Conditions provided to grantees include break clauses to enable Defra to curtail the agreement should there be a breach or if funding is no longer available.

As a Tier 2 programme, and with individual projects operating for up to 5 years, resulting in commitments to run across Spending Review periods, renewed Defra Ministerial approval of this programme will be sought.

5.3.3. Budget Classification

In reviewing the Consolidated Budget Guidance 2025-26 and details of Darwin Plus grants, the budget category and any accounting implications for the typical grants awarded has been considered in the planning and forecasting for the programme. An assessment process will continue to be conducted prior to award to ensure that the correct classification will be applied to each grant.

Under Treasury guidance, Defra is permitted to change budgets from RDEL to CDEL within the financial year. With the early budget classification assessment of grants, and strengthened understanding of the portfolio, the need to process in-year RDEL to CDEL swaps will be kept to an absolute minimum.

Defra does not anticipate that the programme would be funded through HMG's Green Gilts.

5.3.4. Capital, R&D Capital and Resource Delegated Expenditure Limits

The CBG sets out the distinction for whether expenditure scores as CDEL or RDEL. Under the CBG, expenditure should be considered against the ESA10 definition of research and development to confirm whether it should be treated as CDEL for budgeting purposes.

Typically, CDEL is where the recipient uses payments to buy fixed assets or inventory; repay debt or acquire long term financial assets.

Under ESA10, R&D CDEL is referred to as “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis to increase the stock of knowledge, and/or use of this stock of knowledge for the purpose of discovering or developing new products, including improved versions or qualities of existing products, or discovering or developing new or more efficient processes of production.”

All Darwin Plus grants are required to ensure that outputs are open access, and therefore, there is no ability to sell an intangible asset and no reliable measure of probable future economic benefit as there is no recordable method of tracking who has utilised the evidence findings.

Awarded grants are assessed as set out in the CBG against ESA10 criteria (novel, creative, uncertain, systematic and transferable and/or reproducible) to help identify and classify grants as R&D Capital where all five criteria are met. Grants meeting these criteria will be treated as capital within ODA budgets.

In the 2025/26 financial year, a projected 46% of the budget is classified as CDEL. This includes spend by project grants (including some Capital R&D, where research will drive meaningful environmental outcomes on the ground, and equipment purchases) and the MoUs with JNCC and APHA (including some research agreed in scope and equipment purchases). All other finance will be treated as RDEL. Assets created or purchased are owned by the grantees, thus there is no balance sheet impact for Defra and no ongoing charge for depreciation or need for revaluations. Any assets bought from project funds must be used for the benefit of projects and should remain in the host country once the project has completed; they are expected to remain available to the local partners, communities and/or stakeholders, to support ongoing work; alternatives to this approach must be justified.

5.3.5. ODA: International Climate Finance

Based on the findings of the literature discussed in this report, there is good evidence to suggest that measures or actions that are aiming to halt or reverse biodiversity loss can largely be seen to have a positive impact for climate change, either as a result of climate mitigation or climate adaptation.

The Fund Administrator has developed and begun testing a climate assessment methodology that draws from both the OECD DAC Rio Markers for Climate Handbook and the internal FCDO Programme Operating Framework (PrOF) Guide (May 2021)[86] to determine OECD DAC coding, and ICF eligibility (relevant only to ODA funding). Based on this methodology, we anticipate that 95-100% of Darwin Plus ODA funding will be ICF eligible.

[86] OECD DAC. *OECD DAC Rio Markers for Climate Handbook.*. FCDO. 2021. *Climate and Environment. Programme Operating Framework Guide (PrOF). May 2021* (Internal guidance document).

Prior to award, this process will assess all individual grants against the OECD DAC Rio Markers, namely:

- Climate Change – Adaptation
- Climate Change – Mitigation
- Biodiversity
- Desertification

In each case, a clear record will be maintained, and an assessment provided of whether an individual project can be classified against each marker in terms of it being a principal objective, significant objective, or not targeted. Where the links to climate change are only implicit, project evidence will make the link more explicit to ensure compliance with ICF classifications. The outcome of the assessment will be shared with Defra Finance and ultimately with OECD via the reporting and transparency processes.

ICF classification guidance was recently reviewed with Darwin Plus contributing evidence towards the ICF guidance, ensuring that the programme aligns with the approach taken for IWT and Darwin Initiative.

5.4. Resourcing and headcount

Within HMG, managing Darwin Plus will require the following full time equivalent (FTE) staff (see table 7 below). The programme will draw on an analyst already employed under the other BCFs. These calculated costs include employer National Insurance and pensions, plus the 2% annual salary increases anticipated across and 1.25% for reward and recognition. **NB. These staffing costs are funded by Core Defra and are not part of this programme.**

Table 7. Defra staffing costs

Grade	FTE	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Totals
Grade 6	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Grade 7 (including 0.23 FTE BCF Lead Analyst)	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
SEO	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
HEO	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Reward and recognition	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Total	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

In addition, programme will be supported by financial, commercial and project management staff - both in the International Biodiversity and Climate (IBC) and Strategic, governance and Climate directorates, for ODA and non-ODA spend, respectively. Staffing costs for these individuals are funded by Core Defra and are not part of this programme.

HMT advice for the Darwin Initiative business case was that less than [redacted] of programme budget should be spent on resourcing. Noting that Defra staff costs are funded through core Defra rather than under the Darwin Plus business case, fund administration costs through NIRAS and JNCC (for Darwin Plus Local administration only) represent [redacted] of the budget and are thus considered proportionate.

5.5. Financial management

In 2022, with HMT approval, Defra opened a dedicated non-interest-bearing Government Banking Service (GBS) Account, with funds remaining under Defra's control and within the established cash flow management scheme, including monthly reconciliation process. The account was opened for the exclusive purpose of making payments to grantees of the BCFs, including Darwin Plus.

Named individuals from the Fund Administrator will be provided by Defra defined access rights to the account, and these are monitored and checked twice a year by Defra Compliance and Financial Accounting Team.

With close Defra oversight, the Fund Administrator will disburse finance to grantees, on the demonstration of need including, but not limited to, grant claim forms, details of previous and anticipated payments to grantees, payments by fund, and any prepayments or accruals.

Grants will be awarded and paid out in British Sterling (GBP), converted into other currencies by the delivery partner who will own the associated exchange rate risks as set out in the grant agreements.

VAT is recoverable for goods and services received by Defra under the Darwin Plus programme (i.e. the grant administrator (NIRAS) fees and the independent evaluation). Grants awarded for projects under Darwin Plus are inclusive of any VAT that is chargeable; the risk of any adverse VAT assessment raised by HMRC is borne by the Grant Recipient. Grantees are advised that the amount specified in the Grant Funding Letter and the Grant Funding Agreement is the total amount payable by the Defra, and no additional amount will be added for any VAT that they have to pay to HMRC. Reclaimable VAT and any other tax (except PAYE) are prohibited expenditure under grants, as detailed in the BCFs Terms and Conditions.

HMT, Commercial lawyers, Finance Business Partners, Managing Public Money and Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA) were consulted on developing this approach and risk mitigation.

5.5.1. Payments to grantees

The terms of the grant agreement between Defra and the grantee are set out in the Grant Offer Letter, together with the Grant Acceptance Form and the terms and conditions of Grant, describes each partner's responsibilities including fiduciary, safeguarding, compliance, monitoring and reporting.

All grant agreements are based on Defra's Model Grant Agreement; the templates are reviewed annually to further strengthen and maintain the agreements.

On instruction from Defra and in line with agreed governance and safeguards, the Fund Administrator will administer the transfer of the funds to the grant holders.

In line with HMT's guide on Managing Public Money, Defra will not be paying in advance of need. Some grantees, particularly smaller organisations with limited capital, will need funding prior to commencing an activity; clearance for this approach will be agreed with Defra prior to any payments. The Grant Funding Agreement will include mechanisms to mitigate the associated risk, including the ability to clawback any misused or unspent funds.

When authorised to make the payments to the grantees, the Fund Administrator will:

- provide assurance that all money has been paid to the grantee by way of a bank statement;
- disburse payments to projects only on receipt of validated grant claim forms, which will include required expenditure assurance;
- ensure that project implementers are aware that they bear the foreign exchange risk, as foreign payments are made at the pre-agreed sterling amount;
- not pay projects in breach of funding agreements or Defra's instruction; and
- retain all project and payment records for a minimum of five years after termination of each project.

Grant payments will be linked to performance against agreed costs and deliverables set out in each final grant agreement; the grant lead partner therefore bears the risk of poor performance and the performance of its partners within the grant

Defra and the GIAA have full access to grant documents and financial records and shall have the right of access to complete audits at the Fund Administrator's premises if necessary.

5.6. Financial risk

Defra has a zero-tolerance approach to corruption and will pursue aggressive recovery approaches.

In accepting the grant agreement, all lead organisations will be required to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to fraud, bribery and corruption, including but not limited to the Bribery Act; to act immediately if it is suspected, and to cooperate fully with HMG and other authorities to bring perpetrators to account, and to pursue aggressive loss recovery approaches.

All partners must have systems in place to detect and combat fraud. The Fund Administrator will hold responsibility for conducting due diligence on lead organisations prior to grant award, and for on-going monitoring and identifying any risks associated with fraud and corruption and must comply with HMG's policies to deliver a zero-tolerance approach.

All grant agreements contain provisions for withdrawing funding, clawing back misused funds, and break clauses to check progress and pause spend where required.

For grants over £50,000, this will require an independently certified Statement of Grant Usage to confirm that provided funds were spent on a basis consistent with project objectives.

If an issue is identified the Fund Administrator will report this; if required, Defra may instruct the Fund Administrator to send written notice requesting the delivery partner:

- Provide specific information as may be maintained by the delivery partner in the course of its regular operations regarding the use of the Contribution;
- Implement appropriate measures to ensure the Contribution is used in accordance with the purposes stated in the grant agreement.

Under the grant agreement, Defra can exercise its rights to clawback and terminate the grant should an event of default occur.

A cross-BCFs Fraud Risk Assessment and bespoke Darwin Plus Local Fraud Risk Assessment were conducted in 2024, the recommendations of which have been considered in the design of the new processes developed under the 2025 Fund Administration Contract.

A new cross-BCFs Fraud Risk Assessment and bespoke Darwin Plus Local Fraud Risk Assessment was commissioned in 2025 to test the new processes and make recommendations for further improvements (expected completion by November 2025).

Grantees bear the foreign exchange risk and inflationary risk, as payments are made in the pre-agreed sterling amount and converted during transfer or by project. As covered in the BCFs Risk Register, projects should actively manage foreign exchange risks. The change request process is available for projects to adjust ambition should foreign exchange rates become prohibitive; financial guidance is available for applicants and grantees on the Darwin Plus website.

5.7. Monitoring, reporting and accounting for expenditure

5.7.1. Reporting, monitoring and accounting for funds

Each grant agreement (based on Defra's Model Grant Agreement) sets out financial reporting standards proportionate to the scale of the grant, with annual financial reports supported by certified accounts and audits where requested.

Grantees will be required to establish and maintain an inventory of all Assets if they have a useful life of more than one year; and are valued in excess of £500 or equivalent; or are a group of lower value items that are mobile and considered attractive with a combined cost in excess of £500 or equivalent.

The Fund Administrator will submit monthly and annual financial reports, in line with existing HMG programmes and the expectations of Defra Finance, with reports disaggregating data by scheme, grant and category of spend.

The Fund Administrator will provide projections of spend for the financial year broken down by quarter and major budget category lines, with month-by-month financial forecasts, advising Defra in a timely manner of any unexpected, or significant, changes in forecasts. The Fund Administrator will apply Defra's Coding Structure (Cost Centre, Objective and Analysis codes) to strengthen the monitoring of the funds.

These monthly forecasts of need will form the basis for evidence to support the transfer of cash into the Government Banking Service Account for onward distribution to the grantees.

5.7.2. Transparency

Defra requires all its partners to meet the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard on ODA spend, which aims to ensure that organisations publish information to ‘improve the coordination, accountability and effectiveness to maximise their impact on the world's poorest and most vulnerable people’.

This programme will generate significant ODA spend information which will be of interest to others and will be published on IATI and be free to users whenever possible.

To increase the accessibility of information, at a minimum the programme-level data and project-level applications and reports for all ODA and non-ODA projects will also be made freely available on the programme website.

5.8. Accounting Officer Assessment

The accounting officer tests (Annex J) were considered during the development of this business case:

- **Affordability:** Budgets have been set internally for the spending review period and is affordable. Projects are expected to work to agreed budgets and work towards sustainable long-term commitments prior to award. This is managed through established financial controls throughout the programme. Should future budgets not be available, safeguards are in place to curtail projects prematurely. Grants are awarded through a competitive grants process, using an assessment on the proposed budgets and sustainability or achievability of projects prior to award.
- **Regularity:** the intervention is regular being compliant with legislation and Managing Public Money.
- **Propriety:** The intervention is proper as it meets the standards in Managing Public Money and accords with the generally understood principles of public life.
- **Value for money:** the intervention is assessed as providing value for money.
- **Feasibility:** the intervention is feasible and deliverable.

5.9. HMT approval

This business case does not exceed the value required for Tier 1 Business cases and does not go beyond the current Spending Review period. Therefore, HMT approval for this Business Case is not required. The programme has been assessed not to meet the threshold for being classed as part of the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

6. The Management Dimension

Darwin Plus is an established challenge fund, operating since 2012, with a proven track record of delivering projects. Significant improvements and expansions made under the last business case make Darwin Plus an accessible, UK branded and deliverable method of contributing towards enhanced UK commitments on biodiversity.

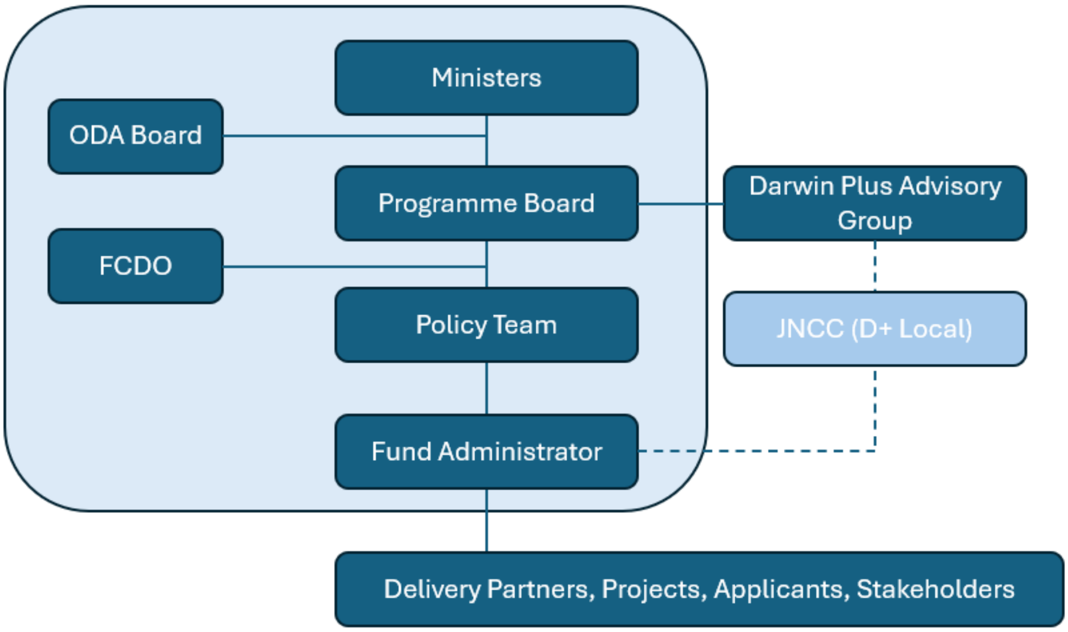
6.1. Programme Management

6.1.1. Programme structure and governance

Darwin Plus uses existing, proven and established expertise and delivery mechanisms. The programme is managed by a Defra-based secretariat, with support from an outsourced Fund Administrator, and overseen by a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) and Programme Board (figure 1 governance structure). The Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG) – an independent technical committee – provides advice on the programme and on applications, making recommendations to Defra.

Darwin Plus is one of Defra's three Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) – together with the Darwin Initiative and Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund. Whilst each has a unique objective, they share the same delivery model and are delivered under the same contractual Fund Administrator: NIRAS.

Figure 1. Darwin Plus governance structure.



To protect the quality of and trust in the programme, whilst delivering on the Seven Principles of Public Life, it is critical and a collective responsibility that Conflicts of Interest be effectively managed to a high standard by anyone involved with the assessment and award of the grants.

A virtual cross-Defra team delivers the BCFs, with individual team members contributing to cross-cutting workstreams on communications, building and applying evidence, and capacity and capability. The structure facilitates cross-learning and resilience in managing the funds.

6.1.2. Programme roles and responsibilities

Defra Ministers: The Minister for Nature – and Defra's Minister for the OTs – will be regularly updated on all key developments and will take key strategic decisions. Ministerial decision will be sought if major financial or reputational risks arise.

FCDO: Engaged and kept informed of Darwin Plus activities, and will advise on strategic, political and security issues – advocating for the OTs policy agenda via bilaterals with Defra Ministers. Has a seat on Defra's programme board.

Programme Board: Retains oversight of Darwin Plus delivery by approving annual workplans including the timing and scale of funding rounds, reviewing recommendations made by the DPAG, monitoring the performance and impact through annual reports and evaluation work conducted in part by the Fund Administrator. The Programme Board, which is made-up of the Defra policy team, DPAG Chair and staff members of the FCDO and ODA Hub (with oversight of the other BCFs), decides and awards grants in accordance with the terms of reference.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) Board: The role of an ODA board is to provide accountability and assurance for Defra's ODA budget and to provide strategic direction for Defra's ODA spend. The ODA board meets quarterly and consists of senior civil servants from FCDO and Defra.

Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG): Responsible for assessing applications to make robust recommendations to Defra on which projects are likely to achieve the desired impact. The DPAG includes experts in biodiversity and/or knowledge and experience of the OTs[87]. The group is currently chaired by Professor Howard Nelson, Lecturer in Conservation Leadership at the University of Cambridge. The operations are supported by the Fund Administrator and reported to the policy team and programme board.

JNCC (for Darwin Plus Local only): The UK government's advisor on international nature conservation, responsible for assessing applications to Darwin Plus Local, and supporting the Fund Administrator with monitoring and delivery of this smaller, biannual scheme. Conflicts of Interest are managed through a formalised 'firewall' between JNCC teams.

- **Policy Team:** Defra staff overseeing the programme will include 1.0 x HEO, 1.0 x SEO, 1.0 x G7, 0.23 x G7 BCF Lead Analyst and 0.2 x G6 (see table 7 for a table with further details on costs), reporting to an SRO. Key responsibilities will be split as follows:

- **Grade 7:** the Programme Head will oversee day-to-day management of the programme, including financial management and safeguarding – delivering through 2xHEOs. They will lead on strategic direction and develop new policies to maintain and raise delivery standards.

[87] Includes ex-officio representations from: Defra, National History Museum, Centre for Environment, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

- **Grade 6**: the Grade 6 will help shape the programme's vision, represent Defra at FCDO meetings relevant to Darwin Plus (e.g. OT board meetings), and support budget planning processes.

- **SRO:** Chairs the Programme Board, the SRO is ultimately accountable all aspects of governance, meeting objectives, delivering the outcome and realising the benefits. The SRO will inform the Programme Board and the Minister on any routine or escalated issues as appropriate.

Fund Administrator (NIRAS): responsible for administration of the application process, due diligence on potential delivery partners, supporting the DPAG, on-going day-to-day liaison, project-level monitoring and evaluation, and release of project funds. The Fund Administrator contract was awarded to NIRAS in 2022 for all three BCFs and is managed by Defra's ODA Hub. As required, the Fund Administrator will also source specialist expertise to inform programme strategy, complementing Defra's in-house expertise on topics including monitoring and evaluation.

Delivery partners: a wide range of respected and diverse UK and OT organisations including governments, universities, research institutes and NGOs[88], responsible for the design and delivery of projects as set out in the grant agreements, including but not limited to fiduciary, legal, reporting safeguarding aspects and project stakeholder management. Partners will liaise with the Fund Manager.

An overview of roles and responsibilities for Darwin Plus tiers is set out at Annex K

6.2. Programme Plan

Darwin Plus is an established challenge fund that operates on an annual call for proposals (bar the Darwin Plus Local scheme, which operates biannually). Each scheme is sequenced on consideration of applicant needs and to capitalise on efficiency gains and enable robust assessments. The annual workplan strongly interacts with the workplans of the other BCFs to avoid pinch points for the Fund Administrator. Annex L provides an illustrative, simplified annual workplan.

Over the lifetime of the business case, new funding rounds will be delivered, and a final independent evaluation delivering findings in 2028 to inform the next business case.

6.3. Programme performance

Defra has established a credible process for measuring results from Darwin Plus, in line with good measurement practices. Key steps include:

- During project design, grantees create a project level logframe, which must include several of Darwin Plus' programme-wide standard indicators.
- During implementation, grantees collect data from a range of sources and use findings to improve project performance – reporting results to the Fund Administrator.

[88] Full list of Darwin Plus delivery partners: https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/institution/ (Last accessed 28/08/2025)

- The Fund Administrator checks and aggregates data from individual projects, to assess overall progress relative to the programme's overall expected outputs, outcomes and impact, as articulated in the fund-level logframe.
- The Fund Administrator reviews and quality assures project completion reports. They assess performance, compare actual results with milestones in the project-level logframe, and make recommendations to strengthen performance.
- The Fund Administrator provides an annual report to Defra, including updated results within the logframe, synthesising evidence from the portfolio, individual project performance and key stakeholders where appropriate.
- Defra provides formal legacy reviews, going back to previous past projects, assessing the long-term differences the projects have made in the Overseas Territories. These reviews are then shared with the policy team and DPAG for evaluation to provide for consideration of the impact of the programme.
- Defra monitors and assesses performance via an annual review process, drawing on the Fund Administrator's annual report and project-level results. The annual review is quality assured and cleared by the SRO and made publicly available on DevTracker (devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk).
- Defra would implement established processes to address poor performance if the annual review process were to assess performance below expected levels.

6.4. Communications and stakeholder engagement

With Defra oversight, the Fund Administrator is responsible for the delivery of the agreed communication objectives set out in the 2024 BCF Communications Strategy. A new BCF Communications strategy is currently in early draft, ready to be published in 2026, to consider improving on the previous strategy. The Darwin Plus policy team will continue to regularly engage with OT governments and delivery partners to better understand the evolving needs and priorities of each OT. This will be achieved through a combination of online roundtable meetings, in-territory visits (where cost-justified[89]), and in the margins of the annual UK-OTs Joint Ministerial Council.

Furthermore, the programme will continue to regularly engage with NGOs based in, or with extensive knowledge of, the OTs, including Falklands Conservation, the RSPB, and the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute. We will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders during the Business Case cycle and apply improvements where possible. Since 2022, the programme has also worked towards diversifying the Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG) to reflect views and expertise from the Global South and the Overseas Territories.

We will continue to engage with Ministers with programme changes, and particularly when financial or reputational risks arise.

Drawing on the success of the 2024 BCF Communications Strategy, the 2026 strategy will largely continue the work established in the previous Communications Strategy, utilising progress made with updating the Darwin Plus Website and the consolidation of social media platforms to communicate with external stakeholders. The programme will continue to work in unison with NIRAS to deliver webinars and workshops for potential project leaders and applicants, to further explain complex topics which require substantial time. A significant highlight of the communications strategy can be found in the success of the

[89] Site visits typically take up 1-2% of total programme management time (around 2-4 days per staff member per year). Defra travel policies and procedures are followed to minimise associated costs.

increase in applications and successful Darwin Plus local projects which are primarily for local communities in the OTs due to the continued promotion and increased awareness of the programme.

The Darwin Plus programme will continue to consider exploring alternative engagement methods as set out in the BCF communications strategy to raise awareness of the programme to different communities within the OTs. The programme will explore the use of local radio stations and newspapers within the OTs to engage with local communities who may otherwise have limited access to the internet or social media platforms used by the BCFs.

6.5. Change management

At the project level, an established system of Change Management supports and enables projects to make financial and non-financial changes to agreed delivery plans in response to challenges and changing contexts, as is the case in the OTs which are prone to natural disasters. This process is delivered by the Fund Administrator, with Defra oversight and engagement on significant and financial changes to project plans.

Responding to the 2022 independent evaluation of the BCFs[90], Defra accepted a recommendation to increase its engagement with the Fund Administrator to build a stronger working relationship, streamline process and maximise learning. Defra now uses the process of updating fund guidance to reflect on stakeholder feedback, it uses evidence gathered from previous funding rounds, deep dives and views from the DPAG to assess scope for change, and works with the Fund Administrator to strengthen the revised guidance. This feedback is now collated within a recommendations tracker, which is regularly reviewed by the BCF programmes to plan how feedback can be implemented for continuous improvement. A new BCF evaluation plan (Annex O) is currently underway and is due to be finalised by February 2026 which will help inform future improvements to the programme.

6.6. Benefits realisation

Benefits will be valued through improvement across a range of programme-wide output, outcome and impact indicators. Key outcome and impact indicators include:

- Number of hectares under Sustainable Management Practices (DPLUS-D01a)
- Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed (DPLUS-C01).
- Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published (DPLUS-C02).
- Number of new or improved species management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B02)
- Number of new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed (DPLUS-B01)
- Number of people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training (DPLUS-A01).

[90] Ecorys BCFs evaluation (2022) https://darwinplus.org.uk/media/sl5mi5zs/bcfs-final-report.pdf Ecorys evaluation https://darwinplus.org.uk/media/sl5mi5zs/bcfs-final-report.pdf

- Number of local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity (DPLUS-A03).

Benefits are expected to be sustainable, disbursed across the OTs, and accrued over a multi-year period. Benefits will not be directly managed by Defra; therefore a Benefits Realisation Plan has not been developed, however, the programme's logframe performs the same function and is used as an equivalent. This is the same approach taken by the Darwin Initiative. Assessments of project results will be monitored and reported to Defra by grantees, via the Fund Administrator. Data from individual projects will be aggregated and used to assess overall progress relative to the programme's overall expected outputs, outcomes and impact.

Defra will influence benefits realisation through its oversight of the technical criteria against which projects are assessed (Annex M), and scrutiny of individual projects. Benefits will be assured through a combination of top-down and bottom-up related actions throughout the delivery chain:

- The policy team, programme board and SRO will provide overall strategic oversight – including of technical criteria.
- The DPAG will have adequate skills, knowledge and experience to score projects against the technical criteria.
- Specific funding eligibility for grantees, with an emphasis on benefits (outcomes, impact and evidence).
- A specific focus on the delivery of projects in-territory, with local delivery partners.

6.7. Open policy and data sharing

The UK Government is committed to push for greater transparency in the availability and use of data to improve accountability and decision making.

Projects are likely to generate significant outputs including datasets, best practices, peer-reviewed journal articles and technical reports which will be of value to other OTs, countries and stakeholders. All evidence and data produced using Darwin Plus funding will be made freely available and accessible to all, unless there are sensitivities involved.

Data collection, analysis, management and storage protocols will continue to be regularly reviewed and strengthened to ensure the integrity of evidence and its subsequent use within the project, Darwin Plus and beyond.

6.8. Risk, Assumption, Issues and Dependency Management

6.8.1. Risk Appetite

The overall risk of the Darwin Plus programme is assessed as **Medium**, and within our risk appetite. The established approach to risk management remains strong, in addition to ongoing risk management processes and mitigation activities carried out across application programme and financial management workstreams, overarching portfolio risk management processes have become further embedded over the last year. We continue to hold monthly risk meetings to manage BCF funds risk and high-risk project risks. Overseen by the Darwin Plus Programme Board, we will work with DPAG, the Fund

Manager and Delivery Partners to develop and maintain an effective risk register which is reviewed every quarter to assign risk with an issues log being updated when relevant events have occurred, develop mitigating actions, update investigations of live issues and agree escalation processes through the established Defra Governance Structures. Annex N provides an extract from the BCF risk register which provides further detail on the different types of assurances established for the programme to mitigate risk to the programme.

All Darwin Plus Main and Strategic projects must provide Delivery Chain Risk Maps with their project-level Risk Frameworks, and regularly monitor risks to inform and manage delivery, and carry out at least annual review of risk, including these in their annual report. 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.

Given some OTs are ODA-eligible, residual risk will be managed at programme level within Defra's ODA Risk Appetite: the amount of risk to which the Defra is prepared to accept, tolerate or be exposed to at any point in time.

Table 8. 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**

6.8.2. Project level risk assessment and management

For applications to the Darwin Plus Main, Strategic and People & Skills schemes, will present a risk assessment under each of the above categories. DPAG will review these against our risk appetite, flagging concerns with Defra. The Head of the programme, will review higher risk project proposals and where appropriate, escalate risks to the programme board for a decision from the SRO, and potentially onto Ministers. Once projects are operating, delivery partners will regularly monitor risks to inform and manage delivery, and – at least annually - will carry out at a review of risk, including these in their annual report.

For applications to the Darwin Plus Local scheme, which makes available substantially less money (a maximum of £20k to individuals and £50k to organisations), a risk assessment is only required where negative impacts on the environment and/or human health are identified. In such cases, applicants must set out the prevention methods they will take to ensure their work does no harm.

All projects must immediately notify the Fund Administrator if it becomes 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.

Where active projects face unforeseen challenges, for example from a natural disaster or new zoonotic disease, where the impact or delay would threaten the delivery of the project outcome, then additional support could potentially be considered, delivered through direct grant agreements. Any such challenges would be escalated to membership of the DPAG and to the SRO.

6.8.3. Programme level risk assessment and management

The BCF risk framework jointly manages the risks of the 3 component funds, including Darwin Plus. Information drawn from project risk frameworks, risk notifications from projects and risks identified by the policy team informs the programme risk level framework. The framework 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 governance structure (see 6.1).

The risk framework currently consists of a risk register with 27 open risks relevant to Darwin Plus, a risk issue register, and delivery chain mapping covering 50 lead organisations responsible for 76 live BCF grants.

Operating through a challenge fund approach will help reduce many of the risks by spreading low to high risks between multiple delivery partners, with established track records and processes, across multiple OTs.

6.8.4. Managing risks of fraud and corruption

Defra has a cautious appetite for fiduciary risk, managing risk through:

- Pre-award due diligence;
- Managing fiduciary risks via the risk framework;
- Monitoring of payments being made to grantees and conducting spot audits;
- Requiring the Fund Administrator to carry out, at least annually, risk-based spot audits on projects to provide assurance; and
- Requiring the Fund Administrator to provide its annual audit.

Example preventative controls include:

- Requiring all Defra, NIRAS and DPAG personnel to abide by a Code of Conduct and to declare any conflicts of interest.
- Requiring all Defra and NIRAS staff to undergo antibribery and corruption training.

- Requiring the Fund Administrator to maintain a counter fraud policy/strategy, in line with Defra's approach, including white blower capabilities – supporting delivery partners to manage and respond to risks.

Example detection controls include:

- Desk-based spot audits (5% of all live projects) and site visits – with spot audits targeted at new organisations;
- Checking the Government Grants Information System (GGIS) for duplicate payments across other HMG funds;
- Requiring grantees to provide evidence of activity, such as reports and photographs, to prove that actions have been carried out.

An irregularity report for 2024-25 was conducted for the three BCFs to assess the effectiveness of the measures implemented to prevent fraud and error across the BCFs. A sample of 85 projects (A third of live BCF projects) was undertaken, finding one case of irregularity to a value of £7, amounting to 0.00% of total grant expenditure for 2024-5.

Table 9. Darwin Plus Risks extract / summarised

Risk Type & Description	Cause/Effect/Consequence	Impact	Likelihood	Gross Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Strategic & Context: Ongoing HMG Funding Commitment	**Cause:** Shifts in UK Government Policy or interest **Effect:** Uncertainty in future funding commitments **Consequence:** Funds may be reduced or discontinued	High	High	High	A large proportion of this risk is out of control of the Contract Manager but some actions can help limit this risk, including early preparation and maintenance of records for spending reviews and active communications around the funds to help maintain its profile (including case study development), and emphasis on new workstream 5 "building and applying evidence". Early communication with stakeholders can help manage reputational risks to the funds.	High
Delivery & Operational: capacity to effectively oversee programme implementation	**Cause:** Limited Capacity in Defra and Niras **Effect:** Weak Governance and delivery systems **Consequence:** Operational inefficiencies and strategic failures	Medium	Medium	Medium	Strong governance with clear ToRs, regular communication on roles and responsibilities and delegated responsibilities for workstreams across both NIRAS and Defra teams, comprehensive documentation of processes, manage vacancy rate and reduced complexity of funds. Regular meetings between fund manager and Defra.	Medium
Financial & Fiduciary: Misappropriation of grant funds by False application	**Cause:** Deliberate provision of false information by grantee **Effect:** Grants awarded under false pretences **Consequence:** Financial Loss and reputational damage	High	High	High	Directive: 1. A grantee must certify in the application form that the statements made by them are true and information provided is correct to the best of their knowledge. 2. Grantees are asked to provide letters of support on headed paper. Deterrent: 1. Defra have zero tolerance approach to fraud, bribery and corruption, any allegations will be investigated and could result in termination of funding. Preventative: 1. Grantees are asked to submit annual accounts that have been independently examined or audited (N.B. not all submitted a/cs are examined/audited - e.g. for small orgs, or for governments (for UKOTs). 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. 2. Expert Groups are recruited based on their knowledge and expertise. They carry out detailed technical assessments and are responsible for assessing the technical competence for applications. 3. FCDO are consulted for an assessment of the regional context including the organisations applying for funding.	Medium

					Detective: 1. If the applicant is granted funding, the fraud might become apparent as part of routine contact by the grant administrator or as part of 6-monthly progress reporting, which is required for each project and reviewed by the grant administrator and by Defra. 2. Desk based irregularity audits wll be undertaken on 30% of live projects per annum and these could detect fraud. All projects can be selected for spot audits. 70% of live projects are not spot auditted in year, however it should be noted that while spot audits are undertaken on a single project, the organisation can have multiple grants in the portfolio. 3. This type of fraud might be detected during a site visit. Since site visits will take place at different stages and some projects will receive upfront payment, money is likely to have already been paid by the time a site visit takes place. Corrective: 1. Attempts will be made to recover any funds paid out as a result of this type of fraud where possible.	
Project / Programme: Diplomatic Risk to UKOTs	**Cause:** Weak or insufficient applications from UKOTs **Effect:** Failure to secure funding from Darwin Plus **Consequence**: Strained UKOT relations and reduced UKOT representation in conservation efforts.	High	High	High	Monitor and consider spread of funding across the UKOTs and investigation/interpret any particular trends. To be managed on a case by case basis depending on if there are any specific risks. Assess the need to support specific UKOTs with Capability & Capacity building activities. Promote awareness of the funds, including engaging with specific individuals as needed.	High
Reputational: events damaging Defra's and/or the UK's reputation	**Cause:** Unsuccessful projects or controversy over project selection/location **Effect:** Media reports highlighting issues (Justified or not) **Consequences:** Decline in future participation and fund reputation	Medium	High	High	Risk mitigation for negative media coverage includes ongoing monitoring (e.g. Google Alerts) and coordination with FCDO and Defra Comms to ensure defensive lines are in place. Proactive measures also play a key role—strategic project selection, alignment with government priorities, and early stakeholder engagement help prevent criticism. Positive results and success stories are actively collected and shared to build public trust and reinforce programme value.	Low
Safeguarding: failure to establish and maintain strong safeguards to prevent harm	**Cause:** Abuse by programme staff, contractors, or expert committee members **Effect:** SEAH incidents within the BCF Ecosystem **Consequence:** Institutional fallout and systemic trust issues	Medium	High	High	Specific tasks planned under Safeguarding 2025 work planning meeting to help develop mitigation actions under this task. Actions likely to include that BCFs: Ensure all staff working on BCF including contractors and expert committee members are aware of and adhere to HMG's safeguarding commitments. This will be achieved through annual mandatory training, signed code of conducts which include a prohibition on SEAH, updates to contract agreements to ensure that if an allegation is made and upheld the subject of concern will face disciplinary action up to and including termination of contract. Contracts, TORs and Code of Conduct will be reviewed and updated to reflect commitment to prevent SEAH. A process map will be created to clearly outline the complaints process.	Medium

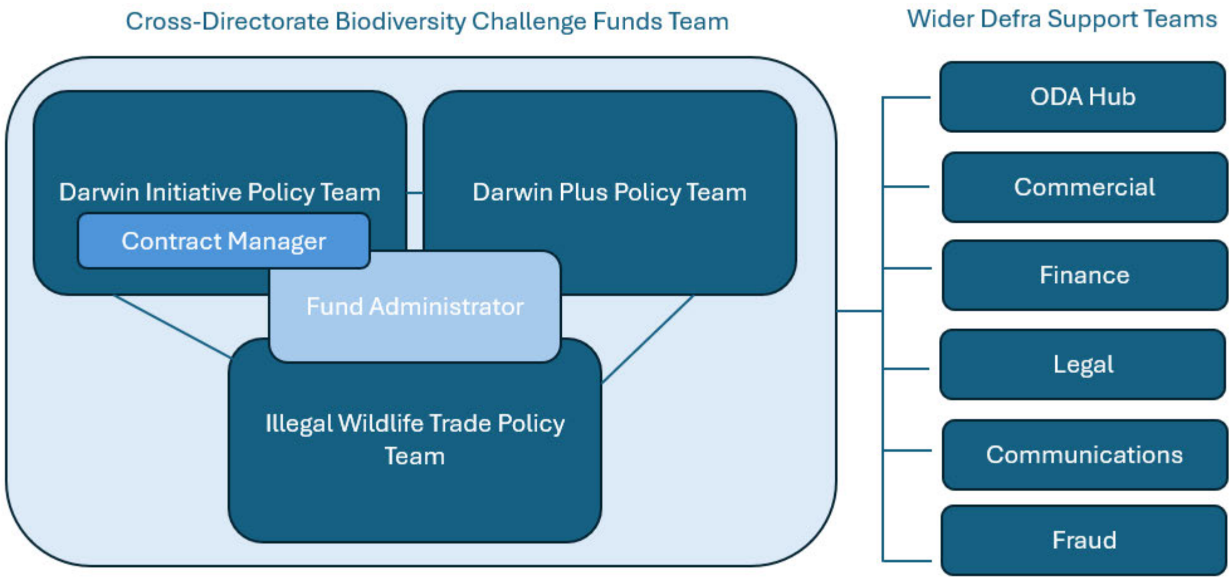
All cases of fraud or theft (whether proven or suspected) relating to Funded Activities must be notified to the Fund Administrator as soon as they are identified.

All projects will provide Defra with independent assurance that the grant has been spent in accordance with the terms of the Grant Funding Agreement. The form of assurance the grantee must provide to satisfy this requirement depends on the value of the grant. In most cases, this will at least require an independently certified Statement of Grant Usage to confirm that provided funds were spent on a basis consistent with project objectives.

6.9. Dependency

With the Fund Administrator contract delivering for all three BCFs, Darwin Plus has a dependency on the continued successful delivery of the other two funds. If either cease or change significantly, then the contract may require renegotiation. This risk is partly mitigated by the establishment in 2021 of a cross-directorate virtual BCFs team to support alignment of the funds, resilience and shared learning (figure 2).

Figure 2. Illustration of Defra's cross-directorate BCFs team.



6.10. Contract management

The Darwin Initiative Policy Team is responsible for managing Defra's contract with the Fund Administrator, as supported by Defra Finance, Legal and Commercial (figure 2).

The performance of the contractor is monitored via the agreed Performance Management Framework (see section 4.3 and Annex H), through quarterly contract meetings and an annual report mechanism.

6.11. Grantee due diligence

The Fund Administrator and DPAG conduct due diligence on prospective lead applicants. Drawing on best practice, due diligence is guided on the principles of: Responsibility and Accountability, Context-specific, Evidence-based, Proportionate and balanced, and Transparency.

Evidence is tested during the assessments of proposals, structured around the following pillars:

- **Governance and control**: assessment of responsibility, accountability and structures in the organisation;
- **Partner deliverability**: assessment of capability and capacity to deliver;
- **Financial stability:** analysis of accounts, financial rigour and viability;

- **Downstream partners:** assessment of due diligence processes, contract management/monitoring, and processes for monitoring and dealing with fraud, bribery and corruption; and
- **Partnership behaviour:** assessment of capacity to promote environmentally and socially responsible behaviours, including gender equality and social inclusion, and safeguarding of vulnerable people.

Due diligence undertaken by the Fund Administrator is seen throughout the life cycle of a project from pre-award stage to completion of projects. Example actions throughout the lifecycle of the grant include:

(Pre-award stage)

- NIRAS carries out detailed checks of audited accounts provided with applications which show the last 2 years of financial statements.
- Project budgets are reviewed in detail by DPAG members and NIRAS to ensure costs are justified and no ineligible costs are included within applications.
- NIRAS require applicants to submit organisational safeguarding policies, whistleblowing policy and code of conduct with their application.
- Organisations that have not received BCF funding before are required to provide details of three similar grants or contracts held, in addition to providing evidence of past track records with references on grant history.

(During implementation)

- Depending on the grant total, projects are required to provide annual statements of grant expenditure/audits of BCF project funds which are reviewed by NIRAS.
- Actual claim forms are provided annually, with projects required to provide an end of year claim, certifying actual project costs against claims made, with any balances being paid or accrued against payments in the next financial year. Changes of +/- 10% should be explained and should have been agreed with NIRAS through a Change Request ahead of end of year.
- Projects are required to provide half year reports which are independently reviewed to update on specific flags or issues which may indicate poor project or financial management.

(Post completion)

- Closed project independent field-based reviews carried out on a sample of projects after completion.
- Projects over £50,000 to provide an end of project audit/statement of usage, covering the project period.

The final claim accounts for the balance of funds due since the latest end of year Actual claim (i.e. only covers the last financial year). The final payment is made once the project has met all requirements for technical and financial reporting. For individuals and small/new territory-based organisations applying to the Darwin Plus Local scheme, where evidence of the above may be limited, the Fund Administrator may recommend to Defra that it conducts due diligence on applicants via FCDO Post and/or trusted OT organisations (e.g. government departments).

In addition to the application, a range of evidence assessed can include: two sets of audited or independently examined accounts covering the last three financial years, Risk Framework, Annual Reports, References and Support Letters, Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption, Safeguarding Policy and other associated policies (whistle blowing policy, Code of Conduct, Ethics, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion), and CVs and Job Descriptions.

Where lead applicants have been awarded grants before under the BCFs, past performance is considered in applications.

6.12. Assurance and approvals

Assurance and approvals will be conducted in line with the Integrated Assurance and Approvals Plan that accompanies this business case.

All proposals to Darwin Plus are technically assessed against published criteria (Annex N) by the DPAG, and by the Fund Administrator against a range of assurance criteria (value for money, finance, safeguarding, GESI, monitoring, evaluation and learning, risk, etc). All projects must demonstrate good value for money and meet the GESI-sensitive minimum standard.

Under the governance structure (section 6.1), the Defra Programme Board will review these assessments and the recommendations being made by the DPAG to award grants.

6.13. Safeguarding

Defra that everyone regardless of age, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, ethnic origin or other protected characteristic has the right to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

This belief is shared by the Fund Administrator who have invested in a new Safeguarding Manager position to strengthen the fund's safeguarding capability and capacity.

Defra has zero tolerance for inaction to tackling abuse and/or exploitation of any person (staff, implementing partners, the public and beneficiaries) by staff or associated personnel involved in Darwin Plus.

Safeguarding is an iterative process; Defra and its partners must be prepared to discuss and strengthen their respective safeguarding capability and capacity to prevent, listen, respond and learn.

Defra and grantees must have appropriate and proportionate safeguarding policies and procedures in place, tailored to the project and reflecting GESI factors and power relationships, to protect staff, implementing partners, the public and beneficiaries from harm.

Prior to award, the Fund Administrator will assess all applications (with support from Defra) in terms of the safeguarding risks, and the capability and capacity of the lead organisation to manage and mitigate these risks to within Defra’s appetite.

Guidance and resource will continue to be provided to support organisations further strengthen their capability and capacity to successfully assess and mitigate safeguarding risks during implementation.

The 2023 cross-BCF deep dive on GESI[91] (including indigenous people and local communities) made recommendation to improve practice. As a result, Defra launched a GESI Strategy and 5-year action plan in 2024 to address these recommendations. The BCFs are on track to ensure all funded projects under the BCFs portfolio are being supported to meet the GESI Sensitive minimum standard by December 2025.

Other recent measures to improve practice around GESI and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) safeguarding include:

- Encouraging projects to disaggregate data on outcome and output reporting indicators by gender;
- Embedding gender in the logframe (Annex G); and
- Improving the risks and mitigations around GESI and SEAH in the Risk Register (Annex O).
- Introduction of a GESI Analysis tool for applicants/grantees.
- GESI and SEAH safeguarding guidance and training resources and webinars for applicants/grantees on the Darwin Plus website[92], and GESI training for independent reviewers.

6.14. Evaluation plan and lessons learned

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) strategy for the programme is as follows:

- Monitoring of the programme against its planned outputs and outcomes – e.g. related to effective protected area management;
- Evaluation of performance to assess the impact, sustainability and transformative action, and value for money of the programme; and
- Generation of evidence and learning to inform the ongoing management of the programme and other HMG programmes and share learning widely.

The monitoring and evaluation of all ODA projects is consistent with the requirements of the UK International Development Act 2015. The Policy Team will be responsible for ensuring that projects meet Defra's monitoring and reporting requirements.

In line with the Programme Operating Framework (PrOF) and Defra's ODA operating manual, it is expected that, in collaboration with delivery partners and the Fund Administrator, all grantees will:

- Produce work/delivery plans: all Defra projects require a work plan/delivery plan which sets out the proposed approach and timeline for managing the project and breaks down activities and outputs, which are clearly cross referenced to payment mechanisms and governance/quality assurance mechanisms, to ensure effective delivery on time and within budget.
- Monitor programme performance and quantify the results regularly to determine whether the project is on track to deliver its intended outcomes and impact.

[91] Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Building and Applying Evidence: Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (2023) 4-bcf-gesi-in-the-bcfs-final-to-publish.pdf

[92] See Gender Equality and Social Inclusion and Safeguarding

- Carry out Annual Report Reviews, which are based on an assessment of Annual Reports and reported progress against the logframe, to assess performance and make recommendations to strengthen performance.
- Carry out Final Report Reviews, like the Annual Report Reviews, which occur at project completion and are based on an assessment against the logframe to compare planned and achieved results.
- Support Mid Term Reviews and evaluation (for projects longer than 12 months), as evaluators can use logframes to identify lessons learnt to inform future project design to strengthen the likelihood of success.

The strengthening, promotion, and use of evidence (including best practices) to inform and scale action is at the core of the BCFs.

6.14.1. Project level MEL

Darwin Plus embeds MEL into the design and delivery of individual projects and at programme level. Through its core operations, it requires applicants to explain the evidence base behind their proposed project, drawing where appropriate on evaluative evidence; and to develop and articulate their pathway to change, identifying the need or problem they aim to address and what steps they need to take to deliver their intended impact.

During project implementation, project teams measure results and track actual performance against plans. Mid-Term reviews (for projects longer than 12 months) are used to identify lessons learned to inform future project design and strengthen the likelihood of success. These mid-term reviews are also an opportunity to gather feedback from stakeholders in OTs where we invest and use this feedback to improve the overall programme.

All project final reports and annual reports are scored by independent, desk-based specialists to check risks and update/improve logframes. The Fund Administrator helps to provide MEL assurances by conducting in-year monitoring of projects and spot-auditing 5% of projects with site-visits.

Darwin Plus Strategic projects are required to commission an independent final evaluation.

All projects are expected to proactively share and promote lessons learned and best practices to other projects with the BCFs and beyond. Defra helps facilitate knowledge exchange via OT stakeholder roundtables and newsletters.

The greatest outcomes and impacts of projects are often only achieved after a project has ended. Since 2012, this data has not been routinely captured, but a deep dive is in development to investigate the legacy and sustained impacts of Darwin Plus projects to help plug this information gap. The current external evaluation (underway) will also support learning on sustainability.

Darwin Plus is an evolving programme. It is continuously adapting and strengthening as opportunities arise and feedback from MEL activities both at a programme and project level is taken onboard.

6.14.2. Indicators and reporting

In developing the standard indicators, alignment with existing indicators including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and others was an objective to reduce the reporting burden on projects and strengthen their ability to contribute towards national reporting mechanisms where possible.

The standard indicators developed for Darwin Plus map to some of the indicators used by the other BCFs. This makes it possible to aggregate data across diverse projects and communicate combined results to key decision makers, in turn helping to build the case for continued support. The indicators also provide guidance on methodology, units and disaggregation measures. From Darwin Plus Round 11, it became mandatory to include a minimum of three Standard Indicators in the project logframe, but projects are encouraged to use as many other indicators from the menu as is possible and feasible.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will provide a high-level indication of success against the programme outcomes and are related to the Theory of Change and log frame (Annex G).

To improve efficiency and harmonise reporting, Darwin Plus uses one standard template for technical reporting and one template for financial reporting from all their grantees.

Although the Darwin Plus programme Annual Review is expected to be a collaborative effort between the delivery partner and Defra, Defra is responsible for the final scoring, recommendations, and publishing of this document. Logframe indicators and milestones will be updated annually to reflect programme performance, changes to programme design and/or feedback on current indicators. Best practice is that logframes should be updated and agreed in the annual review.

6.14.3. Evaluation

In addition to project-level MEL, in 2022 a new central workstream entitled Building and Applying Evidence was formed to strengthen Defra's capability to commission *ad hoc* evaluations and deep dives with defined objectives to strengthen programme performance and evidence derived from multiple projects within the BCFs portfolio.

Building on the 2022 Independent Evaluation, a new Independent Evaluation has been commissioned to assess the performance, impact, sustainability, transformative action, and value for money of Darwin Plus. Defra has designed this Independent Evaluation with a mid-point evaluation milestone (and interim report) in 2026: this will be used to inform ongoing implementation across the BCFs, together with future business cases and contracts. The evaluation is expected to conclude in 2028, by which time the evaluators should have enough data to reach clear judgements about impact, ahead of the next iteration of this business case. A break clause will also be inserted for 2026 should it become necessary to stop the evaluation. Evaluation questions will focus on assumptions in the programme's Theory of Change where the evidence base is less certain, where and evaluation can therefore add most value.

An Indicative Evaluation Plan is included in Annex P.

6.15. Contingency plans

The annual award of grants is based on up-to-date understanding of the available finance secured in HMT Spending Review processes (for both ODA and non-ODA), and existing commitments to grants awarded in previous years.

Should insufficient finance be available to support existing commitments, a rapid assessment of the portfolio will be conducted to identify which projects should be prioritised to receive continued funding. These are likely to be projects near completion and therefore capable of delivering value for money on the investment. Projects early in implementation would be the most likely to be cancelled first.

In the event that an ODA-eligible country graduates and becomes non-ODA, or a non-ODA territory falls into ODA eligibility, we will re-assess the programme portfolio including working with partners (such as FCDO, JNCC and the Defra ODA Hub) to ensure the smooth continuation of any projects affected and sufficient availability of budget.

The Terms and Conditions of Grants, based on Defra's Model Grant Agreement, include provisions to terminate the grant early should insufficient finance be available to allow them to continue.

6.16. Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment has been developed for this business case and has concluded that no potential negative impacts should arise to protected characteristics. All Darwin Plus projects must adhere to a GESI-sensitive standard and provide safeguarding documents: a Safeguarding/PSEAH Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Code of Conduct and a Safety and Security Policy or Security Plan. Relevant reporting indicators are disaggregated by gender, age group, income and stakeholder group (Indigenous Peoples, local communities, nationals) and will feed into annual reviews to assess GESI performance. Only projects started in 2023 or later must use the Standard Indicators, so current data are limited and prevent a full assessment of impact across all projects, though reporting should become more complete over the next three years.

Evidence from the *Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation* (www.espa.ac.uk), and elsewhere, demonstrates that individuals access resources differently depending on their gender and social background. As a result, different people develop knowledge about different species, their uses and their management: awareness of these differences will lead to better project design and delivery as it helps understand how benefits are distributed amongst the population.

As set out in 3.4, Darwin Plus is committed to become fully 'GESI empowering' – ensuring that all its investments, at a minimum, do no harm to gender equality, disability and social inclusion by December 2025. Darwin Plus is on-track to meet this target. 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 already considered by independent review to meeting or exceeding GESI-sensitive minimum standard. Most projects are expected to generate net benefits for women and children. For example, projects awarded to FisherFolkFirst in the Turks and Caicos Islands respectfully co-designed their interventions with diverse small-scale fishing communities (including women and migrant workers), which empowered these groups and addressed their tailored needs (such as producing materials in different languages and dialects)[93].

Please note that the BCFs' GESI guidance and other GESI materials explicitly include people affected by disabilities in social inclusion – plans are being put in place to phase in the newer Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) abbreviation across the BCFs while minimising disruption and confusion with stakeholders. **References to GESI in this document can be inferred as GEDSI for all purposes.**

In 2023, an independent review[94] of the approach to gender equality and social inclusion of the BCFs identified a range of opportunities for mainstreaming gender equality and inclusivity throughout the programme and project life cycles to strengthen impact.

As a result, Defra launched a GESI Strategy and 5-year action plan in 2024 to to support all stakeholders (applicants, projects, experts, external reviewers and Defra/Fund Administration) give due regard to reducing inequality between persons of different gender and inform action on all levels to strengthen the approach to GESI across:

- Core Concepts & Building Awareness (resources/training)
- Internal Process & Management
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

In 2025 the BCFs introduced a GESI Analysis – a tool designed to help projects and applicants understand and identify barriers and inequalities that individuals or groups may experience as a result of their social identity(s) within a specific context. As of April 2025, all applicants are asked to outline their GESI Analysis at the application stage and consider the six principles of a GESI Analysis in their regular reporting.

All applicants must demonstrate 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. This includes applicants explaining their understanding of how individuals, especially those with protected characteristics, may be excluded from equal participation within the context of their project, and how they seek to address this. The applicants' responses are assessed as part of the funding decision process.

Once awarded, all projects are required by the Terms and Conditions, to consider how to prevent discrimination, harassment, victimisation and promote wider equality of opportunity between those who have a protected characteristic under the 2010 Equality Act and those who do not. The Results Framework requires project indicators to be capable of being disaggregated by dimensions of GESI, where appropriate.

Recruitment to the DPAG will have a continued focus on GESI, encouraging applications from both people who live and work in the OTs, and from disadvantaged groups.

The BCF-wide GESI Strategy and the commitment for Darwin Plus to be GESI Sensitive is primarily an opportunity to strengthen the inclusivity, sustainability, and impact of the programme. The BCFs are on track to meet the December 2025 target, with 95% of BCF

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93 'Blue Justice' for small-scale fisherfolk (2025) https://darwinplus.org.uk/news/2025/05/08/blue-justice-for-small-scale-fisherfolk/

94 Gender Equity and Social Inclusion. Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Building and Applying Evidence (2023) 4-bcf-gesi-in-the-bcfs-final-to-publish.pdf

projects assessed as GESI-sensitive at minimum in the first half of 2025. Projects that are not yet meeting this standard are being supported to strengthen their GESI approach.

Adopting this approach will also ensure compliance with the 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 sets out powers to provide ODA funding to the OTs without requiring such funding to meet the poverty reduction criteria that is attached to all other funding provision in the Act.** 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.

6.17. Data Protection

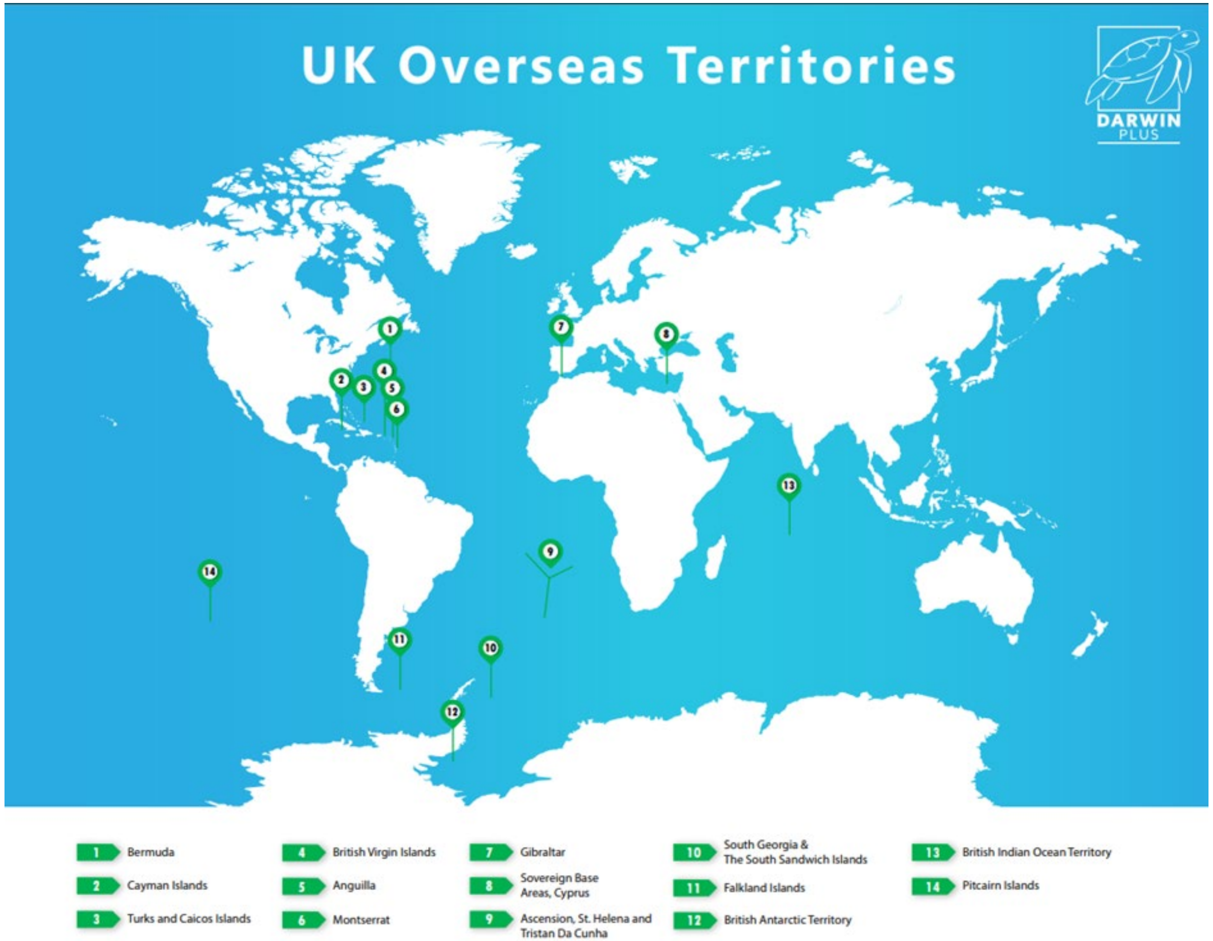
The Fund Administrator contract includes Defra's requirements to enable secure and appropriate processing of data, including the requirement to comply with the fund administrator's obligations under the Data Protection Legislation by providing an adequate level of protection to any Personal Data.

Under the contract, Defra is the Controller, and the Fund Administrator is the Processor. The fund administrator applies suitable General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) measures to ensure that all data is held securely.

To provide stakeholders with information on how we handle Data Protection, a Privacy Notice is published on the Darwin Plus website (www.darwinplus.org.uk/privacypolicy).

7. Annexes

Annex A - Map of the British Overseas Territories



Map of the UK Overseas Territories, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)

Annex B – High Level Summary of Darwin Plus Programme

Summary of Darwin Plus projects awarded since the start of the last Full Business Case in April 2022.

Darwin Plus scheme	Funding Round	Projects start date	Number of projects awarded	Total lifetime value
Main	10	2022/23	20	£5,945,658.00
	11	2023/24	13	£5,716,954.00
	12	2024/25	14	£5,142,634.97
	13	2025/26 (delayed start)	5	£2,969,344.00
Total Main			**52**	**£19,774,590.97**
Fellowships	10	2022/23	4	£135,687.00
	11	2023/24	8	£316,649.00
	12	2024/25	3	£151,609.00
People & Skills	13	2025/26 (delayed start)	6	£527,469.00
Total Fellowships and People & Skills			**21**	**£1,131,414.00**
Strategic	12	2024/25	1	£2,572,235.00
	13	2025/26 (delayed start)	1	£3,000,000.00
Total Strategic			**2**	**£5,572,235.00**
Local	1	2023/24	45	£1,460,019.44
	2		15	£587,596.87
	3	2024/25	34	£1,404,778.99
	4		27	£986,655.42
	5	2025/26 (delayed start)	32	£1,480,456.17
Total Local			**153**	**£5,919,506.89**
Grand Total			**228**	**£32,397,746.86**

Annex C- FY25/26 Round 13 and Darwin Plus Local Round 5 Project list

Project Synopsis	Overseas Territory	Organisation	Summary
Darwin Plus Main Scheme			
Rewilding Northeast Peros Banhos, Chagos Archipelago	British Indian Ocean Territory[1]	Chagos Conservation Trust	£878k – 3 years Rats have had a catastrophic impact upon island ecosystems worldwide. Eradicating rats (a tried and tested conservation intervention) from four islands in northeast Peros Banhos, Chagos Archipelago, will produce the longest chain of invasive predator-free islands in the Indian Ocean (13 islands). When rat-free, the four islands' environmental quality will improve; biodiversity loss will be reversed and will both increase and diversify, with the surrounding marine ecosystems having enhanced resilience to climate change events.
Building capacity for habitat mapping and condition monitoring: Cayman Islands	Cayman Islands	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)	£335k – 3 years The Cayman Islands Government requires tools and the capability to map and monitor vegetation condition (for rare, threatened, and endemic vegetation types). This project uses a proven Earth Observation solution to generate habitat maps and builds on this to develop a condition monitoring approach to achieve conservation outcomes. The Government will be trained in the development and use of the tools to support ongoing assessments, biodiversity conservation efforts and activities to help mitigate negative anthropogenic impacts and climate change.
Recovering St Helena's cloud forest for wildlife & water security	St Helena (ODA)	RSPB	£939k – 3 years This project will develop a sustainable, long-term and collaborative approach to managing St Helena's unique cloud forest to enable nature recovery, improve water security, and provide a model for other key habitats on St Helena. This will be achieved by advancing cloud forest restoration and water monitoring, by addressing the key threats of plant pathogens and invasive species, and by developing a sustainable framework to scale restoration efforts to secure St Helena's biodiversity.
Integrated Coastal Monitoring and Habitat Restoration Program 2025-2028	St Helena (ODA)	Saint Helena National Trust	£233k – 3 years St. Helena's coastline was historically home to large colonies of seabirds and nesting turtles. However, as human activity on the island increased, the number of nesting birds declined. This project aims to update and expand surveys of key areas initially identified in 2012, improve population data using new monitoring techniques, and enhance habitats by identifying threats and community engagement. The project looks to enrich knowledge via a coastal management report, to inform the upcoming review of the Marine Management Plan.

Safeguarding vulnerable life-stages of shark populations in the Cayman Islands	Cayman Islands, Anguilla, Ascension	Cayman Islands Gov Department of Environment	£619k – 3 years This study addresses significant information gaps in the life-cycle of sharks in the Cayman Islands. Building on existing methodologies (satellite telemetry, sex hormones, ultrasonography) and locally developed citizen science, innovative Birth-Alert-Tags used in this project will reveal key life-events and the reproductive ecology for Endangered Caribbean reef sharks and, potentially, for other coastal shark species. Findings will improve the effectiveness of existing marine protected areas and the national shark protection, advancing the islands' capability to sustain long-term conservation of biodiversity.
Darwin Plus People & Skills Scheme			
Strategic capacity building for environmental management in the British Virgin Islands	British Virgin Islands	National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands	£65k – 2 years This project will build institutional capacity at two levels. At an administrative level senior management require training to effectively implement the National Parks Act which requires a Strategic Plan. This project would provide a facilitator with technical skills from a regional context to strengthen NPTVI's internal capacity to update the existing draft Strategic Plan. At the park management level NPTVI has a young cadre of staff who require foundational botanical training to compliment the existing fieldwork training they have received.
Evaluating the conservation needs of Cayman's critically endangered Amazon parrots	Cayman Islands	Cayman Islands Gov Department of Environment	£89k – 3 years This project will evaluate the conservation needs of the Cayman Island's National birds; *Amazona leucocephala caymanensis* and *Amazona leucocephala hesterna*, through investigation of population genetic diversity, effective population size, and the assessment of threats and population recovery. Non-invasive sampling paired with genomics will be used to evaluate potential impact of inbreeding depression, assessing genetic health, and, given the current high levels of threat, including habitat loss, making predictions on future population viability for both parrot subspecies in the Cayman Islands.
Capacity-building on St Helena for molecular detection of plant diseases	St Helena (ODA)	St Helena Research Institute (Gov of St Helena)	£99k – 1 year St Helena's endemic trees are under threat of extinction due to recently discovered invasive plant pathogens. Currently, processing of field samples, essential to assess their spread, must be outsourced, with significant cost and biosecurity implications. This project will enhance existing basic diagnostic capabilities by installing suitable qPCR equipment and providing training to local scientists. This will allow more cost-effective 'on-island' processing of samples. Capacity building will make use of training already provided covering the implementation of more basic technologies.
Building skills and capacity to monitor microscopic marine life, Gibraltar	Gibraltar	The University of Gibraltar	£99k – 2 years Plankton, algae and fish larvae are useful indicators of ecosystem complexity, environmental health and water quality. The small size, fleeting life-stages and environmental sensitivity of these organisms increases their ability to respond rapidly to environmental change. Regular monitoring aids environmental management by helping to identify pollution, invasive species, Harmful Algal Blooms and climate change effects. This project seeks to build local capability and capacity by expanding existing protocols for monitoring microscopic marine organisms and linking these with public health objectives
DNA barcoding and impact assessment of non-native insects on Cyprus	Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas	Enalia Physis Environmental Research Centre	£100k – 3 years

			Cyprus currently hosts approximately 1,300 non-native species, one quarter of which are invertebrates. Their high biodiversity and lack of taxonomic experts hamper swift identification, while their impacts on the UK Sovereign Base Areas as well as Cyprus as a whole, are mostly unknown. This project aims to construct a DNA barcoding library of the non-native insects of Cyprus and assess their impacts on native biodiversity, human-health and socioeconomic parameters, assisting rapid identification, monitoring efforts and informing national policies.
Sustainable Fly Fishing: building expertise, conservation skills, and eco-entrepreneurship	Turks and Caicos Islands	Turks and Caicos Fly Fishing Association (TCFFA)	£74k – 1 year The Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI) have experienced intense tourism growth, yet have seldom balanced this with environmental conservation. To address this, the project aims to build capacity within the TCI Fly Fishing Association (TCFFA) by enabling a comprehensive guide certification, angler-led tagging research, and enhancing flats-fishing communications and marketing. Thus, the project will incentivize & enable conservation within the tourism sector, creating sustainable economic opportunities for locals and helping to position the TCI as a premier, eco-conscious flats-fishing destination.
Darwin Plus Strategic Scheme			
Restoring New Island through invasive species removal	Falkland Islands	RSPB	£3 million – 5 years New Island is globally important, supporting millions of seabirds including the world's largest Slender-billed Prion colony. Recognised as a Key Biodiversity Area it hosts significant populations of breeding pinnipeds and remnant native habitats over carbon-rich peat. Four invasive species are impacting the island's ecosystem and biodiversity. Their removal will allow the reintroduction of lost endemic species, the restoration of natural habitats including combatting catastrophic peat erosion, increase climate change resilience and enable the recovery of seabird populations, passerines and invertebrates.
Darwin Plus Local Scheme			
Barcoding critically endangered corals to maximise biobanking efficiency	Turks and Caicos Islands	Turks and Caicos Reef Fund	£50k – 1 year Genetic diversity is essential for resilience and preservation of species, especially those threatened by human impacts. However, determining genetic diversity involves complex laboratory equipment and training. This project will allow the Turks and Caicos Islands to run in-house DNA sequencing of threatened species, focusing on the critically endangered specimens housed in the biobank facility on Providenciales. Genetic barcoding is essential to maximise the efficiency of future breeding and enable out-planting of these endangered and rare corals back onto our reefs.
Navigating conservation: promoting capacity for acoustic telemetry in the TCI	Turks and Caicos Islands	Parrot Cay Marine Conservation Trust (PCMCT)	£39k – 1 year This project provides a case study to guide the establishment of a shared acoustic telemetry network. The array will be range-tested, installed and used to demonstrate foundational insights on the movement of key marine species, informing further work. Stakeholders will be organised and trained to tag animals, install, maintain, and manage all equipment and data. Outcomes will inform MPA & threatened species policy and management, advise & promote effective use of the network and guarantee long-term open access.

Optimising breeding success for Critically Endangered Mountain Chicken in Montserrat	Montserrat (ODA)	Montserrat National Trust	£49k – 1 year A tiny population of around 30 wild mountain chicken frogs have been found to be potentially resilient to the invasive amphibian fungal disease chytridiomycosis, which decimated the last remaining populations on the Caribbean islands of Montserrat and Dominica. It is critical we learn to breed these animals to aid recovery through repopulation of both islands. We will explore a unique opportunity to develop skills necessary to successfully breed the species for the first time in a semi-wild enclosure on Montserrat.
CORA – Coral Outplanting and Restoration for *Astroides calycularis*	Gibraltar	University of Gibraltar	£50k – 1 year The Orange Cup Coral, *Astroides calycularis* (hereafter, *Astroides*), an endemic in the Western Mediterranean is threatened due to several factors such as habitat destruction, fishing impacts and invasive species. The proposed restoration project aims to restore *Astroides* colonies by transplanting corals fragments onto an artificial reef. By attaching these fragments directly onto the shipwreck, the project seeks to promote coral growth and biodiversity in the area, ultimately supporting the recovery of *Astroides* populations and enhancing marine ecosystem health.
Using Micro-fragmentation Coral Restoration to Strengthen Impacted Reefs - Montserrat	Montserrat (ODA)	Island Solutions	£50k – 1 year Coral reefs are extremely valuable but also highly impacted essential biodiversity ecosystems. They provide coastal protection, food sources, tourism revenue and valuable oxygen to the atmosphere. Corals are being heavily impacted by climate change, disease and human activities/development. This project will establish a land-based coral micro-fragamentation nursery that will grow essential and critically impacted corals at highly accelerated growth rates. These corals will be reintroduced to Montserrat's coral reefs to strengthen those marine habitats.
Establishing a Native Plant Nursery for Biodiversity Conservation	Cayman Islands	Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency	£49k – 1 year In partnership with the Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency, the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park will enhance its Native Plant Nursery on Grand Cayman. The project will enable the increased use of native plants for conservation projects, landscaping needs, and other purposes, instead of using non-native and potentially invasive species. The project will achieve this goal by delivering strategic improvements to existing nursery facilities and growing a minimum of 250 plants comprised of a mix of 10 native species.
Feasibility study of managing invasive avian species in BIOT	British Indian Ocean Territory[1]	Chagos Conservation Trust	£43k – 1 year This project will determine which of the non-native bird species found in the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) are invasive and therefore, detrimental to the environment. It will then conduct a Feasibility Study into the management of these species with a view to eradication, control or “do nothing”. Using the Feasibility Study, governing authorities can make informed decisions on bird management to improve the environmental quality and biodiversity of BIOT.
Beyond The Reef - Ghost Gear Clean Up 2025	British Virgin Islands	Beyond The Reef	£50k – 1 year Our project objective is to reduce and prevent the damage that is currently happening to the marine ecosystem of the British Virgin Islands as a result of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (also referred to as ALDFG or “ghost gear") that continues to trap and kill marine species and smother coral reefs in an unregulated manner long after the fishing gears intended use.

Unveiling sea turtle movements using acoustic tracking in Cayman Islands	Cayman Islands	Cayman Islands Government Department of Environment	£50k – 1 year This project uses acoustic transmitters and an existing acoustic receiver network to track hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), green (*Chelonia mydas*), and loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) sea turtles. The data collected will identify key feeding, internesting, and breeding areas, supporting conservation efforts and guiding protection strategies for these endangered species, ultimately aiding in the preservation of marine biodiversity in the Cayman Islands.
Protecting Biodiversity While Sustaining Cultural Livelihoods in Duck Pond, Montserrat	Montserrat (ODA)	N/A - individual-led by Mrs. Claudia Winifred Charles-Skerritt	£19k – 1 year The Duck Pond project will construct a 56m x 1.2m x 1.2m concrete waterway, on its 0.53-hectare plot; establish 325 vetiver plantlets along 200 metres fence line; create six, 25 metres terraces with 120 vetiver plantlets; develop a 380m² avian habitat incorporating endemic and national symbolic plants; participate in an overseas vetiver basketry training programme to reinvigorate a cottage industry that will preserve our cultural heritage; train a cadre of articulate conservation advocates that will promote the value of biodiversity.
Reef Restoration through Soundscapes: Biodiversity, Acoustic Cues, and Larval Recruitment	Turks and Caicos Islands	The School for Field Studies	£50k – 1 year This study investigates how coral degradation affects biodiversity, acoustic cues, and larval recruitment on South Caicos reefs. We aim to demonstrate that as coral health declines, biodiversity and acoustic activity will decrease, weakening cues that guide larvae to suitable habitats. Furthermore, to test if soundscape loss impacts recruitment, a replay experiment will broadcast healthy reef sounds in degraded areas, assessing if acoustic cues can boost larval settlement. Results will guide restoration efforts by determining if acoustics can support coral recovery.
Youth Biodiversity and Climate Advocate Training and Certificate	Montserrat (ODA)	Montserrat National Trust	£49k – 1 year This project aims to create a comprehensive youth-focused training curriculum on biodiversity conservation, invasive species management, and climate advocacy. Targeting children, adolescents, and youth, it will empower participants as environmental advocates by equipping them with practical skills to improve local biosecurity measures and foster ecological resilience through community-driven conservation actions. The curriculum, designed as co-curricular support, focuses on competence development in the blue, green, and circular economy, fostering sustainable practices, leadership, and innovative solutions for ecosystem preservation and climate adaptation.
Ant diversity and managing invasive ants in Turks and Caicos	Turks and Caicos Islands	Department of Agriculture, Turks and Caicos Government	£50k – 2 years Understanding of the species diversity, species composition and functional groups of ants in Turks and Caicos Islands and the threat of invasive fire ants in changing the community structure of ants and other invertebrates assemblages. Implementation of suppression methods against the population of invasive fire ants and the strengthening biosecurity protocols to increase the protection and conservation of local biosecurity.
From understanding to management: endangered shark movements, connectivity and conservation	Anguilla	Anguilla National Trust	£49k – 2 years Shark and ray species, including those in Anguilla's waters, face extinction threats. The conversion of Anguilla's marine parks into biodiversity sanctuaries offers hope for elasmobranchs, provided their habitats overlap with these protected areas. This project evaluates the parks' effectiveness as refuges by using acoustic telemetry to track shark movements. It applies IUCN's Important Shark and Ray Area criteria to identify critical habitats and develops a sub-regional action plan to guide national conservation priorities.

Establishing a climate-adapted approach to sea turtle nesting habitat management	Anguilla	Anguilla National Trust	£45k – 1 year The sex of sea turtle embryos is directly correlated to nest temperature: higher temperatures result in more females, lower temperatures result in more males. Climate change, combined with coastal development, and coastal erosion caused by sea level rise is disrupting beach dynamics, impacting long-term sea turtle population viability. Using existing climate change models, and correlating beach temperature with hatchling success, this project identifies and pilots conservation actions to enhance the resilience of Anguilla's threatened sea turtle populations.
Conservation Connections: Advocating for Responsible Usage of Marine Spaces	Turks and Caicos Islands	Turks and Caicos Reef Fund	£49k – 1 year The project "Conservation Connections" aims to promote sustainable usage of marine environments through community outreach and education. It includes installing informative signage, producing engaging educational videos, and hosting training sessions. These initiatives target residents, visitors, and marine resource users to raise awareness about responsible practices and foster a sense of stewardship. By equipping the community with knowledge and tools, the project seeks to enhance protection for marine ecosystems while encouraging active participation in conservation efforts.
Completing the biodiversity puzzle of the Jubilee Shoals (SBA Akrotiri)	Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas	Enalia Physis Environmental Research Centre	£50k – 1 year The project will tackle the lack of information about the marine biodiversity and habitats of the western and central sectors of the Jubilee Shoals (SBAA Akrotiri), areas not surveyed yet. This missing ecological information of EU relevant habitats (seagrass beds, rocky reefs, submerged caves, coralligenous) is needed for a holistic, ecosystem-based management approach. With the participation of stakeholder in the surveys, the project will raise awareness, build capacity, and provide evidence-based tools for the sustained management of the shoals.
Increasing capacity and efficacy in local rodent control on Ascension	Ascension Island	Ascension Island Conservation and Fisheries Directorate	£47k – 1 year Rodents pose significant threats to Ascension's biodiversity, infrastructure and welfare of residents. Eradication is currently unfeasible; however, more effective control efforts and improved technologies may more successfully suppress rodent populations. Building on recommendations from DPL00037, this project will implement new strategies and trial innovative methods in collaboration with other contractors responsible for rodent management at the RAF and USAF bases. Consultants will train staff to apply best practice standards to reduce the impact of rodents to the maximum extent possible.
Scalable restoration: enhancing capacity to use local and imported materials	Falkland Islands	Department of Agriculture, Falkland Islands Government	£49k – 1 year This project aims to address land degradation in the Falkland Islands by implementing and demonstrating effective, affordable restoration techniques using locally and non-locally sourced materials. It seeks to enhance local capacity to scale up restoration efforts, focusing on biodiversity, soil stability, and sustainable land management. Key goals include testing innovative restoration methods, fostering reuse of waste materials, guiding best practices, and stimulating restoration-focused businesses. Success will be measured through improved ecological conditions, stakeholder engagement, and adoption of techniques by landowners.
Montserrat Cetaceans 2.0: Mega-Fauna Biodiversity Data Collection and Awareness Programs	Montserrat (ODA)	Island Solutions	£49k – 1 year Through DPLR3 funding, Montserrat has advanced cetacean research, collecting vital data on species inhabiting or migrating through its waters. Our adaptable hydrophone network will be reconfigured to monitor deep-water cetaceans, particularly the sperm whale, a key species in marine ecosystems. This program also emphasizes

			community engagement, partnering with artists and youth to create educational mega-fauna statues for public display. These installations will enhance awareness of Montserrat's unique biodiversity, fostering pride and knowledge among residents while supporting conservation efforts.
2025 Certified Practical Horticulture Qualification for the Bermuda Botanical Gardens	Bermuda	The Department of Parks on behalf of the Bermuda Botanical Gardens	£49k – 1 year This Project will bring suitably qualified overseas trainers and assessors to Bermuda to deliver certified Practical Horticulture Training for staff of the Bermuda Botanical Gardens. This training will meet Target 9 of the BGCI Botanic Garden Accreditation Standard.
Reversing Biodiversity Loss Through Integrating Natural Capital Into Business Practices	St Helena (ODA)	SHAPE - St Helena's Active Participation in Enterprise	£48k – 1 year SHAPE aspires to become 'The Leading Organisation in Organic Farming Methods on St Helena' by realising an organic garden on their grounds, providing fresh produce to Mantis, tailored to their demand, adapting to the 'Farm-to-Fork Strategy', delivered by adults with disabilities. A successful project will see reduction in the use and risk of non-organic pesticides and fertilizers, increased biodiversity in soil meaning more fertile soil, better crop production, greater economic empowerment among farmers and subsequent food and nutrition security.
Managing feral cats on Diego Garcia, Chagos Archipelago	British Indian Ocean Territory[1]	Chagos Conservation Trust	£46k – 1 year This project will first assess the feasibility and ecological impact of eradicating feral cats from Diego Garcia, Chagos Archipelago. If it is assessed as feasible and of ecological benefit, the project will produce an operational plan to eradicate feral cats from the island. The three studies will be passed to the island's governing authority and interested organisations and, made open access on-line via the Chagos Information Portal (https://chip.chagos-trust.org/).
Biodiversity of Falklands sandy beaches	Falkland Islands	South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI)	£49k – 1 year This is the first baseline study of macrofauna on sandy beaches across FI, comparing beaches with different morphodynamic types and varying levels of human intervention and fauna. By evaluating macrofaunal diversity and abundance on penguin-colonized versus undisturbed beaches, the project also seeks to understand how both human activity and these key faunal actors influence ecosystem structure and functioning. Findings will support sustainable beach management and conservation strategies, balancing ecological needs with low-impact human use. It will inform future Island-wide studies.
Advancing Anguilla's invasive plant management through research, monitoring, and training	Anguilla	Department of Natural Resources, Government of Anguilla	£50k – 1 year This project focuses on monitoring invasive plant species in Anguilla to support ongoing eradication efforts of the Tropical Bull Nettle (*Cnidoscolus urens*). It includes tracking populations of the targeted species and assessing the effectiveness of ongoing treatments. The project will also aim to conduct Weed Risk Assessments for all documented non-native plants in Anguilla. By evaluating potential threats and prioritizing management actions, the project aims to reduce the ecological and economic damage caused by invasive plants to native habitats.
Developing equitable non-extractive value for spawning aggregations of reef fishes	Turks and Caicos Islands	FisherFolkFirst	£50k – 1 year Spawning aggregations of reef fishes are critical ecological phenomena and hotspots of biodiversity. The project aims to enhance protection for spawning aggregations of reef fishes in the Turks and Caicos Islands by developing their non-extractive value through responsible eco-tourism and ensuring that small-scale fishing communities share in those benefits.

Bolstering Benthic Baselines – Equipping Ourselves for Long Term Monitoring	Turks and Caicos Islands	Turks and Caicos Reef Fund	£49k – 1 year Bolstering Benthic Baseline – Equipping Ourselves for Long Term Monitoring is a project that aims to equip the TC Reef Fund (TCI's most active and longest standing environmental advocacy NGO) with the materials, technology, software, and training to increase our capacity for long term, globally comparable and currently relevant data collection. A more wholistic approach to monitoring will include photogrammetry, tissue sampling for histopathology, water quality and temperature monitoring, as well as in-person field surveys with trained AGRRA surveyors.
Implementing biocontrol to give Ascension's endemic species a fighting chance	Ascension Island	Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate (AIGCFD)	£26k – 1 year Invasive non-native species (INNS) are the most serious threat to Ascension's terrestrial biodiversity. The scale of the problem means current control efforts are limited to reducing impacts on the most sensitive protected areas and species. Even this stretches resources and more sustainable ways of tackling INNS need to be found. This project will develop budgeted work plans for three INNS of the highest priority, identifying and assessing the suitability of biocontrol agents that could be developed against Ascension's priority invaders.
Biodiversity Showcase Garden, National Museum of Montserrat	Montserrat (ODA)	Montserrat National Trust	£49k – 1 year This project ensures a sustainable solar-power-irrigated Biodiversity & Well-being Garden at the National Museum is healthy, vibrant and resilient to local conditions. Montserrat Botanic Garden and Department of Environment experts will provide information on native and medicinal plants and suitable micro-habitats for insect pollinators. Local craftsmen will use local stone, iron, and mesh to create a resilient barrier protecting the Museum Garden's perimeter from invasive species. Local specialists will install a solar-powered irrigation system to ensure resilience during challenging conditions.
The Montserrat Bat Project: Enhanced Species Health and Impact Assessments	Montserrat (ODA)	Island Solutions	£49k – 1 year As climate change and human activity alter Caribbean ecosystems, bat populations and diversity are shifting. Bats play critical roles in agriculture pest control, pollination, and reducing vector-borne diseases. Modern monitoring tools like ultrasonic recorders and AI will provide updated, comprehensive data on bat populations while contributing to regional acoustic libraries. The program also includes citizen science initiatives, engaging communities to monitor bats on private lands and offering bat houses to residents, emphasizing the ecological importance of these key species.
The ACF Gardens	Montserrat (ODA)	The Alphonsus Cassell Foundation	£50k – 1 year The ACF Gardens, a project by the Alphonsus Cassell Foundation in Montserrat, will establish an urban garden at the historic Arrow's Manshop site in Sweeney's. Using sustainable techniques such as raised beds and mulching, the garden will grow diverse fruits, vegetables, and herbs. Produce will be shared with schools, care homes, and residents, empowering local food cultivation. Inspired by Alphonsus "Arrow" Cassell's legacy, the project promotes biodiversity, climate resilience, and wellness, creating a lasting impact on Montserrat's environment and community.

[1] On 22 May 2025 the UK Government signed a treaty to hand sovereignty of the Chagos Islands (i.e. British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)) to the Government of the Republic of Mauritius. Ratification is expected in 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. **Our steer from FCDO is to continue awarding new projects until ratification is complete.**

Annex D – Results Framework reporting

Reporting on Impact, Output and Outcome Indicators in the Darwin Plus Logframe is supported by Standard Indicators, which were introduced in 2023 as part of a new reporting framework implemented across the BCFs.

Please note:

1. Standard Indicators are used by projects under the Darwin Plus Main, Local and Strategic schemes only. Projects under Darwin Plus Fellowships/People & Skills are exempt.
2. The new reporting system is still being rolled out and has only been mandatory for new projects since mid-2023. Hence, these figures are indicative, but likely to be an underestimate of actual portfolio performance.
3. Annual targets are set by individual projects in their application forms.

Results Framework – data as of 2024-25 synthesis.

		Standard indicator code	Standard indicator or information source	Unit	Target 2024-25	Result 2024-25	Number of projects reporting 24/25	Progress in last three years
IMPACT	**Impact Indicator 1**							
The rates of biodiversity loss and degradation in UKOTs are slowed, halted or reversed	Status of OT endemic threatened endemic species (indicator currently being developed alongside JNCC)		TBD	TBD				
	Impact Indicator 2							
	Extent and condition of terrestrial and marine protected areas in OTs (indicator currently being developed alongside JNCC)		TBD	TBD				
	Impact Indicator 3							
	National Biodiversity Strategies and action plans (methodology to be developed)		TBD	TBD				
	Impact Indicator 4							
	Transformational change (methodology to be developed) (ICF KPI 15)		TBD	TBD				
OUTCOME 1	**Outcome 1 Indicator 1**							
Local communities and other stakeholders benefit from sustained improvement in policy and practice	Area under Ecological Management (ha) (DEFRA / ICF KPI 17)	DPLUS-D01*	Area of land or sea under ecological management	Number of hectares	n/a	5	2	5
		DPLUS-D01a	Area under Sustainable Management Practices	Number of hectares	323	4	1	1197
		DPLUS-D01b	Area improved through restoration	Number of hectares	10	2	1	218
		DPLUS-D01c*	Area newly designated as protected areas or other effective	Number of hectares	n/a	0	0	0

			conservation measures (OECMs)					
OUTCOME 2	**Outcome 2 Indicator 1**							
Local communities and stakeholders have improved wellbeing and climate adaption	Number of people with improved or protected i) livelihoods (Defra KPI DI7 & DI9), ii) disaster resilience /climate adaption KPI (ICF KPI1), and iii) wellbeing (Defra KPI DI10), (iv) freedom of action and choice	DPLUS-D03	Number of people with enhanced livelihoods	Number of people	n/a	1	1	1
		DPLUS-D03a*	Number of people with Sustainable Livelihoods created or protected	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D03b*	Number of people with improved income	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D04*	Number of people with enhanced wellbeing	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D04a*	Number of people with improved food security	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D04b*	Number of people with enhanced access to water	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D04c*	Number of people with improved health	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D04d*	Number of people with improved education	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D04e*	Number of people with improved security	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D04f*	Number of people with improved social relations	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D04g*	Number of people with improved freedom of choice and action	Number of people	n/a	0	0	0
		DPLUS-D05	Number of people whose climate and disaster resilience has been improved.	Number of people	n/a	9	1	9,809
		DPLUS-D05a	Number of people supported to better adapt to the effects of climate change	Number of people	0	0	0	0
	Outcome 2 Indicator 1							
	Gender equality and social inclusion is advanced throughout the fund		% of projects meeting minimum standard[1]	Proportion of projects	N/A	91%	31	91%
OUTCOME 3	**Outcome 3 Indicator 1**							

	Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended	DPLUS-B07	Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended	Number of instruments	0	0	0	0
	Outcome 3 Indicator 2							
	Finance mobilised for new activities building on evidence, best practices and projects			£		1,742,485	105	1,841,015
OUTPUT 1	**Output Indicator 1.1**							
Evidence is produced and Best Practices are developed, refined and made accessible.	Number of best practice guides and knowledge products developed, published and endorsed.	DPLUS-C01	Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed.	Number	27	48	17	156
	Output Indicator 1.2							
	Number of assessments conducted and published.	DPLUS-C02	Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published.	Number	25	30	5	195
		DPLUS-C03	New assessments of habitat conservation action needs published.	Number	6	3	2	10
		DPLUS-C04	New assessments of community use of biodiversity resources published.	Number	1	4	2	8
		DPLUS-C09	Number of records added to accessible databases.	Number of records	10	6,485[2]	6	9,489
	Output Indicator 1.3							
	Number of projects contributing data, insights and case studies to national MEA related reporting processes and calls for evidence.	DPLUS-C05	Number of projects contributing data, insights, and case studies to national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) related reporting processes and calls for evidence.	Number	14	12	10	32
OUTPUT 2	**Output Indicator 2.1**							
Capability and capacity of key national and local stakeholders to deliver on biodiversity conservation and	Number of people from key local and national stakeholders with improved capability and capacity (ICF KPI 2).	DPLUS-A01	Number of people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training.	Number of people	280	926 (100 men, 35 women)	44	2022

associated reductions in multi-dimensional poverty enhanced.		DPLUS-A02	Number of people in eligible countries who have completed secondments or placements.	Number of people	12	9	3	14
		DPLUS-A04	Number of people reporting that they are applying new capabilities (skills and knowledge) 6 (or more) months after training.	Number of people	21	91 (8 men, 10 women)	14	242
		DPLUS-A05	Number of trainers trained under the project reporting to have delivered further training	Number of people	0	5 (1 man)	3	14
	Output Indicator 2.2							
	Number of key local and national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of project	DPLUS-A03	Number of local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity.	Number of organisations	56	120	39	233
	Output Indicator 2.3							
	Number of people participating in community events and activities	DPLUS-A06*	Number of people participating in community events and activities	Number of people	n/a	0	1	0
	Output Indicator 2.2							
	Evidence and lessons learnt are shared and made accessible	DPLUS-C06	Analytics for funded project-specific social media posts.	Number	n/a	11,389	6	11,389
OUTPUT 3	**Output Indicator 3.1**							
Policies and approaches enhancing biodiversity conservation and associated reductions in multi-dimensional poverty are available and endorsed.	Number of new/improved biodiversity (species/habitat) or community management plans available and endorsed.	DPLUS-B01	Number of new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed	Number of plans	24	19	11	78
		DPLUS-B02	Number of new or improved species management plans available and endorsed	Number of plans	8	24	6	28
		DPLUS-B03	Number of new or improved community management plans available and endorsed.	Number of plans	0	0	0	10
		DPLUS-B04	Number of new or improved sustainable enterprises/ community	Number of plans	0	0	0	2

			benefits management plans available and endorsed.					
	Output Indicator 3.2							
	Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations	DPLUS-B05	Number of people with increased participation in governance.	Number of people	559	778	18	1842
	Output Indicator 3.3							
	Number of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (people) with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights (Defra KPI DI8)	DPLUS-B06	Number of people with strengthened land tenure rights.	Number of people	0	12	1	20
OUTPUT 4	**Output Indicator 4.1**							
Programme management ensures delivery of a competitive, adaptively managed fund.	Number of high-quality applications received			Number of applications		Darwin Plus Round 13 Main St1: 19; Main St2: 16; People & Skills: 6; Strategic: 4		
	Output Indicator 4.2							
	Annual Average Project Final Report Scores[3]					Local: 3.63 (51 FRs) Main: 3.46 (13 FRs)		
	Output Indicator 4.3							
	Volume of finance secured to deliver Darwin Plus projects							
	Output Indicator 4.4							
	Number of deep dives conducted in the 'Building and applying evidence' workstream							
	Output Indicator 4.5							
	Percentage of recommendations from deep dives which have been considered and actions discussed							

[1] The analysis is based on the reviewer scores from the ARRs, not the project's self-assessment. For those that are assessed as "*Not yet sensitive*", they have been asked to respond to demonstrate they are within their Half Year Report due 31st October. Further strengthening is needed in terms of how both projects and reviewers are responding to the GESI question (particularly the six GESI Analysis principles). There are plans in the C&C workstream to help support with this.

[2] 75% of reporting for this indicator comes from DPLUS175. This project operates across several countries and territories including: Turks and Caicos Islands, St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, SBAs of Akrotiri & Dhekelia (Cyprus), Gibraltar, Falkland Islands, Cayman Islands, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Antarctic Territory, Bermuda, Anguilla. This was also the final year of reporting with the project concluding in March 2025.

[3] Code projects according to score (For Main and Strategic Final Reports, letter grades are converted as follows: A++ = 5; A+ = 4; A = 3; B = 2; C = 1. For Darwin Plus Local, score of 1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3=3, 4=2, 5 = 1). Aim for average of 3 across funds, which corresponds to a score of A "Outcome met expectation". For D+ local) A++ = 1; A+ = 1; A = 1; B = 2; C = 3. For Darwin Plus Local, 1, 2 and 3 = 1, 4 = 2, 5 = 3. Darwin Plus Fellowship reports are not scored.

Annex E- Case Study examples of Darwin Plus impact

Darwin Plus Project	Description
DPLUS031 South Georgia Habitat Restoration Project Final Phase:	Darwin Plus part-funded the world's largest attempted invasive rodent eradication in South Georgia, which was declared rodent-free in 2018 for the first time in over 200 years. Eradication had an immediate impact on native fauna, as evidenced by the first breeding of the endemic South Georgia Pipit (multiple nests at multiple sites) in living memory. Darwin Plus is now funding project DPLUS187 to monitor seabird population recovery at South Georgia using satellite technology.
DPLUS128 Safeguarding Cayman's sister islands from invasive species	Following feral cat culling and tightening of the Cayman Government's 2015 Animals Act, the native rock iguana population increased from ~1,000 in 2022 to ~3,500 in 2025, and fledgling success of brown boobie chicks increased from 12.5% to 77.8% in a single season. A follow-on project was secured to ensure local agencies and community are prepared to collaboratively deliver long-term control strategies: DPLUS207 Empowering and preparing Cayman's Sister Islands to tackle invasive mammals.
DPLUS086 Future-proofing endangered species conservation in Anguilla	This project led a programme of reintroducing native species and eradicating invasive mice from Sombrero Island, and successfully lobbying the Anguillan Government to update Biodiversity and Heritage Conservation Act to protect all endangered reptiles and plants and remove invasive green iguana. Since then, the near-extinct Sombrero ground lizard population has increased from <100 in 2018 to >1,600 in 2024. A follow-on project was secured translocate Critically Endangered Lesser Antillean iguanas to increase genetic viability and resilience: DPLUS211 Big trouble for small populations: saving Anguilla's Critically Endangered iguanas.
DPL00087: Building capacity for vegetation wildfire response in a changing climate	This Darwin Plus Local project delivered certified training to prepare for the increasing risk of wildfires in the Falkland Islands, which can prove devastating for ground-nesting birds like albatrosses, petrels and prions. This was very positively received by the community and 28 people were trained, and 67 accredited certificates awarded to individuals including Government Officers, farmers, and landowners. Since this project, the Falkland Islands Government has drafted a new Wildfire Strategy for the Falkland Islands, which underwent public consultation over June-August 2025.

DPL00004: Building Capacity for Coral Restoration: Contributing to Bermuda's Blue Infrastructure	This Darwin Plus Local project explored planting corals and restoring reefs as a nature-based solution to shield coastal infrastructure during hurricanes. The 1km long bridge linking the airport to most of Bermuda is frequently damaged by storms, causing costly disruption. Coral cover on the bridge's protective barrier was increased from 1.2% to 31.3% across 20 planting sections, which received strong support and interest from the Bermudan Government. A follow-on project was secured to establish a coral spawning system scale-up propagation: DPL00096: Building sustainable coral propagation capacity in Bermuda.

Annex F- Projected benefits for Darwin Plus Main and Darwin Plus Local

		DPLUS MAIN								DPLUS LOCAL							
		Option 0		Option 1		Option 2		Option 3		Option 0		Option 1		Option 2		Option 3	
Indicator	Title	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
DPLUS-A01	Number of people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training.	309	326	427	456	491	525	678	731	45	48	973	1,032	1,343	1,425	1,742	1,848
DPLUS-A02	Number of people in eligible countries who have completed secondments or placements.	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	0	0	8	8	10	11	13	14
DPLUS-A03	Number of local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity.	106	116	144	160	165	183	225	253	3	3	65	69	90	96	117	124
DPLUS-A04	Number of people reporting that they are applying new capabilities (skills and knowledge) 6 (or more) months after training.	122	123	179	180	209	210	298	300	3	3	55	58	76	80	98	104
DPLUS-A05	Number of trainers trained under the project reporting to have delivered further training	1	2	1	3	1	4	2	6	0	0	3	3	4	5	6	6
DPLUS-A06	Number of people participating in community events and activities	-	1,157	-	1,920	-	2,328	-	3,538	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-B01	Number of new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed	9	10	14	14	16	17	22	24	2	2	40	42	55	58	71	75
DPLUS-B02	Number of new or improved species management plans available and endorsed	7	10	10	15	12	18	16	26	0	0	3	3	4	5	6	6

DPLUS-B03	Number of new or improved community management plans available and endorsed.	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-B04	Number of new or improved sustainable enterprises/ community benefits management plans available and endorsed.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-B05	Number of people with increased participation in governance.	134	137	180	186	205	212	279	289	346	367	7,478	7,933	10,329	10,957	13,396	14,210
DPLUS-B06	Number of people with strengthened land tenure rights.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	13	14	18	19	23	24
DPLUS-B07	Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-C01	Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed.	33	33	45	45	51	52	70	71	2	2	45	48	62	66	81	86
DPLUS-C02	Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published.	311	377	412	521	467	599	627	828	0	0	4	5	6	6	8	8
DPLUS-C03	New assessments of habitat conservation action needs published.	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	5	6	7	8	10	10
DPLUS-C04	New assessments of community use of biodiversity resources published.	-	1	-	2	-	2	-	3	0	0	1	1	1	2	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.	3	6	5	11	6	13	10	19	0	0	6	7	9	9	12	12
DPLUS-C06	Analytics for funded project-specific social media posts.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

DPLUS-C07	Number of webinar attendees	7	8	12	12	14	14	20	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-C08	Number of Media related activities	58	67	90	104	107	124	157	183	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-C09	Number of records added to accessible databases.	2,639	3,069	3,959	4,672	4,666	5,531	6,760	8,074	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-C10	Number of decision-makers attending briefing events.	104	126	133	169	148	192	194	261	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D01	Area of land or sea under ecological management.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D01a	Area under Sustainable Management Practices	117,233	141,713	149,505	190,121	166,785	216,040	217,960	292,803	38,351	40,681	829,612	880,016	1,145,865	1,215,483	1,486,080	1,576,369
DPLUS-D01b	Area improved through restoration	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D01c	Area newly designated as protected areas or other effective conservation measures (OECMs)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D02	Ecosystem Loss Avoided	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	439	465	9,488	10,065	13,105	13,901	16,996	18,029
DPLUS-D03	Number of people with enhanced livelihoods	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	2	2	3	3	4	4
DPLUS-D03	Number of people with Sustainable Livelihoods created or protected	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	2	2	3	3	4	4
DPLUS-D03	Number of people with improved income	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	2	2	3	3	4	4
DPLUS-D04	Number of people with enhanced wellbeing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D04a	Number of people with improved food security	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D04b	Number of people with enhanced access to water	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D04c	Number of people with improved health	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

DPLUS-D04d	Number of people with improved education	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D04e	Number of people with improved security	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D04f	Number of people with improved social relations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D04g	Number of people with improved freedom of choice and action	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D05	Number of people whose climate and disaster resilience has been improved.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D05a	Number of people supported to better adapt to the effects of climate change	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D05b	Number of people with improved resilience	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D06	Value of Ecosystem Services Generated or Protected	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DPLUS-D07	Number of globally threatened taxa with improving conservation status	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Annex G – Darwin Plus Theory of Change and Logframe

Darwin Plus Theory of Change

THE CHALLENGE

UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) are experiencing major and immediate threats due to human-induced pressures. The state of biodiversity is closely linked to the challenges of climate change ensuring fair distribution of the benefits resulting from biodiversity.

PROBLEM DRIVERS

- Pollution
- Climate change
- Changes in land/sea use
- Invasive species
- Direct exploitation of organisms

BARRIERS

- Inequalities which exacerbate market and government failures and prevent participation from the most marginalised
- Government failures such as competing policy priorities and limited resources
- Information gaps: lack of awareness of impacts/ sustainable alternatives
- Market failures: unconsidered environmental externalities
- Financing gap

Transformational Change across territories and into the future

INPUTS

- Biodiversity-related research is conducted, including on species, landscapes, and seascapes
- Training & skills development for key stakeholders and local partners
- Establishing partnerships and relationships between local and international stakeholders
- Cross-cutting themes are identified, with particular reference to marginalised groups such as women and rural communities
- Considerable scope for innovation is maintained

OUTPUTS

- Evidence is produced which can be used to guide future biodiversity management and policies
- The capacities and capabilities of local stakeholders are improved
- Policies and management techniques that promote sustainability are implemented

OUTCOMES

- Demand led action to conserve, protect and restore nature
- Local communities and stakeholders have improved wellbeing and climate resilience
- Sustained improvement in policy and practice

IMPACT

- The rates of biodiversity loss and degradation in UKOTs are slowed, halted, or reversed.

High quality Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Funding is channelled through the four tiers of the Darwin Plus programme. Three are challenge-style funds (Darwin Plus Strategic, Darwin Plus Main, Darwin Plus Local), enabling multi-year grants. Further funding is provided through Darwin Plus People & Skills that supports individuals in acquiring skills and knowledge.

KEY 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 (Defra and leveraged) remains available for project implementation and sustainability

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems are robust and pragmatic

External factors such as political conflict and natural disasters remain manageable for project implementation

High quality applications are received

Theory of Change narrative

The following is a narrative theory of change for the Darwin Plus (as of March 2026). Assumptions and evidence notes are footnoted.

1. The Challenge

The UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) are facing significant and urgent threats to their biodiversity, primarily as a result of human activities such as habitat destruction, pollution, unsustainable resource use, and the introduction of invasive species. These pressures are having a detrimental impact on native species and ecosystems, many of which are globally important and uniquely vulnerable. Furthermore, the health of biodiversity in the UKOTs is intrinsically connected to broader challenges posed by climate change, which can exacerbate existing pressures and create new risks for ecosystem, wildlife, and local communities. Addressing these issues requires not only targeted conservation efforts, but also ensuring that the benefits arising from biodiversity, including ecosystem services, livelihoods and community resilience, are fairly distributed. This approach promotes social equity and helps safeguard both environmental and human wellbeing, recognising that sustainable biodiversity management is fundamental to achieving fair outcomes for all residents of the UKOTs and the importance of safeguarding natural environments independent of people.

1.1. Drivers of biodiversity loss

Human activity remains the primary cause of biodiversity loss and degradation, via the direct drivers:

1. *Changes in land and sea use*, e.g. agricultural and urban expansion, water extraction.
2. *Increased exploitation*, e.g. overexploitation via harvesting, hunting, and fishing.
3. *Climate change*, e.g. extreme weather events, changes in seasonality, ocean acidification.
4. *Pollution*, e.g. marine plastic, waste, industry, agriculture, petrochemicals.
5. *Invasion of alien species*, e.g. global trade spreading species that impact ecosystem functions.

Climate change is partly driving biodiversity loss, which is further reducing biodiversity's capability to mitigate, adapt and be resilient to the impact of climate change.

Behind these are indirect drivers (economic/political/social factors), including consumption habits, wealth generation, and the separation of production from consumption. Inequalities between and within stakeholders often impacts who benefits from the use of biodiversity, and who bears the cost. OTs may be more susceptible to the impacts of climate change due to islands being low-lying and exposed to extreme weather events.

Biodiversity loss and degradation tends to be less in areas managed by indigenous and local communities, but these areas are facing escalating external pressures (agriculture, and infrastructure), impacting the biodiversity and the livelihoods and wellbeing of these communities.

1.2. Barriers to addressing the challenge

The direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity degradation and loss need to be addressed to halt and reverse current trends. As the Dasgupta review[95] on the Economics of Biodiversity highlights and the UK Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy[96], action is needed to ensure biodiversity is effectively embedded in decision-making. Barriers[97] include:

- **Market failures:** biodiversity is an externality or public good that private actors will not necessarily account for in their private behaviour.
- **Government or governance failures:** ability of policymakers to take a sustainable approach to political and economic priorities and the management of biodiversity assets; capable institutions and the requisite biodiversity knowledge to guide effective action form the enabling conditions to change this.
- **Information gaps:** lack of awareness of biodiversity, understanding impacts of activities, and options to managing biodiversity limits the effectiveness of policymakers, communities, and private agents.
- **Inequalities:** economic, political, and social inequalities exacerbate market and governance failures; more equitable representation of marginalised groups (e.g. by age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and indigenous and local communities status) in decision-making is needed.
- **Financing gaps:** The scale of the challenge is greater than funding available. Appropriate finance for biodiversity and poverty reducing interventions is often unavailable, inaccessible, insufficient, or too risky for other funders.

2. Inputs

Darwin Plus draws on a set of core resources and enabling conditions that support long-term environmental outcomes across the UK Overseas Territories. These inputs include:

- **Financial resources** made available by the UK Government for environmental projects in the UKOTs, recognising both the significance of their globally important biodiversity and the need to strengthen local capability to manage it.

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[95] www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review

[96] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-overseas-territories-biodiversity-strategy/uk-overseas-territories-biodiversity-strategy

[97] Evidence gap: Challenges specific to different regions/themes and which challenges projects can realistically influence and those that sit largely outside project control.

- **Technical expertise** of project teams, in territory partners, UK institutions and regional networks, spanning biodiversity science, climate change adaptation, environmental management, monitoring and evaluation, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) sensitive design, and ethical and safeguarding practices.
- **Existing partnerships and relationships** from local, national and international partnerships, to ensure contextual knowledge, access to local communities and insight into political and institutional dynamics.
- **Evidence**, such as insights and best practices from past BCFs projects, fund-level research, OT government priorities, and wider scientific data, is used to inform project design[i]. This approach enables the selection of context-appropriate interventions, ensuring that projects identify effective strategies, understand their mechanisms, and appropriately adapt them to specific settings[98].
- **Fund management expertise** including guidance and support for effective project design and implementation including ethical and safeguarding compliance, and monitoring and evaluation[99].
- The **independent expert committee** plays a central role in shaping high quality proposals by offering informed, impartial review based on deep experience in conservation and climate change. This ensures that projects are selected, funded and monitored to a consistent and robust standard[100].

3. Project Activities

With these inputs projects are able to use the grants to design projects aligned with the UK Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy and ODA strategy[101,102] that:

- Conduct biodiversity-related research, including on species, landscapes, and seascapes, and people's interactions with them at the individual, community, institutional, and systemic levels.
- Build the capacity of key national and local stakeholders through training & skills development.
- Establish and build partnerships and relationships between local and international stakeholders.
- Address cross-cutting themes in particular the meaningful inclusion of vulnerable or marginalised groups such as women and rural communities.

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[98] Evidence gap: Whether existing support for adaptive management (e.g. CCNs) are sufficient to support this need.
[99] Assumption: Best practice and learning products are accessible, used, and understood by applicants and grantees.
[100] Evidence gap: How expert committee feedback changes project design quality, not just selection outcomes.
[101] Assumption: UK OT Biodiversity Strategy and ODA strategies and priorities are stable.
[102] Assumption: High quality applications are received.

- Test out and adapt ideas and approaches to meet the specific needs and challenges of the diverse contexts that the projects work in, ensuring information is captured to evidence whether an idea or approach is effective[103]. This includes three broad areas of innovation:
    - Novel to the area **-** the diffusion, replication or application of proven conservation approaches in another geography or to a different issue or stakeholder group.
    - Novel to the sector - an approach proven in a different sector is adapted to deliver results and impact in the biodiversity conservation sector.
    - Novel to the world – an innovation unproven in any sector, is applied to the biodiversity conservation sector.

Projects carry out robust MEL while implementing their activities, ensuring that progress is systematically tracked against clear objectives and indicators[104]. By employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, projects are able to assess both the effectiveness and impact of their interventions, identify areas for improvement, and adapt approaches in response to emerging insights. Continuous learning is fostered through regular reflection and knowledge sharing, allowing teams and stakeholders to refine best practices and maximise outcomes for biodiversity conservation, wellbeing and climate resilience[105].

4. Outputs

With inputs in place, Darwin Plus projects implement a diverse range of interventions aligned with the four programme themes[106]:

- **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.

4.1. Evidence that can guide future biodiversity management and policy

Under Darwin Plus, projects produce a wide suite of evidence based outputs that support environmental governance across the UKOTs. These include ecological surveys, species assessments, habitat mapping, climate vulnerability assessments, environmental monitoring datasets, management guidelines, risk analyses, implementation lessons and evaluations. Projects will develop evidence that is

[103] Evidence gap: Success rates of different types of innovation supported by the fund.
[104] Assumption: MEL systems are robust and pragmatic.
[105] Assumption: Biodiversity, wellbeing and climate resilience are compatible, with manageable trade-offs.
[106] Assumption: External factors such as political conflict and natural disasters remain manageable for project implementation.

accessible, comprehensible, usable and assessable, enabling stakeholders to trust and apply it effectively[107]. Because Darwin Plus prioritises practical, action orientated work, evidence outputs often demonstrate not only what interventions were implemented, but also how, why, and with what impact.

4.2. Improved capabilities and capacities of local stakeholders

Capability and capacity building is one of the four central themes of Darwin Plus. Outputs in this domain include targeted technical training, development of new skills for OT based practitioners, improved organisational systems, strengthened scientific and technical expertise, better environmental governance, and more resilient local institutions. These outputs are delivered through workshops, mentoring, territory to territory knowledge exchange, community based training, improved monitoring systems and enhanced environmental management practices. Building capability ensures that OT partners can sustain and expand environmental work beyond the life of a project, manage environmental risks more effectively and participate more fully in decision making[108,109].

4.3. Implementation and uptake of sustainable policies and management techniques

A further category of outputs includes policies, management plans, and practical techniques that promote sustainable use, conservation, restoration or protection of biodiversity across the UKOTs. Examples include species recovery plans, invasive species strategies, habitat restoration protocols, protected area management frameworks, marine spatial plans, climate adaptation plans and enforcement or regulatory tools. Where new research is conducted, it must be directly applicable to environmental outcomes and implemented through practical actions.

5. Outcomes

5.1. Demand-led action

When evidence is produced and shared, when capabilities and capacities of local stakeholders are strengthened, and when sustainable management approaches are implemented, the combined effect is to generate demand-led action to conserve, protect and restore nature across the UKOTs. This means that OT governments, civil society, and community partners are better equipped, better informed, and more motivated to take proactive action, grounded in their own priorities and supported by high quality evidence. This means local ownership and alignment with OT government objectives, ensuring that actions reflect territorial needs and contribute meaningfully to existing commitments.

[107] Assumption: Evidence has broader applicability than the very specific context in which the project is working.
[108] Assumption: Built capacity remains available (stays in the sector and Territory).
[109] Evidence gap: Does capacity building meaningfully shift behaviour where political or economic incentives run counter to conservation outcomes.

5.2. Wellbeing and climate resilience

A second outcome is improved wellbeing across diverse local communities and stakeholders. Many UKOTs are small island territories where communities depend directly on natural capital for livelihoods, safety, food security, and resilience to climate change. When biodiversity is better protected and ecosystems are healthier, communities experience benefits such as reduced environmental risk, improved fisheries and ecosystem services, enhanced cultural and natural heritage, and strengthened resilience against environmental shocks. Ensuring that projects adopt a GESI sensitive approach helps widen access to these benefits, prevents unintended exclusion or harm, and supports equitable participation in decision making[110].

5.3. Policy and Practice

The third outcome reflects a sustained improvement in policy and practice across the UKOTs. Evidence outputs and strengthened partnerships support OT governments to embed good environmental decision making into policies, processes and long-term strategies[111]. As projects demonstrate impact and share accessible data, they reinforce the case for sustaining and scaling successful approaches. Enhanced capability means that OT based institutions are better able to regulate, plan, implement and monitor environmental initiatives, supporting the long-term institutionalisation of effective conservation practice.

6. Impact

The long-term impact of the Darwin Plus programme is that rates of biodiversity loss and degradation in the UKOTs are slowed, halted, or reversed. By generating high quality evidence, strengthening local capability, supporting community engagement and embedding sustainable management practices, the programme fosters systemic improvements in how biodiversity is protected, managed and restored across the UKOTs. Healthier ecosystems support the resilience of communities and economies, reduce exposure to environmental risks, enhance climate adaptation and maintain the globally significant natural heritage of the Territories.

This impact aligns with the core objectives of Darwin Plus to improve biodiversity, strengthen environmental quality, address climate change and build capability and capacity for long-term environmental stewardship. As sustainable practices become embedded and local actors continue to apply knowledge and evidence, the OTs are better positioned to secure lasting environmental outcomes beyond the duration of the funded projects.

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[110] Evidence gap: Inclusion and GESI focused activities translate into durable changes in power, voice or decision making.

[111] Assumption: There is will form key stakeholders (particularly government) to implement change based on findings from projects.

7. Transformation Change: Scalability and Replication underpin each case

Scalability and replication serve as the cornerstones of transformational change, ensuring that successful interventions can be adapted and extended across diverse contexts. By designing projects with the capacity to scale, lessons learned and effective approaches are not confined to a single locality but can be shared, adopted, and tailored by other regions or stakeholders. This facilitates the widespread uptake of proven methods, multiplying their impact and embedding lasting improvements in policy and practice[112]. Ultimately, transformational change is achieved when these scalable and replicable solutions catalyse broader shifts in governance, resource management, and community engagement, supporting the sustained reversal of biodiversity loss, poverty reduction and enhanced climate resilience across multiple settings.

[112] Evidence gap: Evidence distinguishing replication of activities from replication of outcomes.

Darwin Plus Logframe

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

OUTCOME 1:	**Demand led action to conserve, protect and restore nature**
Assumptions:	• Not exceeded by other negative pressures on biodiversity • Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems are capable of assessing the outcome. • No meaningful impact on functioning of programme from e.g. geopolitical tensions, natural disasters
Indicator 1.1:	*Area under Ecological Management (ha) (DEFRA/ ICF KPI 17)*
	Units: Hectares Disaggregation: UKOT; Biome Standard Indicator: DPLUS-D01: Area of land or sea under ecological management • DPLUS-D01a: Areas under Sustainable Management Practices • DPLUS-D01b: Area improved through restoration • DPLUS-D0c: Area newly designed as protected areas or other effective conservation measures (OECMs) Results: TBC

	Notes: Indicator method under development, based on ICF KPI 17 Methodology Note "Hectares of land that have received sustainable land management practices", KPI potentially being reformulated to area under ecological management (which needs to be clearly defined). This could also act a source of evidence that scalable approaches (Output indicator 2.1) are being taken up and implemented.

OUTCOME 2:	**Local communities and stakeholders have improved wellbeing and climate adaption**
Assumptions:	• Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems are capable of assessing the outcome. • No meaningful impact on functioning of programme from e.g. geopolitical tensions, natural disasters
Indicator 2.1:	*Number of people with improved or protected i) livelihoods (DEFRA KPI), ii) disaster resilience/ climate adaption (ICF KPI 1), iii) wellbeing, (iv) freedom of action and choice*
	Unit: People Disaggregation: UKOT; Gender (men, women, other); sector Standard Indicator: DPLUS-D03 : Number of people with enhanced livelihoods • DPLUS-D03a: Number of people with Sustainable Livelihoods created or protected • DPLUS-D03b: Number of people with improved income DPLUS-D04 : Number of people with enhanced wellbeing • DPLUS-D04a: Number of people with improved food security • DPLUS-D04b:Number of people with enhanced access to water • DPLUS-D04c: Number of people with improved health • DPLUS-D04d: Number of people with improved education • DPLUS-D04e: Number of people with improved security • DPLUS-D04f: Number of people with improved social relations • DPLUS-D04g: Number of people with improved freedom of choice and action DPLUS-D05: Number of people whose climate and disaster resilience has been improved • DPLUS-D05a: Number of people supported to better adapt to the effects of climate change Results: TBC

Indicator 2.2:	*Gender equality and social inclusion is advanced throughout the fund*
	Unit: Proportion (%) Disaggregation: Not yet sensitive/ Sensitive/ Empowering/ Transformative Target: 100% of projects are supported by the fund to meet the GESI Sensitive minimum standard. Results: TBC Notes: The results of this indicator are based on the GESI scores included in the Annual Report Review process of all active Biodiversity Challenge Fund projects. An analysis on the scores will be completed annually in September once all reviews have been completed.

OUTCOME 3:	**Sustained improvement in policy and practice**
Assumptions:	• Policy and practice replicable and applicable in other UKOTs • Capability sufficient to sustain outcomes for impact
Indicator 3.1:	*Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended*
	Unit: Number Disaggregation: UKOT; Type (enacted, amended) Standard Indicator: DPLUS-B07: Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended Results: TBC Notes: For example, where projects have contributed evidence, during consultation phases, to amend or develop policy.

	The target was set using the planned figures for currently running projects, adjusted for the lifetime of these projects and their likely outputs in any given year. In this case, the 1 policy anticipated has not been fully developed in the 2022/23 period, and will likely be reflected in the following year's reporting.
Indicator 3.2:	*Finance mobilised for new activities building on evidence, best practices and projects*
	Unit: GBP (£) Disaggregation: public/ private source of finance. Based on ICF KPI 11 & 12 methodology. Standard Indicator: N/A – captured in general reporting. Notes: finance mobilised for new activities beyond the agreed scope of the project at the time of funding.

OUTPUT 1:	**Evidence is produced which can be used to guide future biodiversity management and policies and meet MEA commitments (as well as future Darwin projects)**
Indicator 1.1:	*Number of best practice guides and knowledge products developed, published and endorsed*
	Unit: Number Disaggregation: UKOT; language Standard Indicator: DPLUS-C01: Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed Results: TBC
Indicator 1.2:	*Number of assessments conducted and published*
	Unit: Number Disaggregation: UKOT; Taxa (Flora, Fauna, Fungi) Standard Indicator:

	DPLUS-C02: Number of new conservation or species stock assessment 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 Results: TBC
Indicator 1.3:	*Number of projects contributing data, insights and case studies to national MEA related reporting processes and calls for evidence*
	Unit: Number Disaggregation: UKOT; Information type (data, insights, case studies, other) Standard Indicator: DPLUS-C05: Number of projects contributing data, insights, and case studies to national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) related reporting processes and calls for evidence Results: TBC

OUTPUT 2:	**Capability and capacity of national and local stakeholders are improved**
Indicator 2.1:	*Number of people from key local and national stakeholders receiving training/ new skills (ICF KPI 2)*
	Unit: People Disaggregation: UKOT, Gender (men, women, other) Standard Indicator: DPLUS-A01: Number of people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training DPLUS-A02: Number of people in eligible countries who have completed secondments or placements

	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 under the project reporting to have delivered further training Results: TBC Notes: The double counting risk of DPLUS-A05 is noted.
Indicator 2.2:	*Number of key local and national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of the project*
	Unit: Number Disaggregation: UKOT, Organisation type (public, private, other) Standard Indicator: DPLUS-A03: Number of local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity Results: TBC
Indicator 2.3:	*Number of people participating in community events and activities*
	Unit: People Disaggregation: UKOT, Gender (men, women, other) Standard Indicator: DPLUS-A06: Number of people participating in community events and activities Results: TBC

Indicator 2.4:	*Evidence and lessons learnt are shared and made accessible*
	Unit: Number Disaggregation: UKOT, Analytic type (reach impressions, engagement, other); Gender (men, women, other); Media type (internet, print, radio, television, podcast, other) Standard Indicator: 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 Results: TBC

OUTPUT 3:	**Policies and management techniques that promote sustainability are implemented**
Indicator 3.1:	*Number of new/ improved biodiversity (species/ habitat) or community management plans available and endorsed*
	Unit: Number Disaggregation: UKOT, Type (new, improved) Standard Indicator: DPLUS-B01: Number of new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed DPLUS-B02: Number of new or improved species management plans available and endorsed DPLUS-B03: Number of new or improved community management plans available and endorsed DPLUS-B04: Number of new or improved sustainable enterprises/ community benefits management plans available and endorsed

	Results: TBC
Indicator 3.2:	*Number of people with increased participation in local communities/ local management organisations*
	Unit: People Disaggregation: UKOT, Gender (men, women, other); Governance structure (new, existing) Standard Indicator: DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in governance Results: TBC Notes: this indicator is applicable only in a few of the UKOTs.
Indicator 3.3:	*Number of people with strengthened (recognised/ clarified) tenure and/or rights*
	Unit: People Disaggregation: UKOT; Gender (men, women, other) Standard Indicator: DPLUS-B06 Results: TBC Notes: this indicator is applicable only in a few of the UKOTs.

OUTPUT 4	***Programme management is good and adapts to strengthen the delivery of the challenge fund.***
Indicator 4.1	*Number of high-quality applications received*
	Unit: Number Disaggregation: funding round, scheme (Local, Main, Fellows, Strategic) Results: TBC Notes: The number of eligible applications scoring an average of 4 or higher. Darwin Plus Main applications are scored at two stages, while all other schemes are scored at only one stage.
Indicator 4.2	*Annual Average Project Final Report Scores*
	Unit: Annual average Disaggregation: funding round, scheme (Local, Main, Fellows, Strategic) Target: Aim for average achievement of Outcome score of A across all Darwin Plus Final Reports received in reporting period. Results: TBC
Indicator 4.3	*Volume of finance secured to deliver Darwin Plus projects*
	Unit: GBP (£) Disaggregation: public/ private source of finance. Based on ICF KPI 11 & 12 methodology Standard Indicator: N/A – collected in general reporting Results: TBC
Indicator 4.4	*Number of Deep Dives conducted in the 'Building and applying evidence' workstream*

	Unit: Number Disaggregation: Study type (Process, thematic) Standard Indicator: N/A – From Fund Management records Target: 10 across all three Biodiversity Challenge Funds Results: TBC Notes: Please note this target has been adjusted from last year's target of 12.
Indicator 4.5	Percentage of recommendations from deep dives which have been considered and actions discussed
	Unit: Percentage Disaggregation: Study type (Process, thematic) Target: 100% of completed deep dive recommendations processed in the BCFs recommendation tracker Results: TBC

Annex H – Value for money framework

Economy	Economy Indicator 1		2027	2028	2029	Assumptions
	Overhead costs as % of total programme spend	Planned				Indicator 1 Overhead costs = Defra staff costs + Expert Group costs + NIRAS Fund Admin but not things that are adding to quality (eg. WS-5 + C&C + 50% comms)
		Achieved				
			Source			
			Financial records			
	Economy Indicator 2		**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	
	Quality of procurement and personnel resource management processes (RAG)	Planned				Indicator 2 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.
		Achieved				
			Source			
			Personnel Management processes and records			
Efficiency	**Efficiency indicator 1**		**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**Assumptions**
	Cost per person in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training	Planned				Indicator 1 considers only C&C projects, assumes that full project budgets were spent to deliver training.
		Achieved				
		Source				
		Project budgets, Annual synthesis results				
	Efficiency indicator 2		**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	Indicator 2 is qualitative, requires accompanying word doc with concise narrative referring to Annual Report Section etc where info is stored.
	Extent and quality of measures taken in last year to improve efficiency (RAG)	Planned				
		Achieved				
		Source				
		BCFs Recommendations Tracker				Indicator 4 taken from all projects submitting a Final Report during the reporting period.
	Efficiency indicator 3		**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	
	Value of co-funding leveraged (as % of total Defra spend)	Planned				
		Achieved				
		Source				
		Annual results synthesis				

Effectiveness	Effectiveness indicator 1		2027	2028	2029	Assumptions
	DPLUS-A03 Number of local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity	Planned				Indicators 1–3 taken from Synthesis
		Achieved				
		Source				
		Annual results synthesis				
	Effectiveness indicator 2		2027	2028	2029	
	DPLUS-D01 Area of land or sea under ecological management (ha)	Planned				
		Achieved				
		Source				
		Annual results synthesis				
	Effectiveness indicator 3		2027	2028	2029	
	DPLUS-D05a Number of people supported to better adapt to the effects of climate change	Planned				
		Achieved				
		Source				
		Annual results synthesis				
Equity	Equity indicator 1		2027	2028	2029	Assumptions
	% of projects that are confirmed by reviewers to be GESI sensitive	Planned				Indicators 1–2 All projects submitting an Annual Report or a Final Report Indicator 3 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
		Achieved				
		Source				
		Project Annual and Final Reports and Report Reviews				
	Equity indicator 2		2027	2028	2029	
	% of projects that are confirmed by reviewers to be GESI empowering	Planned				
		Achieved				
		Source				
		Project Annual and Final Reports and Report Reviews				
	Equity indicator 3		2027	2028	2029	
	% of project funding that goes directly to UKOT-	Planned				
		Achieved				

	based organisations / partners	Source Project budgets	

Annex I- Performance Management Framework

Overview of the PMF

As part of the Authority's continuous drive to improve the performance of all Contractors, this Performance Management Framework (PMF) will be used to monitor, measure, and control all aspects of the Fund Manager's performance of contract responsibilities.
The PMF purpose is to set out the obligations on the Contractor, to outline how the Contractor's performance will be evaluated and to detail the sanctions for performance failure.
Management of the PMF
Key Performance Indicators ("KPI's") shall be monitored on a regular basis and shall form part of the contract performance review. Performance of KPI's will be reported by the Contractor and Authority quarterly and annually. Where KPI's are highlighted as 'Self-Assessed' the Contractor shall produce the report and those highlighted as 'Assessed by the Authority' shall be reported on by the Authority.
The first quarter shall not be formally assessed. It shall be used to develop the quarterly report template and agree the format and content to be included in the report, including agreeing methodology, definitions, thresholds, and quality assurance considerations.
Any performance issues highlighted in these reports will be addressed by the Contractor, who shall be required to provide an improvement plan ("Remediation Plan") to address all issues highlighted within a week of the Authority request.
The Authority shall hold Quarterly Contract Meetings with the Contractor to review the Contractor's quarterly Performance Management reports and implementation of any improvement plan. One of these Quarterly Contract Meetings shall include an overarching Annual Contract Performance Review.
Performance failure by the Contractor may result in administrative costs to the Authority[113]. Where the Contractor fails to meet the KPI's then the service credit regime shall apply.
The KPI's are essential in order to align Contractor's performance with the requirements of the Authority and to do so in a fair and practical way. KPIs have to be realistic and achievable; they also have to be met otherwise indicating that the service is failing to deliver. Without the use of service credits in such a situation, this service failure places strain on the relationship as delivery falls short of agreed levels. As a result, the only recourse would be to terminate and seek alternative supply.
The use of a strong service credit regime accompanied by a proactive approach to correcting failures and addressing their cause improves the relationship and enables a partnership rather than a confrontational style of working. Its focus is on managing and improving service. It is NOT about taking cost out of the service to the Authority.

Service Credits

The use of Service Credits is governed by the following principles:

- Service Credits sit within the wider service management approach being pursued by the Contractor and the Authority. The use of Service Credits does not prejudice the Authority's rights under appropriate clauses of the contract in the event of inadequate performance by the Contractor.

[113] Upon Clarification: Lost income to the Authority in this case is in reference to a monetised cost of the Authority's staff time taken to rectify any failures in Service delivery from the Contractor.

The Service Credit regime will be applied on each occasion where there is a service failure (i.e. where a KPI is identified as having a 'Red status'). This will also give rise to a remediation plan.

The Authority has full and complete discretion on whether to claim all, part, or none of a Service Credit to which it is due.

Service Credits claimed will be applied to the subsequent invoice as a credit note[114].

The full, agreed Service Credit regime shall operate from the initial delivery date until the end of the Contract Period.

Table 14 Service credits will be applied as follows and refer to the KPI's outlined in Section 1:

KPI	Deliverables	Requiring Improvement 2% Service Credit	Poor Performance 4% Service Credit	% contribution
KPI 1	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on one or two deliverables	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on three or more deliverables	20%
KPI 2	2a, 2b, 2c, 2d	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on two management tools	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on three or more management tools	20%
KPI 3	3a, 3b	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on one deliverable	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on two deliverables	10%
KPI 4	4a, 4b	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on one deliverable	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on two deliverables	10%
KPI 5	5a, 5b	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on the deliverable.	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on the deliverable with >30% of agreed milestones missed	10%
KPI 6	6a, 6b	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on the deliverable.	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on the deliverable with >30% of agreed milestones missed	10%
KPI 7	7a	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on the deliverable.	Failure to meet the acceptable standard.	10%
KPI 8	8a, 8b, 8c	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on one deliverable	Failure to meet the acceptable standard on two or more deliverables	10%

[114] Upon Clarification: Service credits are to be applied in monthly invoices and can include the sum of all service failures throughout the preceding quarter (which would include each instance where a service credit should be applied, such as late monthly reports.) The Authority and the Contractor will confirm and make amendments to those KPIs at the Inception Meeting, which do not constitute as a material change to the KPI. Any disagreement between the Contractor and the Authority will be escalated through the Dispute Resolution process detailed within the Authority's Terms and Conditions.

The Authority reserves the right, on serving notice in writing on the Contractor to treat any failure to meet a KPI as breach of contract in lieu of claiming a Service Credit in respect of such failure, in which case the Authority shall have the remedies available in accordance with the Contract in respect of such breach. A notice under this provision may be served at any time, provided that the Authority shall not be entitled to recover a Service Credit in addition to contractual damages.

The Authority reserves the right to review and amend the existing KPI's detailed in Section 1 or add any new KPI's. Any changes to the KPI's shall be confirmed in writing.

Any proposed changes to the Service Credit regime, may be made by agreement between the parties and confirmed in writing.

KPI 1: Financial Management is delivered to a high standard
1a: Proportion of funds disbursed to grant holders within agreed timeframe.
1b: Financial forecasts are submitted on time in a format which meets Defra's needs.
1c: Anti-fraud measures maintain the level of fraud within the agreed threshold of <1% of annual budget. Fraud and significant whistleblowing issues are identified and reported.
1d: Financial information submitted to Defra is error free.
KPI 2: The funds are agile, responding to risks and opportunities to strengthen performance
2a: Programme Management tools support agile and responsive management of the funds.
2b: Requests from Defra are acknowledged and actioned.
2c: New Very High risks, fraud and safeguarding issues are identified, documented, and reported to Defra.
2d: Annual Reviews (fund level) are completed and actively used to strengthen performance
KPI 3: Clear guidance and feedback enables the key stakeholders to put forward strong applications
3a: In-country organisations enabled to lead and submit high quality grant applications
3b: Unsuccessful lead partners reapply with stronger applications.
KPI 4: Independent expertise is efficiently targeted to identify the most transformational proposals
4a: Assessment Pack supports efficient and robust assessments
4b: Sift Briefing Pack supports informed discussions and robust recommendations of the expert groups.
KPI 5: Performance of projects is strengthened by adapting and responding to actions and recommendations arising from project reviews and feedback.
5a: Annual Project Reports Reviews are completed on time and actively used to strengthen performance
5b: Mid-term Reviews are completed on time and actively used to strengthen performance

KPI 6: Capability and capacity of national and local stakeholders enhanced.
6a: High quality resources (templates, guides) are produced and made available.
6b: High quality training courses are delivered to targeted stakeholders
KPI 7: Evidence is utilised, and Best Practices are made available.
7a: An active portfolio of deep dives is maintained.
KPI 8: International Awareness and Understanding of the funds is strengthened.
8a: Effective communication plan delivered to improve understanding and visibility of the Funds.
8b: Communication products attract a broad readership in support of the objectives.
8c: Websites perform strongly in terms of accessibility, platforms, security and search engine optimisation.

Annex J- Accounting Officer Assessment

Accounting Officer Test	Explanation	Decision-Maker's Assessment	Met/Not Met/Partially Met
Regularity	[A proposal must be supported by clear legal powers. This is normally via two routes: (a) specific legislation; or (b) the department's common law powers. Common law powers are based around what is a reasonable expectation of what is required to deliver existing policy. If a proposal is dependent upon new legislation, normally expenditure cannot be permitted until after Royal Assent. However in certain circumstances, limited spend is allowed if a Bill has passed Second Reading. Anything in advance of this ormally requires a Ministerial Direction. Managing Public Money does allow, in limited circumstances and with HMT approval, the Supply and Appropriation Act to be used where no specific legislation is in place and none is going through Parliament. This is normally for one-off projects or pilot exercises that will last no more than 2 years.	The intervention is regular as it is compliant with the relevant legislation and guidance in Managing Public Money. Grants will be made in accordance with relevant legislation, the relevant delegated authority and all requirements specified in Managing Public Money. The programme and its funds will be managed as per HMT's Managing Public Money guidance, Government Functional Standard: Grants, FCDO ODA guidance, and is within Defra's delegated authority. They will be managed following Section 153[(1)(s)] of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This gives the Secretary of State the power to give financial assistance to the aims of Darwin Plus with HMT's consent. Section 153(3) allows the Secretary of State to give financial assistance in such form and on such terms as they see fit. Assistance is also supported by Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations115, under which the UK has a broad obligation to promote the well-being of the	**Met**

115 Chapter XI: Article 73 — Charter of the United Nations — Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs — Codification Division Publications

		inhabitants of the Overseas Territories. 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 116	
Proprietary	[The use of public funds needs to be proper as well as regular (i.e. supported by law). Therefore it needs to comply with the standards set out in Managing Public Money which includes obtaining the necessary internal and if necessary external HMT approvals. This test is not definitive, but it basically expects the spending decision to apply all the established protocols and checks which support the premise that all public expenditure is proper and auditable.]	The intervention is proper as it meets the standards in Managing Public Money and accords with the generally understood principles of public life. All risks are within the agreed risk profile, with a low appetite for fiduciary risk, but an appetite for delivery risk where there is potential for scaling or transformation. Established due diligence and safeguarding processes, will be applied to each potential grantee prior to award, and throughout the lifespan of the grant agreement. The Darwin Plus programme is key to meeting Ministerial initiatives and UK government obligations in supporting the Overseas Territories by funding an environmental biodiversity conservation grant scheme. The proposed Full Business case takes into	**Met**

116 International Development Act 2002 (legislation.gov.uk)

		consideration the wider ODA cuts to funding whilst meeting the needs of the Overseas Territories. The expenditure of the Darwin Plus programme is clear and honest using grant agreements and is accessible via the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).	
Value for Money	[The proposal must be good value for money for the Exchequer as a whole and not just the department and where possible a full evaluation should be undertaken. It may not always be possible to measure intended benefits and alternative options should include a 'do nothing' option. This should include an opinion from both Finance Business Partner and Directorate Economists on whether the proposal meets this test before sign off.]	The intervention is assessed as providing value for money. In the previous Full Business Case and extension, we have developed a proven programme scheme which is effective and represents good value for money. The new business case will continue to explore several different options for the maintenance of the programme, ensuring that it aligns with the UK's strategic objectives whilst remaining flexible to respond to changing priorities. Economy: ensured through the optimal allocation of funding streams, and selection of projects on merit. Efficiency: encouraged by utilising expertise to recommend projects for award, building on the effective work of Darwin Plus since 2012, Ecorys Darwin Plus Fund Scheme	**Met**

		Evaluation[117] and a systematic approach to learning and lesson sharing. Effectiveness: achieved through a wider range of quality proposals, providing a scaling pathway for the best, effectively managing risk, and an improved results framework for measuring the outcomes and impacts. Equity: ensured by valuing proposals contributing to reducing inequality between genders and marginalised groups and utilise indicators to track equity performance. The risk-reward profile is appropriate, given the urgency and impact of biodiversity loss and degradation. The programme will mainstream biodiversity into policy and practice, strengthening capacity and capability to scale up and sustain action. We consider the risk-reward profile appropriate for Defra, given the urgency and potential impact of biodiversity loss and degradation.	
Feasibility	[This is a fairly new criterion and overlaps with propriety and value for money. In essence it asks whether	Darwin Plus has been an established programme since 2012, with a proven track record for	**Met**

[117] https://darwinplus.org.uk/media/sl5mi5zs/bcfs-final-report.pdf

	the proposed policy can be carried out effectively and credibly. In short, are we confident it can be delivered in line with policy intentions? This should link to evidence of this from market testing, piloting, gateway reviews etc.]	biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories. The continuation of the programme through a new FBC would ensure the continuation of the positive work that has been delivered historically. The programme has scored an "A" for its annual reviews in 22/23 and an “A+” in 23/24 for its high indicative performance and continuous improvement. Available budget for this intervention is subject to confirmation of Darwin Plus budget allocations for ODA and Non-ODA. Projects under Darwin Plus work to agreed budgets and avoid unaffordable longer-term commitments, assessing proposed budgets and financial sustainability prior to award, with delivery monitored through financial controls. The scheme will continue to fund existing financial commitments and will only launch a new round f funding (Round 14) subject to agreed budget availability. Safeguards are put in place to curtail activities should future budgets not be secured, and grants awarded after an affordability assessment. Grants are awarded through a competitive process, with an assessment on the proposed budgets and the financial sustainability of the projects prior to award.	

		We will continue to work with our FBP to ensure that we have sufficient ODA and Non-ODA budget to deliver historical grant agreements, as well as new commitments.	
Affordability	[This is a Defra AO Test and a sub-set of the HMT Propriety test; but given its own assessment because of its critical importance. Therefore, we ask the explicit question as to how the proposal will be funded and has it got full budget cover? Consideration also needs to be given to the classification of spend and how much will be scored as Administration, Programme or Capital costs. There are separate Control Totals in Defra's budget for Administration, Resource DEL and Capital DEL. It is also important that all administration costs are properly recorded. There is some leeway to classify certain administration costs as Programme; but the default is that they score as Admin. This is something your FBP can advise on.]	Available budget for this intervention is subject to outcomes of business planning. Projects work to agreed budgets and avoid unaffordable longer-term commitments, assessing proposed budgets and financial sustainability prior to award, with delivery monitored through the financial controls. The scheme will continue to be delivered subject to agreed budget availability, and safeguards are in place to curtail activities should future budgets not be secured, and grants awarded after an affordability assessment. Grants are awarded through a competitive process, with an assessment on the proposed budgets and the financial sustainability of the projects prior to award. The ODA and Non-ODA budget required to deliver these grants are part of the department's baselines. We have worked with our FBP to review the budget classification and have detailed this in the finance section.	**Met: ODA and non-ODA allocations for 26/27 – 28/29 have been confirmed following Defra Business Planning.** **We will be able to accept additional funding for other strategic priorities as opportunities arise. No commitments will be made until full funding availability is confirmed.** **If the next business planning cycle is not favourable Defra may potentially have to stop future funding rounds for Darwin Plus. Future funding will be part of the first call on Defra's future ODA Settlement. On consideration, Defra considers the programme affordable.**
Overall Assessment	[Ultimately this is a personal judgment for the AO. The acid test is	The primary accounting officer tests have been considered throughout	**Met**

	whether the AO can confidently defend the policy as a satisfactory use of public money. For large and complex project decisions, it would not be unusual to apply the AO tests at several stages and key decision-points.]	and we believe all the Accounting Officer tests have been met or partially met throughout. The programme can administer grant funding in line with UK legislation, managing public money in an appropriate manner. The programme has a long-established history which provides a track record for value for money in environmental conservation.	

Annex K – Overview of Roles and Responsibilities in Darwin Plus Tiers

High-level overview of roles and responsibilities for Darwin Plus Main, People & Skills and Strategic

Key Area	Defra	Darwin Plus Advisory Group	Fund Manager	Delivery Partners
Grantee Selection	Approves guidance. Oversees the Darwin Plus Advisory Group. Darwin Plus Programme Board awards funding.	Assesses applications and recommends proposals based on merit for funding. Reviews project level MEL plans and logframes.	Develops guidance Administration of application process. Assesses applicants MEL strategy. Undertakes financial due diligence.	Develops grant applications.
Project level monitoring and reporting	Reviews annual synthesis report.	Receives annual synthesis report.	Day-to-day point of contact for projects. Assesses and scores project reviews, before publication. Synthesises a project-level portfolio review. Conducts midterm reviews on a sample.	Reports against the agreed project-level MEL framework and in line with guidance. Quality assures results and assesses performance annually.
Programme level monitoring and reporting	Sets strategy. Accountable for programme risks. Owns MEL and reporting framework. Reviews and publishes logframe. Reviews Fund Manager reports. Conducts and publishes Annual Review. Conducts and publishes Programme Review	Advises Defra on the strategy. Reviews programme level MEL strategy. Receives the Annual Review. Receives Programme Review.	Compiles and quality assures data. Updates programme logframe and results framework. Owns agreed risks; manages project risks, including fiduciary and safeguarding. Reports quarterly, annually and end of Business Case cycle.	Delivers activities to the agreed standard. Accountable for management of project risks. Timely and efficiently escalates risks and issues. Reports progress to Fund Manager.

	at end of Business Case cycle.			
Payments and finance	Reviews and scrutinises deliverables to authorise payments. Controls the annual review/drafting of the Terms and Conditions. Approves funds to delivery partners. Delegates to Fund Manager to issue grants to awarded projects. Oversees the delivery and reporting of the budget.	None	Issues and signs grants on Defra's behalf. Reports on deliverables and finance to Defra. The Fund Manager issue and sign grants on Defra's behalf. Defra controls the annual review/drafting of the Terms and Conditions, and delegates to the Fund Manager to issue them to the awarded projects. Administers financial change requests and payments to delivery partners. Conducts spot check audits on projects.	Submits reports to support efficiency of projects payments. Complies with spot checks, audits, and the T&Cs of the agreement.

High-level overview of roles and responsibilities for Darwin Plus Local

Key Area	JNCC	Defra	Fund Manager	Delivery Partners
Grantee Selection	Co-develops and approves guidance with Defra. Assesses applications and recommends projects for funding.	Co-develops and approves guidance with JNCC. Oversees the Darwin Plus Advisory Group. Darwin Plus Programme Board awards funding.	Administration of application process. Assesses applicants MEL strategy. Undertakes financial due diligence.	Develops grant applications.
Project level monitoring and reporting	Reviews annual synthesis report.	Reviews key points at Darwin	Day-to-day point of contact for projects.	Receives annual synthesis report.

		Plus Programme Board.	Assesses and scores project reviews, before publication. Synthesises a project-level portfolio review. Conducts midterm reviews on a sample.	Reports against the agreed project-level MEL framework and in line with guidance. Quality assures results and assesses performance annually.
Programme level monitoring and reporting	Co-sets strategy with Defra. Owns MEL and reporting framework. Reviews and publishes logframe.	Co-sets strategy with JNCC. Accountable for programme risks. Reviews Fund Manager reports. Conducts and publishes Annual Review. Conducts and publishes Programme Review at end of Business Case cycle.	Compiles and quality assures data. Updates programme logframe and results framework. Owns agreed risks; manages project risks, including fiduciary and safeguarding. Reports quarterly, annually and end of Business Case cycle.	Delivers activities to the agreed standard. Accountable for management of project risks. Timely and efficiently escalates risks and issues. Reports progress to Fund Manager.
Payments and finance	Reviews and scrutinises deliverables to authorise payments. Approves funds to delivery partners.	Manages the delivery and reporting of the budget.	Reports on deliverables and finance to Defra and JNCC. Administers financial change requests and payments to delivery partners. Conducts spot check audits on projects.	Submits reports to support efficiency of projects payments. Complies with spot checks, audits, and the T&Cs of the agreement.

Annex L- 2026/27 Proposed Delivery Plan

Timeline	Darwin+ Local	Darwin+ Main	Darwin+ Strategic	Darwin Plus People & Skills
FY 2026/27				
April	Darwin Plus Local Round 6 projects begin / Call for applications (Round 7)	Round 14 launches and invites applicants for stage 1	Round 14 launches and invites applicants for stage 1	Round 14 launches and invites applicants
June		Stage 1 Closing date/ DPAG begin review		
July	Round 7 application window close		Strategic Stage 1 closing date	
August	JNCC sift of applications	Stage 1 sift / Invitation of Stage 2 applications	DPAG Reviewal of projects	
September	Local Programme board		DPAG Strategic Sift	
October	Round 7 Projects (6 months projects) start	Stage 2 closing date / DPAG review	Applicants to provide clarification on proposals	Application window close / DPAG Review
November		Stage 2 Sift	Strategic interview stage	Application Sift
December		**Darwin Plus Programme Board** / Results & Feedback letters issued	**Darwin Plus Programme Board/** Results & Feedback Letters issued	**Darwin Plus Programme Board /** Results & Feedback letters issued
April		Projects start	Projects Start	Projects Start

Annex M- Darwin Plus project assessment criteria

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 **meets all the of assessment criteria, with no concerns raised;** 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 **meets most of the assessment criteria, no major concerns identified.** 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 **meets most of the assessment criteria, no major concerns identified.** 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.
Indicative scoring threshold of competitive applications	
3	Emerging Demonstration of Evidence that the proposed project **meets many of the assessment criteria, some concerns raised.** 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 **meets some of the assessment criteria, or has raised concerns.** 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 **meets only a few criteria, or raises important concerns.** The proposal is likely to require significant revision.
0	No demonstration of Evidence. The project **fails to meet any of the criteria outlined and raises serious concerns** e.g. flawed approach, subject to serious technical difficulties or risks, unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, or is duplicative.

Annex N- Darwin Plus Risk Register extract

Risk Category	Risk Description	Proximity	Inherent Likelihood	Inherent Impact	Inherent Risk Rating	Mitigation Strategy (including timescales)	Residual Likelihood	Residual Impact	Residual Risk Rating	Risk Appetite	Within Appetite
Delivery and Operational	Lack of Project Sustainability **Cause:** Projects lack durability or scalability **Effect:** Benefits are short-lived or limited in reach **Consequence:** Reduced long-term impact of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds		Medium	High	High	Delivery partners will be required to include in their application form and report on measures to ensure the sustainability of interventions. Sustainability considered at assessment stage. Emphasis on innovation and local solutions will support impact beyond project time frame. Scaling pathways will be identified.	Medium	Low	Medium	Cautious	Yes

Delivery and Operational	ODA Graduation **Cause:** Countries or OTs graduate from the ODA list **Effect:** Projects become ineligible for ODA funding mid-stream **Consequence:** Project disruption or cancellation		Medium	Medium	Medium	Ongoing engagement and analysis to monitor risk of ODA graduation and working with FCDO, Fund Manager and Defra ODA Hub to ensure a smooth transition for any projects affected.	Low	Low	Low	Cautious	Yes
Strategy and Context	Ongoing HMG Funding Commitment **Cause:** Shifts in UK Government policy or interest **Effect:** Uncertainty in future funding commitments **Consequence:** Funds may be reduced or discontinued		High	High	High	A large proportion of this risk is out of control of the Contract Manager but some actions can help limit this risk, including early preparation and maintenance of records for spending reviews and active communications around the funds to help maintain its profile (including case study development), and emphasis on new workstream 5 "building and applying evidence". Early communication with stakeholders can help manage reputational risks to the funds.	Medium	High	High	Open	Yes

Financial and Fiduciary	Misappropriation of Grant Funds by False Application **Cause:** Deliberate provision of false information by grantee **Effect:** Grants awarded under false pretences **Consequence:** Financial loss and reputational damage		High	High	High	Directive: 1. A grantee must certify in the application form that the statements made by them are true and information provided is correct to the best of their knowledge. 2. Grantees are asked to provide letters of support on headed paper. Deterrant: 1. Defra have zero tolerance approach to fraud, bribery and corruption, any allegations will be investigated and could result in termination of funding. Preventative: 1. Grantees are asked to submit annual accounts that have been independently examined or audited (N.B. not all submitted a/cs are examined/audited - e.g. for small orgs, or for governments (for UKOTs). 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. 2. Expert Groups are recruited based on their knowledge and expertise. They carry out detailed technical assessments and are responsible for assessing the technical competence for applications. 3. FCDO are consulted for an assessment of the regional context including the organisations applying for funding. Detective: 1. If the applicant is granted funding, the fraud might become apparent as part of routine contact by the grant administrator or as part of 6-monthly progress reporting, which is required for each project and reviewed by the grant administrator and by Defra. 2. Desk based irregularity audits wll be undertaken on 30% of live projects per annum and these could detect fraud. All projects can be selected for spot audits. 70% of live projects are not spot auditted in year, however it should be noted that while spot audits are undertaken on a single project, the organisation can have multiple grants in the portfolio. 3. This type of fraud might be detected during a site visit. Since site visits will take place at different stages and some projects will receive upfront payment, money is likely to have already been paid by the time a site visit takes place. Corrective: 1. Attempts will be made to recover any funds paid out as a result of this type of fraud where possible.	Medium	Medium	Medium	Cautious	Yes

Financial and Fiduciary	Substandard Equipment/ Goods **Cause:** Grantee substitutes agreed assets or fails to purchase them **Effect:** Claims do not reflect actual asset usage **Consequence:** Misuse of funds and compromised project quality		High	High	High	Directive: 1 - In grantee terms and conditions inventory, disposal and charging of assets are outlined. 2 - Grantees have to sign a strict Grant Agreement fully details actions required, which is a legally binding agreement. Detective and Corrective: 1. - There is a whistleblowing facility in the T&Cs and on fund websites to alert the fund managers and Defra to confirmed or credible suspicions of fraud. Preventative: 1. Accurate records are required to be kept, including receipts and bank statements which gives proof that actions are being carried out. This must be submitted to claim payment. The grant administrator will carefully review all evidence before making payment, this includes for the final payment on completion of the project, there are no upfront payments available for Q4. The limitation here is that false documentation provided in support of a claim may be difficult to spot and payment may on occasions still be made when work had not been completed. Detective: 1 - Desk based irregularity audits will be undertaken on 30% of live projects per annum and these could detect fraud. All projects can be selected for spot audits. 70% of live projects are not spot audited in year, however it should be noted that while spot audits are undertaken on a single project, the organisation can have multiple grants in the portfolio. 2 - Site visits are carried out wherever possible. This type of fraud may be detected if a site visit is arranged once a project is completed. The limitation here is that many of the site visits will take place before the project is completed. 3 - In the case of events, whereby it is reasonable to do so or the event is virtual, policy members can attend in person to view activity. Corrective: 1 - The Grant Agreement includes claw back mechanisms should the grantee be found to have provided false information/failed to deliver scheme objectives/failed to undertake proposed activity.	Medium	Medium	Medium	Cautious	Yes

Project and Programme	Diplomatic Risk to UKOTs **Cause:** Weak or insufficient applications from UK Overseas Territories **Effect:** Failure to secure funding from Darwin Plus **Consequence:** Strained UK-OT relations and reduced UKOT representation in conservation efforts		High	High	High	Monitor and consider spread of funding across the UKOTs and investigation/interpret any particular trends. To be managed on a case by case basis depending on if there are any specific risks. Assess the need to support specific UKOTs with Capability & Capacity building activities. Promote awareness of the funds, including engaging with specific individuals as needed.	High	Medium	High	Open	Yes

Project and Programme	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Risk **Cause:** Project design fails to consider inclusive approaches **Effect:** Unequal benefits among genders and social groups **Consequence:** Increased inequality and potential social backlash		Medium	Medium	Medium	All applicants must include in their application form an outline of how they will consider and address GESI, with a focus on doing no harm, but also demonstrating clear understanding of the context and increasing GESI as much as possible. Projects should have disaggregated targets where possible. GESI is included in the assessment criteria of all grants. Funded projects need to regularly (at least annually) report on their approach to GESI. Guidance on our requirements is provided as written guidance and covered in workshops for applicants and projects. Further C&C activities and resources are planned to help projects meet our ambition to go beyond GESI sensitive to transformative where possible. Guidance will be provided to Expert Groups and external reviewers on how GESI should be assessed at both the application state and project reporting to build awareness/ capacity of reviewer and ensure scoring is consistent. There is a draft GESI strategy for the BCFs, building on a deep dive focused on GESI, and informed by Defra policies and best practice guidance on incorporating GESI principles in ODA programming.	Low	Medium	Medium	Open	Yes
Reputational	Reputational Damage from Poor-Quality Projects **Cause:** Investment in substandard implementers or interventions **Effect:** Harmful or ineffective project delivery **Consequence:** Loss of		Medium	High	High	Delivery Partners competitively selected against rigorous technical and financial criteria with independent assessment will help ensures projects meet delivery, quality and strategic objectives. Reporting frameworks, due diligence and spot check conducted by the Fund Manager.	Very Low	Medium	Low	Cautious	Yes

	trust in HMG and damage to fund credibility											
Safeguarding	Project SEAH Risk **Cause**: UKAID-funded projects enable or fail to prevent sexual exploitation /abuse **Effect:** Vulnerable stakeholders are harmed or ignored **Consequence:** Serious ethical violations and loss of fund legitimacy		Very High	High	Very High	A) Continual safeguarding and SEAH risks will be monitored throughout the project cycle including through application assessments, published resources on BCF websites and in guidance documents, the issuance of caveats to ensure minimum standards are met by projects and organisations receiving project funding, review of Annual Reports, inclusion of safeguarding and prevention of SEAH questions in mid-term reviews and spot audits, and ongoing support, advice and guidance to projects through webinars and BCF Helpdesk. Projects will be continually reminded of HMG's committment to prevention of SEAH and appropriate response to allegations. B) Continued emphasis on GESI to ensure equal participation of women and people with disabilities to decrease likelihood of SEAH and increase appropriate response to victim-survivors when allegations are raised. SEAH is an ongoing, likely event particularly in such a large programme. The reputational risk to BCF, Defra and NIRAS can be reduced with appropriate mitigations.	High	Low	Medium	Cautious	Yes

Safeguarding	Programme Management SEAH Risk **Cause:** Abuse by programme staff, contractors, or expert committee members **Effect:** SEAH incidents within the BCF ecosystem **Consequence:** Institutional fallout and systemic trust issues		Medium	High	High	Specific tasks planned under Safeguarding 2025 workplanning meeting to help develop mitigation actions under this task. Actions likely to enclude that BCFs: Ensure all staff working on BCF including contractors and expert committee members are aware of and adhere to HMG's safeguarding commitments. This will be achieved through annual mandatory training, signed code of conducts which include a prohibition on SEAH, updates to contract agreements to ensure that if an allegation is made and upheld the subject of concern will face disciplinary action up to and including termination of contract. Contracts, TORs and Code of Conduct will be reviewed and updated to reflect commitment to prevent SEAH. A process map will be created to clearly outline the complaints process.	Medium	Medium	Medium	Cautious	Yes

Annex O- Darwin Plus Indicative Evaluation Plan

N.B. ***At the time of writing (October 2025) the independent evaluators have been appointed: Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and Itad (International Development and Health) Ltd. The evaluation is ongoing, with first results expected in early 2026, followed by a mid-point evaluation milestone (and interim report) later that year. The evaluation is expected to conclude in 2028.***

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.

<u>Evaluation type and design</u>
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:

<u>Impact</u>

- 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?

<u>Value for Money</u>

- 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 is 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.

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Value for Money indicators</th><th>Assumptions</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Economy</td><td>Economy Indicator 1
Overhead costs as % of total programme spend</td><td rowspan="2">Indicator 1 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)

Indicator 2 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.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Economy Indicator 2
Quality of procurement and personnel resource management processes (RAG)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Efficiency</td><td>Efficiency indicator 1
Cost per person in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training</td><td rowspan="2">Indicator 1 considers only Capability and Capacity projects, assumes that full project budgets were spent to deliver training.

Indicator 2 is qualitative, requires accompanying word doc with concise narrative referring to Annual Report Section etc where info is stored.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Efficiency indicator 2
Extent and quality of measures taken in last year to improve efficiency (RAG)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Effectiveness</td><td>Effectiveness indicator 1
DPLUS-A03 Number of local or national organisations with enhanced capability and capacity</td><td rowspan="3">Indicators 1–3 taken from Synthesis

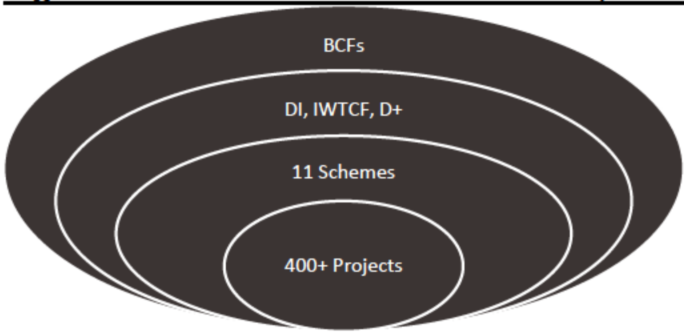
Indicator 4 taken from all projects submitting a Final Report during the reporting period.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Effectiveness indicator 2
DPLUS-D01 Area of land or sea under ecological management</td></tr>
<tr><td>Effectiveness indicator 3
DPLUS-D05a Number of people supported to better adapt to the effects of climate change</td></tr>
</table>

	Effectiveness indicator 4 Value of co-funding leveraged (as % of total Defra spend)	
Equity	**Equity indicator 1** % of projects that are confirmed by reviewers to be GESI sensitive	**Indicators 1–2** All projects submitting an Annual Report or a Final Report
	Equity indicator 2 % of projects that are confirmed by reviewers to be GESI empowering	
	Equity indicator 3 % of project funding that goes directly to UKOT-based organisations	**Indicator 3** 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

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 Pus help address these?

<u>Method</u>

- 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.[118] 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.[119]
- 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 later than the other BCFs). A break clause will be inserted for 2026 should it become necessary to stop the evaluation at this point.

<u>Commissioning and governance</u>

- External commissioning proposed to ensure independence. This will use the new external MEL international services provider contract.

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118 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'.

119 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.

- A Defra-led steering group[120] 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."

[i] Assumption: Evidence from project and fund MEL is of sufficient quality.

[120] With representation from the Darwin Plus Programme Board, Darwin Plus Advisory Group, the Fund Manager and Defra Biodiversity Challenge Funds team.