



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Environmental Audit Committee

Sub-Committee on Polar Research

Oral evidence: The UK and the Antarctic Environment, HC 381

Wednesday 8 May 2024

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: James Gray (Chair); Philip Dunne; Barry Gardiner; Clive Lewis; Anna McMorrin; Dr Matthew Offord; Claudia Webbe.

Questions 313 - 407

Witnesses

I: Andrew Griffith MP, Minister of State (Minister for Science, Research and Innovation), Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, David Rutley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Americas, Caribbean and the Overseas Territories), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and Jane Rumble OBE, Head of the Polar Regions Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[FCDO](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Andrew Griffith MP, David Rutley MP and Jane Rumble OBE.

Q313 **Chair:** I welcome you all to this seventh—I think it is—meeting of the Environmental Audit Committee’s sub-committee looking into Britain’s relationships with the Arctic. I am particularly delighted to welcome two Ministers and our very old friend Jane Rumble, who runs the Polar Regions Department in the Foreign Office. Both Ministers take an active part: Andrew Griffith, who is the Minister of State for Science in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, and David Rutley, who has responsibility, among other things, for the polar regions in the Foreign Office. Both David and Jane accompanied us on the Sir David Attenborough in our inquiry in Antarctica. Andrew, we were sorry you could not be with us but another time, perhaps.

Can I start off by asking you some rather easy general questions? I would not want you to get complacent by how easy they are, because they are much tougher later on. The first question is what Antarctica means to Britain. In other words, I am contrasting this with what the Arctic means to Britain. The Arctic means an enormous amount and we have hugely close relations of all kinds with it. What does Antarctica mean to Britain? What is the nature of our relationship with Antarctica?

David Rutley: Before I answer that question—thank you, it is an important question—I just wanted to thank the Committee for its sincere interest in polar matters. I think the work you have done on the Arctic, in particular, has been useful and as you, Mr Gray, know, we held the first Arctic Ministers’ meeting, where both of us were in attendance, to talk about key priorities for the Arctic.

The work the Committee did was a prompt to put increased focus on there. It has always been important. It is important to give credit where it is due. I would like to say thank you for the work that you have done there. The very constructive challenge that you are providing here and your energy and enthusiasm as a whole group for the subject means a huge amount. I think it is important for the team as well, our polar regions team, when they can see that enthusiasm. It moves things on.

As far as the UK goes and its relationship—

Chair: Thank you for that.

David Rutley: It is sincerely meant. I do not say that so often in front of a Select Committee, because often it is challenge, challenge, challenge. However, here I think it has been legitimate challenge, a constructive challenge to it. It has been a great example.

Chair: Before you answer the question then, can I add to that? The view that the Committee has taken of this inquiry as a whole, and indeed of the inquiry into the Arctic, is that we are not perhaps like some other parliamentary Select Committees, keen to find things that are wrong with



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what you are doing. On the contrary, we are keen to try to support both Departments in what you do in the Antarctic and find ways in which it can be improved. I think we start from a positive and friendly standpoint rather than from an antagonistic one.

David Rutley: Understood, but we also recognise that there are challenging questions and you will provide challenge as well. We look forward to the rest of the questions today.

We have a long and proud history of discovery, exploration and scientific research in Antarctica. We were among the first to discover and map the continent and made the first territorial claim in 1908. We were also one of the original negotiators and the first to ratify the Antarctic treaty, which has been in force for 63 years now. We played leading roles in negotiating subsequent treaty instruments, including the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources—if you do not mind me calling it CCAMLR going forward, that would be good—and the protocol on environmental protection.

We have maintained a permanent presence on the continent since world war two. Today, the British Antarctic Survey is recognised as one of the world's most eminent Antarctic research institutes. I think those of us who were fortunate enough to attend the visit could see that. BAS, together with our other research institutes and universities in the UK, works collaboratively with a range of other Antarctic treaty parties, particularly to better understand the implications of climate change on the continent and what that means to the planet more widely.

As the next questions that may follow, our relationship and the way we look at Antarctica is different from the Arctic because of different factors. You may want to explore that, Chair. Hopefully, I have set out the fundamentals of our relationship with Antarctica.

Q314 **Chair:** Sort of. That was a very useful introduction and certainly will be very helpful. However, it was not what I asked at all. What I was asking about was the nature of our relationship with Antarctica. Why do we have a relationship with Antarctica? What is the purpose in us being there? Is it for geopolitical reasons? Is it for scientific reasons? Is it for fishing in the southern ocean? What is our interest in Antarctica?

David Rutley: It is multifaceted. The key thing is that, as I have explained, because of our relationship, which is quite unique, there is a sovereignty claim, which is in abeyance as part of the Antarctic treaty. Our interests are primarily around science. Clearly, in the geopolitically challenging world we live in at the moment, we also have a strong view on its geopolitical significance, as well as the impact it has from a climate perspective.

Q315 **Chair:** We are going to want to investigate that particular relationship more closely, I think, in a minute. There is quite a lot to be drilled down into precisely which bits are geopolitical and which bits are scientific.



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Science, which is outstanding and world leading, is a net cost to the UK. Most things that we do in the Arctic are net benefits, whether it be industry, whether it be fishing, whether it be tourism, whether it be all sorts of things. That is a benefit to the UK. British businesses take part in that. Science costs HMG money. We will be coming back to talk more about science, but what benefit in general is accrued to UK plc?

David Rutley: We have the Minister responsible for that sitting next to me, so he will be able to shed more light on that as we get to these questions. I think the key thing is science in and of itself is hugely valuable, particularly as we face into the climate challenges we are experiencing right now. We know that the Antarctic is not just interesting in and of itself, but the global implications. Obviously, the science also provides that sense of presence, which is so important for our wider view of the Antarctic as well.

Q316 **Chair:** I am still feeling not quite satisfied by this, if you don't mind me saying so, Minister. It is a very large amount of money being spent by the British Government on our relations with Antarctica. An enormous amount of money; far, far, far more than we spend, for example, in the Arctic or in many other regions of the world. We spend an enormous amount of money doing it. What I am trying to find out, trying to get down to, is what benefits we get from it. Science, great, but the science can presumably be done elsewhere, no doubt, or much of it could be or it could be done on a smaller scale or it could be done in other ways. Leave the science to one side for a moment. Geopolitics, therefore, is all you are left with. In which case, I just find the dual role that BAS fulfils between science and geopolitics quite complex, and the funding for it.

In what way does BAS decide which bit it is doing? Is our purpose in being there and spending all this money—billions of pounds altogether—for geopolitical reasons to say, “We are here, we have not given up our claim. Whatever is happening down here, we take an interest in it and if you get this wrong, we, Britain, will be involved”? That is really why we are there, isn't it?

David Rutley: No, as I said, there are several reasons. Obviously, presence is key in terms of the issue around sovereignty, but science is fundamental, too. It is not as if we are a peripheral player in science. The science that we are doing is world leading. That is clear.

The point that you made, and I know you have looked at this very clearly so I say this gently because of the amount of analysis that you have done, but when you look at the amount of funding that has been attributed annually to the Antarctic and to the Arctic from a science perspective, they are very similar. It depends from year to year.

Q317 **Chair:** We will come back to that. That is if you do not include the infrastructure, if you do not include Rothera and the Sir David Attenborough, you are quite right in saying that the actual amount of money spent on science is very similar. However, if you include the



infrastructure costs, it is vastly different.

David Rutley: To come back on that particular point, it is also important to think about the lifetime of those investments, in terms of both the infrastructure and the SDA. These, again, are not being used just for one year. This is to help future proof—I am sure we will speak more about this—not only our presence but the science there for decades to come, hopefully 30, 40, 50 years. In the scheme of things, when you amortise those investments annually, the numbers are much smaller.

Q318 **Chair:** Leaving geopolitics to one side, your argument is that we gain an enormous amount out of having our scientific research under BAS in Antarctica. We, ourselves, saw large amounts of it, or some of it anyhow. Let me ask the Science Minister: what is done in Antarctica that could not be done elsewhere?

Andrew Griffith: First, thank you, Mr Chairman, and I echo my note and thanks to the Committee for the strong interest in polar regions in particular. That is something that I have overweighted the allocation of my own time to in this role. I have visited the Arctic. I was not blessed enough to, I suspect, be in role or be available for a visit to the Antarctic.

Chair: Yet.

Andrew Griffith: It is clearly a very important scientific domain. For my part, I make no apologies for the amount we invest. We are able to do so because of the Government's unparalleled commitment to science and technology. That total budget this year will reach £20 billion a year. That is the numerator that we should look at; the allocation that we spend through the funding councils to what we do in Antarctica.

Maybe this is not the right thing, but I would tend to look at it closely, coupled with what we do in the Arctic. For example, we are sending the Sir David Attenborough up north this summer. It has a dual use, if you like. Clearly, a lot of the climate-related research, which is the predominant focus of our research, speaks to climate changes at both ends of the planet.

I am not answering your question, James, but I think that within the broad scheme of the domains in which we spend money on scientific discovery and research this is not such a large commitment. It has been relatively static.

Q319 **Chair:** Leaving aside infrastructure then, how much do we spend in science in Antarctica?

Andrew Griffith: We spend in aggregate £95 million. That is a combination of what you would call the infrastructure side of things and an element of competitive funding whereby people bid annually or triennially for their particular area of doctoral research. If you aggregate those things, it is £95 million.



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Q320 **Chair:** Delete the infrastructure stuff, which, after all, you could argue is general expenditure and could be applied to the Arctic as well; the costs of the Sir David Attenborough, for example. Let's leave aside the infrastructure. How much do we spend on science itself in Antarctica?

Andrew Griffith: It will be about £35 million a year.

Q321 **Chair:** How much do we spend in the Arctic?

Andrew Griffith: I do not think I have those numbers. They are probably in your brilliant report, but I can write to the Committee and let you have those.

Chair: Nevertheless, I think—

Andrew Griffith: It is significantly less because of the nature of that infrastructure.

Q322 **Chair:** You have done £35 million in the Antarctic, rather less than that in the Arctic. What science do we do in Antarctica that we could not do elsewhere, either in university laboratories or in the Arctic or elsewhere? What is so special about Antarctica? What do we do down there that we could not do elsewhere?

Andrew Griffith: I think it is a combination of the facilities that we have. It is a different polar environment to what goes on in the Arctic. We can fill certain gaps that would not otherwise be done. There are relatively more territories engaged in Arctic research. Clearly, millions more people live in the Arctic than Antarctic. I would not say there are particularly unique things. There may be if you are looking at emperor penguin colonies. You can do that at one end of the poles and not the other. Overall, you can do good polar science, and we are aided and abetted by the facilities and the establishments that we have there.

Q323 **Chair:** I am drilling down into the relationship the UK has with Antarctica. We heard a moment ago it was partly geopolitical. We will come back to that in a second. Leaving that to one side, the other bit is science. Therefore, what I am trying to discover is why the UK is spending a large amount of money doing science. What I want to know is what we can do in Antarctica that we cannot do somewhere else. Is this money well spent? Why are we spending £35 million on science in Antarctica? Is it a good scientific reason? Emperor penguins you mentioned, so the biodiversity side of things a little bit. BBC livestock people could do that for us—I joke. What are we doing in Antarctica that we could not do elsewhere?

David Rutley: I think the thing to highlight is we have critical mass. We are well established in Antarctica. We are well sighted on the vast amount of research that we produce from Antarctica, which is much valued not just by the UK but across the world.

First, we have form. We are well respected and that science has helped inform huge amounts of views on what is happening in climate change.



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We are doing great research in the Arctic as well. At the heart of part of your question is about which is a priority. Partly because of the education you have helped immerse me in, I would say they are both important. Having recently attended the Arctic Encounters conference in Alaska and seeing the geopolitical challenges that are before us in the Arctic, clearly, there are a huge amount of issues that we need to confront and face into with our like-minded allies there.

There are other reasons why we want to be interested in what is going on in the Antarctic. Science unites us on both sides, but geopolitically there are different circumstances around the South Pole, which we also need to show a real interest in.

Q324 **Chair:** Before we move on to that, I am still finding myself a little confused here. Your argument was there are two reasons for being in Antarctica. Two things are central to Britain's relationship with Antarctica. One was geopolitics, and we will come back to that in a moment. I think that is a very important point to make. That is a matter for the Foreign Office. The other was science, and we managed to establish that we were spending £35 million a year on science. What I am trying to find out is why are we spending another £35 million? What is so special about science in Antarctica that we do not have elsewhere? Why are we doing it? Is it just an excuse?

Is the science we are doing in Antarctica just a cover for our geopolitical purposes in being there, or is it, as I think you were hinting at a moment ago, we are there because we are there because we are there, and you are probably quite right in saying withdrawing now would cost more than staying on, as it were. That is a separate matter. I am still a little puzzled about—or not puzzled, actually, because I think I know the answer, but I am keen to know what you think we are gaining scientifically from our presence in Antarctica.

David Rutley: As we saw from some of the work that we were able to see first hand in the Antarctic, there is unique work going on in biodiversity. That is clear. That is in marine and other wildlife.

Then what is going on in terms of space weather and some of the other work that we saw of the ocean circulation as well, we could rely on third-party research if we wanted to. However, given the history and given the role that we play, you used the word beginning with "w", withdrawal. That is not on the agenda, just to be very clear with the Committee.

We have been there for the long haul. We intend to be there for the long haul. It is not just a matter of history, but given that we are there, we have a sovereignty claim, which, of course, we want to uphold. However, the science in and of itself is invaluable, and we are very good at it.

Q325 **Chair:** Let's move on to that. Given that as far as we can make out that science is brilliant but less important than the geopolitical reason for being there, why is the Foreign Office responsibility and the MoD



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responsibility funded by this rather curious route through BAS? Why are UKRI and DSIT funding it to BAS rather than the Foreign Office? Elsewhere in the world, if we ever need a geopolitical presence in Hong Kong or wherever it might be, the Foreign Office pays for it. Why uniquely in Antarctica is our geopolitical presence there funded through this scientific route?

David Rutley: I will let the Science Minister come in, but all I would say on this is, of course, the science is key for our presence. As I have said several times, the science in and of itself is vitally important as well. What we want is to make sure that that science and the science that is taken forward is the best possible science. That is where it is best left to DSIT and the relevant research bodies to determine what research should be taken forward.

We have a clear view that there needs to be a presence there. We have a clear view that important science should take place. At that point, we then hand over to the experts who make the decisions about what science.

Q326 **Chair:** I think you are misunderstanding me. Of course, I accept that entirely. We will move science to one side for a moment. What we are talking about now is the need for Britain to have a geopolitical presence in the south in Antarctica. I entirely accept that, and I did not want to ask the question why. Let's assume you do. My question is why, given Britain's necessity to have a presence in Antarctica, is that funded through DSIT, UKRI and BAS through the scientific wing, rather than through the political wing, namely the Foreign Office?

David Rutley: Sorry, I will try that answer again. What I am trying to underpin is that our approach is science-led and our presence is science-led. Other countries have a presence there and have limited science capability, often carried out by military personnel. We have a very different approach. As you have seen on your visit, we do have some military support there, but the primary presence, the primary focus, is around the science. That is why the funding is linked to the science and the decisions about what science goes on there is not a call by FCDO, it is a call by DSIT and those who work on it.

Q327 **Chair:** Perhaps I am not being clear enough. Let me try to be very, very clear in my questions. I think perhaps I am mumbling. I tend to mumble a bit; I do apologise for that. Britain spends a very large amount of money with our presence in Antarctica. That is my first question to you. You made it plain that that was partly because we provide world-class science. I am convinced that we do. I would not knock that for a second. I am certain we do provide world-class science, but also that the purpose in being there was for the geopolitical reason of having a presence in Antarctica for all the historic reasons that you describe.

My question was: given that is the case, first, which is more important? If you were to say science is more important, we come back to the question



of why you cannot do that somewhere else. Also, why are we spending such a gigantic amount of money doing it?

Secondly, if, as I suspect—and it is a perfectly legitimate and reasonable thing to say—the reason for our being there is because of the geopolitics for our presence in Antarctica, our presence in the southern ocean, if that is our reason for being there, why is it funded in this particular way? What is the basis, what is the origin of the funding stream? I think you would agree it is an important question because, apart from anything else, the quantity of funding then becomes not a matter for the Foreign Secretary but a matter for the Science Secretary. It is quite a different matter. Why is the funding for our geopolitical presence in Antarctica done through DSIT, UKRI, BAS?

David Rutley: I will try it one more time, and you certainly were not mumbling. I am just trying to explain it from our perspective. If I am not doing it clearly enough, I apologise.

The key thing is BAS has a dual role. It provides world-class science and influential presence in Antarctica. The funding, as I said, follows the science because that is the primary activity that takes place. One thing that we have not talked about so far and I think will maybe help but not completely answer the question to your satisfaction, we are quite happy with the approach that is being taken here. The other thing I would say is that while you make the point that this is expensive, yes, this is an investment in science but, relative to the size of the total science budget, it is relatively small. In terms of being able to—

Q328 **Chair:** What is the total cost of our presence in Antarctica every year?

David Rutley: The question you raised, Chair, was the cost of the science, which is £35 million. The presence on top I think is around another £60 million. That is £95 million for presence alone and then science on top. That is a lot of money, but in the scheme of—

Chair: What is the capital spend?

David Rutley: That is annual.

Chair: That is revenue spend, isn't it?

David Rutley: That is revenue spend, and then capital on top, yes.

Chair: Capital spend in the last couple of years has been?

David Rutley: The SDA is about £200 million, £250 million. Then you have about I think £90 million for the Discovery Centre, but we can give you the breakdown. Again, those investments are not for the next two or three years expecting a payback in three years. This is because, as we saw on the trip, a lot of that infrastructure is very old. To me it feels recent, the 1980s. I remember them very well. That is a long time ago in terms of infrastructure and they do need to be refreshed. There is no question of it.



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The premise of your question I understand, I would just disagree to some extent about the relative cost of being able to maintain presence and to have this excellent science available. BAS, just to give some reassurance to the Committee, is not just a decision that is made completely by DSIT. There is a review group, which includes FCDO, the MoD and the Cabinet Office that meets twice a year.

There are key decisions around the science, but we recognise the dual mission and, as a result, there is a co-ordinating body that reviews and works together and involves the National Security Council when required as well.

Q329 **Chair:** Let me have one final bash at this. I do not mean to bore everyone rigid with it, but none the less it is quite an important matter. If you put together the capital investment and the revenue investment over the last couple of years, we are certainly talking about £1 billion or thereabouts, give or take. The UK has spent £1 billion, give or take, on presence in Antarctica, from which we have £37 million of science; a very small amount, I am told, by comparison to the rest of the scientific budget. Surely that is disproportionate. Surely we spent an enormous amount of money for a very small return.

David Rutley: I will just have one final go at this, and I know Andrew is probably itching to get in. As we saw, the infrastructure that is being built, and we will no doubt have more conversations about this, is of a very high standard. It needs to be because of the weather and the climate and the challenges there. They are built to last and they are built there for another 50 years or so. What needs to happen is to look at the infrastructure, the capital expenditure over the lifetime of those projects, that changes the arithmetic and the financial calculations quite significantly.

Yes, there has been investment, but we need to for presence; we need to because the science is critical. Never has it been any more important because of what is happening in the climate and the lessons that we are learning, particularly from the science we are doing in the Arctic but also in the Antarctic. Do you want to come in on that at all?

Andrew Griffith: Just quickly. It is not for us to ask the questions, but if we did have a perfect delineation or an allocation in finance direct terms, would that help us? We are lucky that we have a strong institution, science-led, in the British Antarctic Survey. If we did have government accounting lines with different numbers for different Departments, would it help us or would we just argue endlessly about the allocations of those anyway?

There is a cost to doing science at a distance. The same logic would say if you send an experiment up on a rocket, 90% of the cost is getting that experiment into orbit. The actual experiment itself is probably relatively modest, but you have to protect it from a very harsh environment, you



have to project it a distance, and you have to be able to recover the data afterwards.

I accept that is not a perfect analogy, Mr Chairman, but there will be somewhat of that, that we are operating in a harsh and hostile environment at great distance. We want to play our part as a global scientific superpower. I suspect most members of the Committee would rather we did more climate science than less as a public policy choice. Given that, given the institutional settlement we have, given that it is collaborative across Government and internationally—virtually everything we do is some form of international collaboration—I do not think we should be discontent with the situation that we find ourselves in.

Q330 **Chair:** Let me move on very slightly. It was nice to have one recommendation from our Arctic report to be acted on, namely the ministerial meeting, which happened, I think, last week. Thank you for that and thank you for the credits, too. When my grandchildren ask me what I did, I will say I got the Ministers to meet once a month, or whatever it was. What happens with regard to Antarctica? You mentioned, I think, officials presumably meet regularly to discuss the funding aspect of things. Do all the Ministers with responsibility for Antarctica meet regularly?

David Rutley: Not in quite the same way, partly because the relationship is different. There are real differences between the Arctic and the Antarctic. There is also a difference in our relationship with those chunks of geography. In the Arctic we are a near neighbour, but in the Antarctic we have sovereignty claim.

We have an important line here where the FCDO takes a lead in that area. That includes representing the UK at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and in administering the UK domestic legislation. Our excellent Polar Regions Department, led by Jane Rumble here, is also part of the Overseas Territories and Polar Directive, but they administer the British Antarctic Territory.

There is a clear lead in this area. That said, we work regularly with other Government Departments, DSIT, MoD, as I talked about, the Cabinet Office, DfT from a shipping perspective, and DEFRA from a fishing perspective as well.

Andrew Griffith: There would be nothing ab initio to stop us doing that if the Committee needed something else for your grandchildren.

Q331 **Chair:** One little logical thing: the Foreign Office is the lead in all these matters for very good reason as you described. However, a moment ago you went to great lengths to say that science was the lead.

David Rutley: As I said, this is regarding the sovereignty aspect. There is a clear lead here. You talked about the geography. In terms of the presence and the activity that is involved in that geographic area, it is



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predominantly science and, therefore, we have the approach that we have.

Q332 **Chair:** How often do you all meet? MoD presumably is the responsible protector, DSIT, the Foreign Office; how often do your Ministers meet to discuss Antarctic matters?

David Rutley: The approach that is taken here is different from where we are now with the Arctic, because this is more a business-as-usual arrangement where, because of the different treaty meetings and so forth that take place and CCAMLR meetings, there is more of a regular rhythm. As I said, the Departments work very closely, with Jane taking a lead role from an administrative perspective.

Andrew Griffith: Perhaps Jane will know, because it happens at official level, to be clear. The BAS review group, which is chaired by DSIT following the science, is de facto—is probably de jure—the formal group that meets—how often does that meet, Jane?

Jane Rumble: That meets twice a year.

Andrew Griffith: That is the BAS review group.

Q333 **Chair:** At regional level, though, Jane. Ministers do not meet. You are both one responsible for science, one responsible for Foreign Office. Leaving aside preparations for this hearing, which I am sure you have got together and chewed it over a bit, how often would you meet in an official way in the Department for discussions about Antarctic matters?

David Rutley: You have only been in role a few months. We have not had a formal meeting. Often, as is the case, we rely on officials to take this work forward. If the Committee were to recommend that there could be more co-ordination we would certainly consider that, but all I would say, because this is not just about the Chair's grandchildren, is we do have a different rhythm of activity in the Antarctic. That is the thing.

Q334 **Chair:** I realise that. We have been talking about the relationship between the science aspects of things and the geopolitical aspects of things, and therefore I would have thought it perfectly reasonable that Ministers responsible for those two things would meet to discuss them. Now you are telling me they do not. That seems to me to be odd. How do you decide?

David Rutley: It is slightly different in the sense that—

Andrew Griffith: We have now meetings mandated on Arctic matters. We could extend that to polar matters.

David Rutley: We are happy to do it. I just want to reassure—

Andrew Griffith: Do a two for one.

Chair: That is a good idea.



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David Rutley: I am very happy with that. I just want to reassure the Committee that, as required, Ministers do have these conversations and there is just a different rhythm as far as the Antarctic goes.

Q335 **Philip Dunne:** You both touched on the climate change impact on Antarctica. It was not originally part of the treaty system, but it is clearly becoming the focus of most of the scientific research. Can you, at a top level, explain what the consequences are of climate change on Antarctica as the UK sees it perhaps from a Foreign Office perspective and then from a science perspective?

David Rutley: There are a number of key issues, which we were able to talk about and witness when we were there. Antarctica is warming around twice the global average. Atmospheric and oceanographic warming are together causing increasing ice melt. That is clear. You can see that. That is increasingly contributing to global sea level rises.

Not only that, the thing I learned through the visit as well is that with the meltwater from the Antarctic, it is also affecting the circulation of global ocean currents. It is pretty clear, you can see that. I know that Matthew has a better understanding of this, given his love of the sea. It is globally significant what is happening there. It is not just about what is happening in the Antarctic or the biodiversity there. These have compelling impacts around the world.

It was quite interesting, on the Sir David Attenborough we had a couple of Dutch scientists who were with us. I was trying to work out—I did not realise the Dutch were that interested in Antarctic research—and I gently just asked, “Why are you so interested in Antarctic research?” They said, “When 25% of your country is under the sea level, you get very interested in Antarctic studies very quickly”. One of the most compelling answers I have had to why it is important to study the Antarctic.

Q336 **Philip Dunne:** From a scientific point of view, can you elaborate on that?

Andrew Griffith: David talked about the significance of that, which is well understood for climate, for nature, for biodiversity. A lot of food chains ultimately start in the polar regions. But I am not your scientist, and you have taken evidence, I think, from Jane and others.

In terms of what we do, we are at the heart of most of the big international collaborations taking measurements, observations, understanding the changes and the rate of change in the Arctic; for example, the International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration, which is between NERC and the US National Science Foundation, but also projects on behalf of the European Space Agency and climate observations on behalf of bodies like the IPCC and the World Meteorological Organisation.

There is a lot that we do that we are contributing to in terms of taking measurements, and there is more that we can do going forward as part of a project called InSync, which is all those who are doing Antarctic science, collaborating to take simultaneous measurements across the



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whole of the region, which would only be possible if one worked collaboratively to do that.

Q337 Philip Dunne: David mentioned ocean levels rising, but the impact on the continent of Antarctica itself can best be done through international collaboration, as you have just said. Is the focus primarily on understanding the impact on Antarctica of global warming or on what is happening to the rest of the planet as a result of global warming's impact on Antarctica?

Andrew Griffith: I think it is both; we are pretty joined up.

David Rutley: Jane may want to come in here. Do you want to talk on this?

Jane Rumble: The science objectives are twofold. One is to understand how Antarctica is driving global atmosphere and global ocean change so that we can understand the rest of the globe, which will improve our climate modelling, understanding sea level impacts we will have and what is happening to our weather.

The Antarctic treaty system is responsible for the management of Antarctica itself. For that, we need to understand what the local and regional implications are so that we can better manage human activity, tourism, fishing, what is happening to the biodiversity and how we can best protect vulnerable species. It is very much both. One is arguably bigger, because understanding the whole globe is a much more complex focus. The other one is, I suppose you would say, equally complex but it is a smaller scale.

Q338 Philip Dunne: The treaty system was established before climate change was a thing, and not included in the treaty. Is work being done to consider whether we need to adapt the treaty in order to take into account climate change, which is now the most important thing that we are looking at there?

David Rutley: It is a good question. There has been a lot of work that has been done, particularly between the UK and Norway initially. They chaired the Antarctic Treaty Meeting of Experts on climate change back in 2010, and then climate change became a standing agenda item both for the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, which is annual, and the CCAMLR meetings, which are also annual. That was a key moment to make sure that we had that as a standing agenda item. That has been going for around 13 or 14 years now.

Q339 Philip Dunne: Another thing that has happened recently is the biodiversity impacts of climate change. I was not unfortunately on the visit, but I think those who were were interested in particular in the global impact of avian influenza on many species that are indigenous. Again, is that a standing item on the agenda, biodiversity impact?



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David Rutley: Let me come on to the point about avian flu, but is biodiversity also a standing item? I know climate change is, but I want to make sure.

Jane Rumble: Yes. The environmental protocol to the Antarctic treaty gives a framework for comprehensive environmental protection, including biodiversity. The Committee for Environmental Protection is established to advise the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting on the implementation of the protocol, which covers biodiversity. It is not an agenda item of its own, but the Committee's main role is to advise on that.

Q340 **Philip Dunne:** One of the things that we are trying to do is to come up with recommendations to help the Government formulate policy where there may be gaps. Is this an area where there might be something that we could recommend to you, as Ministers, whether it would be helpful to you? It is now in the public consciousness very recently that emperor penguin colonies are under enormous threat. Perhaps that was not widely known until we had the benefit of the real Sir David Attenborough's work on all the "Blue Planet" and "Frozen Planet" programmes showing that to the general public. I think there is much more interest because of the global biodiversity crisis. As you say, Minister, many of the food chain elements start in Arctic regions or Antarctic regions. Maybe this is unfair to ask Jane, but the Ministers might like to encourage a nudge in this direction.

David Rutley: As Jane said, and as we were saying particularly around climate, these are now agenda items on these bodies. Encouragement for all parties to make this a key priority would be hugely helpful, particularly as it is cross-party. As we will come on to, there are other areas where a nudge from the Committee would be very helpful to see more collaboration around fisheries management and marine conservation, but we will come to that, no doubt, in due course.

On avian flu, we are keeping very close to the situation there, monitoring it very closely. As those who attended the trip know, there is very keen interest in making sure that steps are taken to stop the further spread through human activity. We are monitoring and tracking what is going on among other species as well.

Chair: It affected walrus in the north, I think, didn't it, reported this week? Didn't I see walrus dying through avian flu?

Q341 **Anna McMorris:** Moving on from the previous questions, how do you feel—I address this to Minister Rutley—that global politics and the changes in geopolitics impact the effectiveness of the Antarctic Treaty System? How do they maintain Antarctica as that continent for peace and for scientific research?

David Rutley: We had some quite lively conversations about this on the visit. First, to reassure people—and the Antarctic treaty I think has been



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a tremendous vehicle for peace in a continent that has never experienced any military activity or any military conflict, at least, and long may that continue—we want to make sure that the purpose of the treaty being about conflict prevention continues.

When you add the treaty system together, those three different elements—the treaty, CCAMLR and the environmental protocol—provide a solid foundation. There has been good evidence overall that the parties and the Antarctic operators there comply with those treaties.

That said, and this is the heart of your question, with the geopolitical challenges we are now seeing and the headwinds we are facing into, it is more challenging. That is why, in answer to Philip's question about where this Committee can point, the Committee is very well informed and will form its own view but I think we could all see that there is a requirement here for different countries to put aside their own national interests to some degree and focus on what is important for the planet, which is critical here.

There are two areas where I am particularly worried and would be interested in your views as well, Anna. I think some of the activities by Russia in making it difficult to agree catch limits in CCAMLR, for example, and China being quite slow to the table on issues around marine conservation are worries. Particularly with Russia, where it feels, to some extent, politically motivated. That is the worry, if we start seeing geopolitics influencing what has been a very successful treaty.

Q342 **Anna McMorris:** I will come on to Russia. We have heard evidence here to this Committee from Professor Dodds, who said that Antarctic policy, particularly on the environment, is arguably at its most challenging since the late 1980s. What are the UK Government doing to support and prevent that consensus within the treaty breaking down, particularly concerning issues, as just mentioned by Philip, on the protection of species like the emperor penguins?

David Rutley: We continue to work with all relevant parties. We have the next meeting that is taking place in India later this month.

Jane Rumble: Two weeks.

David Rutley: In two weeks' time. That is a key moment where we can help to reinforce the key purposes of the treaty and encourage all parties to live up to those ambitions and aspirations.

Anna McMorris: That is the treaty consultative meeting in India?

David Rutley: Correct.

Q343 **Anna McMorris:** Are the UK Government particularly going to set out their stall on what is happening in terms of what Russia is doing and the potential actions of Russia and how that might impact on Antarctica and the treaty?



David Rutley: We do that in and around those key convening moments, in CCAMLIR as well, but there are other bilateral moments where we can communicate these issues with our friends and allies around the world, and with those who do not share our values, too. There are different levels here where we can work in multilateral fora, but also bilaterally.

Q344 **Anna McMorris:** We have heard that one of the scientific vessels that Russia was using has been sanctioned by the US because of the invasion of Ukraine, but also potentially because of some of the activities that it was partaking in, in Antarctica. The Committee was informed about some troubling current Russian activity and collection of seismic data. That sounds more like prospecting minerals rather than collation of scientific data and research. Are you aware of this, and what is the UK Government's response to it?

David Rutley: Again, the treaty is very clear, or at least the protocol related to it on environmental protection is very clear. It prohibits the exploitation of mineral resources in the Antarctic, except for smaller scientific purposes. That is indefinite in scope. That goes on and on.

Russia has had a long-standing programme of surveying and mapping the geology of Antarctica, both on the land and on the seabed. It has repeatedly given assurances at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting that these activities are for scientific purposes. It has also joined the consensus on a new resolution adopted last year on reaffirming ongoing commitment to the prohibition of Antarctic mineral resource activities other than for scientific research. We will continue to monitor that situation and those activities.

Q345 **Anna McMorris:** You are content to believe Russia when it says it is just undertaking scientific data?

David Rutley: We continue to monitor the situation and we continue to make our points clearly heard, as do other members of the treaty as well.

Q346 **Anna McMorris:** What are the ramifications, then, if—as some people, including Professor Klaus Dodds, have given evidence of being concerned about—this is for a different matter and it is not for scientific purposes?

David Rutley: The treaty is very clear. Russia has recently reaffirmed its commitment to the key elements of the treaty that you are talking about. It needs to be held to account on this, as we all do. This is a treaty that we have all signed up to. It has been hugely successful, one of the most successful treaties in our recent history. All parties will want it to continue. We have to hold people to account.

Anna McMorris: Thank you for that. Moving on—

Q347 **Chair:** Can I interrupt briefly on this? I recognise that that is the case, of course, but the journalist who has written to us to allege all sorts of nefarious practices by Russian ships has made some very specific allegations that Russia is fundamentally breaching the treaty conditions,



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using their scientific vessels for mineral research and potentially for military purposes. Have you seen those allegations? It is a slightly obscure South African journalist. I am not saying it is true necessarily. None the less, have you seen those allegations? If so, what do you make of them?

David Rutley: I personally have not seen them. I have heard of them. All I can say is what I have said so far. Clearly, I will take a closer look, given the interest of the Committee.

Q348 **Chair:** I think what we will do, if that is all right by you, is we will pass you a letter we have had from these journalists. I have no idea who they are, but it is worth passing them to you, and perhaps the Foreign Office will want to look into it, because they are extremely serious allegations about Russian malpractice.

David Rutley: It does come back to Anna's point. Fundamentally, we have had a very successful treaty here and geopolitical headwinds are challenging, but we need to stick the course on this and all parties do.

Q349 **Anna McMorris:** Thank you. We would be grateful if you could then raise it at this treaty meeting, if you feel that is necessary after seeing some of the allegations.

David Rutley: You are going to the meeting, aren't you?

Jane Rumble: Yes. We have had the same information that you have had. There isn't any evidence that would point to a breach of the treaty. You would need different equipment between surveying and actual exploitation. There is not a shift to it, but yes, we are watching it very closely. Russia has been tackled on this before and has assured the ATCM on multiple occasions that this is a science programme. We will keep it under review.

Q350 **Anna McMorris:** On our visit to Antarctica, we went through the Falklands. The Falklands is very keen to create a gateway to Antarctic ports and be seen as the gateway to Antarctica. What plans do the UK Government have to ensure that this happens? We also went into Punta Arenas, so we saw the plans from Chile. We know that the Sir David Attenborough goes in and uses their port and resources because the flights there are much easier. What plans do you have?

David Rutley: The plans that we have, obviously linking with the Falklands Islands Government, they are going to be looking to enhance their gateway capability. The Sir David Attenborough and the BAS's five aircraft are all registered in the Falkland Islands, and they routinely operate from there. With the Falkland Islands Government, they are going to be investing more in a new port, upgrading facilities at Stanley to better meet future needs. My understanding is that those aims will mean that the replacement infrastructure is in place about 2027. I think it is also very clear from our visit and the journey to start the visit that, if I can put it politely, there are challenges, which I know very clearly as



the Overseas Territories Minister and you all know, about how to get to the Falklands. The air bridge needs to be made as reliable as possible, not least for the people that live there, but also the defence purposes that are required on the Falklands.

We are also doing all that we can, working with the new Argentinian Government, to get to a better place in that relationship, to reset that relationship. That might provide some opportunities in future.

In all these steps with the Falklands, we have to work very closely with the MLAs, who you spent time with, and their considerations. The people of the Falklands are very important in this whole dynamic as well.

Q351 Anna McMorris: Finally, there is increasing strategic competition in the polar regions and in Antarctica, but also with that, then, concerns about weaponisation of science. For example, we have heard—whether this is weaponisation or not, you can comment—that China established a station to support a National Satellite Ocean Application Service, for example. There is a lot of competition such as this. How do the Government evaluate the role of infrastructure development in terms of geopolitics and what is going on with other countries? Particularly looking at Rothera, we saw the infrastructure development there and the investment that the Government are making and BAS is making there as a tool for enhancing the UK's role in soft power and using science as a soft power.

David Rutley: We continue to monitor the situation there. There are positive examples of how infrastructure developments, not only our own but other countries, have helped massively in taking forward science and producing invaluable science output. There have also been examples of stations where they have been constructed and maintained for pretty negligible science output. What we would advocate very strongly with every influence that we can is that infrastructure in such an important part of the world, one which we want to keep as pristine as possible, should be and primarily support meaningful science outputs.

Q352 Anna McMorris: Can I turn to the Science Minister then on that? What is your view in terms of how science can help with our geopolitics and the infrastructure and the soft powers we have? How can we, as a nation and working within the treaty, ensure that it is not being used for false purposes elsewhere?

Andrew Griffith: The latter I know less about in terms of how one enforces and polices. I think that is slightly different equities. In terms of what we do for soft power, our science is essentially collaborative and essentially open. The best example of that is our readmission into Horizon, the world's largest collaborative international science programme.

We also have our own significant bilateral science programmes, some of which qualify as ODA as well, depending on the country in which we



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operate. Our commitment to open science, to publish the research of that, which is a key protection against people using that for nefarious purposes, is absolute. The UK leads the way on that.

Q353 **Anna McMorris:** Can I check finally with Jane? Jane, am I correct in thinking that all Antarctic science is open within the treaty, so for everything conducted scientifically the data has to be open and available?

Jane Rumble: Yes, the treaty has a provision for open science. What that means is up to interpretation about how quickly it becomes open. Certainly, all the UK data will eventually become—

Andrew Griffith: All ours is publicly funded sciences.

Anna McMorris: But it is under the treaty agreement that it has to be anyway. That is not a UK thing.

Andrew Griffith: No, it is a more general thing. All UKRI publicly funded science has to be open. If you want, there is a belt and braces, but we would do that regardless of the treaty.

Q354 **Chair:** How many scientific research spaces does China have on the continent?

David Rutley: Five.

Q355 **Chair:** I think I am right in saying that under the treaty system, all the bases can be visited by other nations and inspected?

David Rutley: Correct.

Q356 **Chair:** Do the Chinese allow us into their bases to inspect them?

David Rutley: Yes.

Q357 **Anna McMorris:** Do they have people there? Are they manned? They do. They did not in Ny-Ålesund, did they?

Jane Rumble: No.

Anna McMorris: You probably do not know about that.

Jane Rumble: The Antarctic bases, some are summer only, so they are staffed in the summer, not in the winter. We have summer-only bases as well. Some are year round. Yes, the five stations that they currently have are all operational.

Q358 **Chair:** They are ready to welcome in inspectors?

Jane Rumble: They meet the obligations of the treaty to be inspected.

Q359 **Chair:** What about the Russians? How many bases do the Russians have?

Jane Rumble: That is a good question. It is six or seven, at least. Some of them are not operational, so they arguably are in disrepair. They definitely operate at least two, possibly three.



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Q360 **Chair:** You will see the general thrust of my questioning is to what degree we are content that these are genuinely scientific research stations. To what degree are they for military or even commercial purposes? Do we have an official Government view on that question?

David Rutley: Our approach, as I said, is that we advocate that those facilities are used for science.

Chair: I know you advocate it, but the question is whether they are.

David Rutley: They can be inspected; that is the thing. The science is open and the facilities are open for inspection.

Q361 **Chair:** The Government have no knowledge suggesting other than that the Russian and the Chinese bases are used for purely scientific purposes, that is your official line and you are convinced that is the case?

David Rutley: Jane, do you want to come in on this?

Jane Rumble: I would say that there are periodical evaluations of the contribution of each state to Antarctic science. It is pretty clear that the Chinese contribution to Antarctic science is exponentially increasing. Its scientific output is largely increasing. I would say Russia's is fairly low and continually steady at a fairly low level, as far as we can see. It has done some significant science in drilling into Lake Vostok, although that in itself was controversial. It has done some big projects, but the Chinese contribution is definitely increasing.

Q362 **Chair:** Sorry to bang on about this, but at an official level anyhow, officially you are convinced that the Chinese and the Russians are entirely within the terms of the treaty. They are not using these bases for military or for commercial purposes. They are using them for scientific purposes.

Jane Rumble: I do not have any evidence to the contrary.

David Rutley: Yes, we have not seen any evidence to the contrary.

Chair: Understood. For the record, the senior official Jane Rumble said no evidence to the contrary, and giggled rather fetchingly.

David Rutley: I do not think that that was a giggle. It was an intake of breath.

Chair: An intake of breath, yes, that is what it was. Sorry, that was an interlude.

Q363 **Dr Offord:** Minister Rutley, you mentioned in the previous answer about the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, CCAMLR, as we refer to it. What, if any, specific actions are you or the Department taking to strengthen both conservation and fisheries management when we consider changes to the Antarctic ecosystems, particularly from climate change?



David Rutley: I will respond to that question but if we finish the geopolitical side here. We are going into another key component on CCAMLR and fisheries. I did not know where to put this into the conversation but I should do it here, if that is okay. I will say it because it is important and it does respond in part to the work of this Committee, which I hope you will be pleased to hear.

FCDO periodically develops more specific strategies relating to the UK Antarctic interests, but these documents are not normally published documents. However, what I can inform the Committee is that I have commissioned officials to develop a strategy for public release later this year in the autumn that will define the UK's long-standing interests in the Antarctic and set out our ambitions for the region. I hope that that in part answers or at least recognises that we need to focus more efforts on the Antarctic and answers more fully some of the questions that are being asked here. I will come on to CCAMLR, apologies, but I wanted to make sure that we got that on and that it was not a tail-end question, because it might be important and adds dimension on geopolitics.

Q364 **Anna McMorris:** Can I clarify: is that a renewed Antarctic strategy?

David Rutley: We have something that is a BAT, British Antarctic Territory, strategy relating to the territory. This is a strategy; we have a strategy but it is an internal document. What we want to do, given the significance of the issues and the real interest that is being shown, not just from this Committee but primarily from this Committee and elsewhere in Parliament, is to now go for a published strategy that will be set out. Obviously, we can be held to account to it, but hopefully it will spark further interest here as well and further debate.

Q365 **Anna McMorris:** Is that joint with the scientific—

David Rutley: It will be cross-government. FCDO will lead, to the previous line of questioning, but it will involve other Departments as well. Hopefully, that will show that while we need to consider the approach to cross-government working where FCDO takes the lead, the strategy will help set out the wider context. Any other points on that or should we go to CCAMLR?

Chair: That is very welcome indeed and we will probably make that one of our recommendations, even though you have already confirmed it, so that in the autumn whatever Government may be around after the autumn will be bound by it. We will try to make it a recommendation.

David Rutley: That is a good point. From the conversations that we have had, some of them quite challenging, it is very clear that cross-party there is an interest in this. This sits way above party politics, as far as I am concerned. Whatever happens in the election, we will be in a good place. I have to be quite general on the timing because we are also working on an overseas territories strategy that will be done by the summer recess and we only have finite resources. However, Jane and the



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team are working very hard on this and the quality of the work is always good.

Chair: Matthew, you carry on. If there is a Division we will suspend for 15 minutes, if there is one vote.

Anna McMorrin: There are multiple votes.

Chair: Are there multiple?

Dr Offord: I believe so.

David Rutley: Shall I try to get on to some of the questions as best I can? If we cannot go to all on the record straightaway, we can always write, but I am sure that we can achieve this.

We are fully committed to CCAMLR, which has a great history of scientific exploration in the southern ocean. It has always seen that objective evidence is vital for underpinning decision making and management of fishery stocks. The UK is both a fishing nation and an active advocate of enhanced marine protection areas in the CCAMLR area. The objective of CCAMLR fundamentally is conservation, but it provides for fishing activities where they can be done sustainably.

British fishing vessels have operated in the Ross Sea since the early 2000s. The Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands manage toothfish, icefish and grill fishing in the waters in accordance with the provisions of CCAMLR. We also led on the first CCAMLR marine protected area that was adopted in 2009. We are co-sponsoring three further proposals under consideration by CCAMLR. We have a proud record of conservation within the CCAMLR environment.

Q366 **Dr Offord:** Are you saying that you are seeking to enforce or strengthen that in light of the ecosystem changes as a result of climate change?

David Rutley: Yes. When you see the work that goes on, it is not just us. There are others who want to have greater marine protection. We are taking a leading role. We have seen the first marine protected area, as I said, but we are co-sponsoring three other proposals and there is another one on top, so there are four marine protected areas. The Committee is also aware that recently we expanded the area of no-catch zone within the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands area as well. We have a good record there, notwithstanding the fact that there are tensions, which you may well be coming on to next, but we will see.

Q367 **Dr Offord:** You certainly foresaw that coming, didn't you? Yes, indeed, there are tensions within CCAMLR and that is particularly through Russia and China, who often seek to obstruct some of the conservation measures that are being proposed. Is the UK working with others to try to overcome some of these challenges that are being put in front of CCAMLR? Can you give any examples of specific initiatives that you are seeking to co-operate with others to prevent the obstruction by those two



countries?

David Rutley: Yes, thanks, this is an important question. The challenges that we are finding in the CCAMLR area, around the marine protected area discussions particularly, is that Russia most particularly and to some extent China have been resisting moves on a number of MPA proposals. They say in their arguments that they are trying to balance the protection also with the erosion of future fishing opportunities. We are very aware, though, that we have to protect those stocks in a very meaningful and sustainable way and we need to do it quickly.

However, since 2021 Russia has been egregiously blocking consensus—and consensus is a key thing in the context of CCAMLR—on the scientifically derived catch limit for the South Georgia toothfish fishery, based on very spurious arguments and not recognised by other CCAMLR members. That is clearly politically motivated, probably made worse by the situation of its illegal invasion of Ukraine, and they are directed at the UK. It is also a disrupting tactic to CCAMLR’s wider activities as well.

Q368 **Dr Offord:** Are we taking any particular steps to overcome some of those tactics, as you say?

David Rutley: We are trying to work with our partners here. It will be interesting to see what the Committee has to say on this. You probably share a very similar view to the Government, that we need support from our friends on these particular matters as well. We are being unfairly targeted.

Q369 **Dr Offord:** We are also aware that there have been clashes between the UK and Russia over fishing rights in places, including South Georgia. There have also been some tensions with our allies such as the US, which is concerning. That demonstrates to me the complexity of geopolitics in the area, particularly around fisheries management. How would you address some of these challenges to ensure that we safeguard our interests in places like the south Atlantic?

David Rutley: Our commitment is pretty clear by the actions that we have taken to protect areas. We are well regarded around the world for the marine protected areas that we have put into place and we are doing similar work here in the CCAMLR as well. We are working not just in multilateral fora but also bilaterally to make our case. However, as you say, these are complex situations and they are made probably more challenging by the fact that there are a lot of challenging issues in the world at the moment. There is only a certain amount of bandwidth so we have to work very hard to make sure that our voice is heard on these issues, which are about fairness and the sustainability of fisheries stocks in a very sensitive part of the world.

Q370 **Barry Gardiner:** I want to ask you both about science in the Antarctic but also to separately try to segregate talking about the science from talking about the funding for the science, if we can try to compartmentalise it like that. Mr Griffith, can you tell us what steps the



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UK Government are taking to support research and infrastructure development in the Antarctic?

Andrew Griffith: First, we continue a clear commitment to our funding. Secondly, we have gone through a process of significant infrastructure upgrade. That is happening right now on the Rothera station. Obviously, you have seen the Sir David Attenborough—

Barry Gardiner: I have not. Philip and I are the ones who feel very bitter about it.

Andrew Griffith: You missed out, too. I hope that you have an opportunity to do that. The Sir David Attenborough gets rave reviews and it was a significant injection of capital into our facilities there. Those are the two things, Mr Gardiner.

Q371 **Barry Gardiner:** Tell me about the gap. The Met Office told us in its written evidence that there were important knowledge gaps to be addressed, including trends in Antarctic sea ice and the large uncertainties and the response to the ice sheet to future greenhouse gas emissions. In terms of the scientific programme here, we know what we are doing. What is it that you see that we need to be involved in doing? I do not say that we need to do it all ourselves, but that we need to be involved in doing to get a much more coherent scientific programme in place?

Andrew Griffith: Jane may be able to help me. I had not heard that. I have spent quite a lot of time with the Met Office and in general people are very complimentary about the work of the British Antarctic Survey.

Barry Gardiner: That is taken as read. People are complimentary about what is being done but they are conscious that there is much more that needs to be done.

Andrew Griffith: That is very fair.

Barry Gardiner: Perhaps Ms Rumble may like to—

Andrew Griffith: Jane may have some contributions on that.

Jane Rumble: Sorry, I was answering a different question. Could you just summarise?

Q372 **Barry Gardiner:** What are the gaps? There are a lot of things that we are doing and there are a lot of things that we are doing very well, but looking at the science overall, what are the issues that we need to be focused on for the future? What are the projects that need to be brought together? This is not necessarily something that we have to do on our own, because so much of the research—and we have heard this time and again—has to be collaborative. Looking forward, persuade us that there is a coherent view about how our science should be contributing to the overall scientific endeavour.



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Chair: Sorry, there will be a Division shortly in the main Chamber. I will suspend the Committee for 15 minutes if there is one vote or 25 minutes if it is two and thereafter 10 minutes more if it is more than that. We think that it will be no more than two. Therefore, we will suspend for 25 minutes, which will take us through to 4.50 pm.

Barry Gardiner: Lots of time to think of the answer.

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—

Q373 **Chair:** I am informed that the Science Minister cannot join us, which is a great shame, although perhaps we will not miss him. None the less, I am disappointed that he is not able to be here for the rest of the session, particularly because we are moving on to discuss science. However, let's do what we can.

Barry Gardiner: It is for Ms Rumble. She was just about to respond to the question, so I will give it straight to her.

Jane Rumble: Thank you. You were talking about how the future gaps of science are determined. It is done both at the international level and at the national level. At the international level there is the Scientific Committee of Antarctic Research, which is an international body. It has done a horizon scan and it keeps that up to date in terms of what the science community thinks the future challenges that need to be addressed are. That body can then help to deliver international co-operative science, getting everybody to work together.

At the national level, the British Antarctic Survey has done a gap analysis of science. It pointed to things like enhancing climate modelling, conserving biodiversity, protecting the infrastructure, looking at the global implications of Antarctic science and looking at trigger points. In the polar regions there are some of the big trigger points. These are things that will shift the global system that will not be reversible. The question is once they go, will that cascade? Trying to understand the modelling of that is key and trying to look at and predict extreme events in the polar regions because they can also have a significant impact.

Q374 **Barry Gardiner:** Let me ask you about the shifts and the progress in technology and equipment. We heard from Mike Bentley, who is a professor at Durham University, that as the science is changing more vehicles, sensors and more sophisticated engineering are available. Clearly, we need access to that to be able to move forward and fill those gaps that you have just identified. How are we going about doing that to make sure that we do have the kit that we need to get the scientific data that we would require?

David Rutley: One example would be some of the work that we are doing on remote sensing stations in the Antarctic. We have remote-operated vehicles and we have remote personnel aviation systems and



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we are looking at how we can utilise AI capabilities as well. We are working hard to update those technologies and I am sure that the Minister can provide more information as required.

Chair: If he was here.

David Rutley: The other thing that is key is making sure that whatever we take forward and that other countries do as well is within appropriate guidelines and operating protocols to maintain compliance with the treaty provisions.

Q375 **Barry Gardiner:** Can I ask you about one of the projects, the InSync project, and how you envisage that feeding into the International Polar Year in 2032? InSync goes between 2027 and 2030, doesn't it?

David Rutley: Correct.

Barry Gardiner: What specific measures are the Government taking to support that project and how do you see it feeding into the Antarctic?

David Rutley: It will help to deliver the circumpolar assessment. We heard already from the Science Minister about DSIT's commitment to support this, and the Government more widely. It will be very important to help to work out the connections between the ice, ocean, atmosphere, climate, environment and life, including human pressures. We have the preparatory work that is taking place between 2024 and 2027 and, you are right, Barry, the synchronous scientific observations will then take place between 2027 and 2030. That will then build up to the International Polar Year.

Q376 **Barry Gardiner:** It is important that we are taking the same measures at the same time and doing that regularly, isn't it?

David Rutley: Yes, and we have to do it through international collaboration; that is the key thing. I know that that has come up in quite a few of the questions that we have been discussing today. International collaboration is key and the treaty helps encourage that as well. I keep looking at 2032, and that is a long way off. When you look at some of the very dire projections about what can happen in the Antarctic, this is an important project. However, it is very clear that we need to be doing a lot more work in terms of science and mitigation in the years that approach that as well. The International Polar Year cannot just be about this project; there is a lot more work that needs to be done and I am sure that the Committee will have a view on that as well.

Q377 **Barry Gardiner:** Thank you. That is clear. Before we move on to specifically funding of science, I want to ask you about how we are ensuring that we are in compliance with the Nagoya Protocol and specifically the promotion of fair and equitable sharing of benefits that come from the genetic resources in the Antarctic, which of course is part of the protocol. Under the EU we had Regulation 511/2014, which I am sure you are familiar with. I am assuming that that was rolled over under



REUL and that we now have it as part of our own domestic law. What are we doing to ensure that that compliance is there to make sure that there is that equitable sharing of the genetic resources?

David Rutley: I will ask Jane to answer that question; it is quite a technical one.

Jane Rumble: The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting has made several statements to say that the conservation and use of genetic material in Antarctica is with the competence of the ATS. The Convention on Biological Diversity, which is where the Nagoya Protocol stems from, does not apply in Antarctica, by virtue of the treaty. The treaty has controlled access to Antarctica through the environmental protocol. There is not yet agreement on any benefit-sharing regime. It has been discussed but there are different views about whether or not that should take place. The treaty tries not to make money out of Antarctica, in general terms, because we are looking after it for peace and science.

Barry Gardiner: There have been patterns.

David Rutley: There have.

Q378 **Barry Gardiner:** If you go back to the 1970s, the Russians did the black yeast, the Germans much more recently have done the green algae, and they have patented those. My question then becomes what enforcement measures have or can be taken. I accept that the Nagoya Protocol is not considered within scope under the treaty. If there is a violation of the treaty itself in that respect, what enforcement mechanisms are there then to be put in place and how have we done that?

Jane Rumble: The treaty, as I say, is controlling going into Antarctica. Your collection of your genetic material is controlled by the treaty. Once you have taken it out of Antarctica, the future use of it and any intellectual property and results and patents that you might get from that is not currently controlled by the treaty. There has been no agreement to have a benefit-sharing regime.

There is a databank. In fact, the United Nations Environment Programme gathered a database that the UK supported some years ago to show what all the patents are in respect of Antarctic genetic material, but in the treaty there are many parties that are concerned that we are the custodians of Antarctica, we are looking after it on behalf of the global community and we do not seek to make money out of it. We do not charge tourism licences; we do not charge fishing licences. This is another economic derivative of Antarctica that is not controlled at this point but the debate is quite live. The recent agreement on biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction under the United Nations Law of the Sea framework—we have put a paper into the next meeting to welcome that and its assurance that it will not undermine regional agreement to protect the competence of the treaty.

Q379 **Barry Gardiner:** BBNJ would not apply to the Antarctic, though, would it,



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because it is not beyond national jurisdiction because we have sovereign—

Jane Rumble: Exactly, but there are other states that may not take that view. The treaty puts the question of territorial sovereignty in abeyance. We are trying to reassert the message that the treaty is the competent body and that the treaty should make decisions related to the genetic use of Antarctic materials.

Q380 **Barry Gardiner:** Given that our view is that we have sovereignty over part of the Antarctic, why have we chosen not to exercise sovereignty rights for accessing genetic resources in the Antarctic?

Jane Rumble: Because the treaty puts territorial issues to one side, it does not deny the existence of it. We control British national activity. Within the Antarctic Act in 2013 we revised the legislation, seeing that the use of genetic materials was coming over the horizon, to ensure that we control—we give permits to collection of anything in Antarctica. We know who is going to get it, we know how they are going to go and get it and we then know what they are going to do with it. We have not gone one further to try to have an independent regime of benefit sharing because people would just do it in other countries. You need to have a fair playing field. We have been keeping the debate alive within the treaty. At the moment there is no great desire from any state to have a benefit-sharing regime, but I think that that will be further debated.

Q381 **Barry Gardiner:** Is that not like saying that anybody can come into the shop but if they shoplift and then go out, once they are out of the shop we cannot do anything about it?

Jane Rumble: I would say that we control the shopping. However, yes, if you go home and you put it in the bin or you eat it or you give it away, we do not control that.

Barry Gardiner: You do not control whether they then exercise a patent over it and monetise it.

Jane Rumble: Exactly.

David Rutley: However, if I am not mistaken, the protocol creates a ceiling. It may not be exactly where you want to go, Barry, on that, but you cannot take living organisms that would affect its abundance, is that right?

Jane Rumble: That is right, yes.

David Rutley: There is a ceiling on what you can take, and so far that has not been abused. However, clearly, we need to keep very close to this. It is vitally important.

Q382 **Barry Gardiner:** It would be interesting to hear from you in greater depth, in writing, how we propose to go about tackling this. I am interested that you said that BBNJ is something that you have taken into



consideration in future negotiations. This is a critical area and clearly there is going to be divergence among different parties to the Antarctic treaty as to how they go about it and what they do. Is there a forward-looking group of which we are part or in the lead? How are we corralling the right way forward here? That is something that I would be interested to get the Department's thoughts on.

Can I now turn to the funding of science in the Antarctic? If we look at the NERC grants, they are typically between £4 million and £5 million. We have heard that something like the Thwaites glacier project was something that took decades of planning and required significantly more funding. Are we in danger of having too short funding cycles—three to five years being our maximum cycle—when the planning and implementation of some of the important projects here need much bigger scale and much longer-term planning?

David Rutley: With your permission, given that the Science Minister is not here, I will endeavour to answer these questions. Between us, Jane and I will do our best to answer. If you need any further information we will write.

Chair: Yes, and if there are bits that you do not know about, ask the Science Minister to write to the Committee in response to the question, if you will.

David Rutley: Absolutely. That is an important question around these projects. Obviously, these projects are being conducted in a very harsh environment with a limited window, often, for them to be conducted. That means that there needs to be longer planning times and we do need a longer-term view. Ultimately, that is going to be a matter for DSIT to decide. Some of these projects will involve international collaboration where we need to work with other partners as well. We do need a longer-term view and the good news is that from the core funding NERC has been there to support BAS over many years and will continue to provide that base funding. In the spirit of that, the competitive bidding that goes in for funding, we will need to make sure that there is a very clear case that some of these projects will be longer term than in other areas. Jane, you may want to come in on some of that.

Jane Rumble: Yes, there are two key elements. There is long-term investment in the BAS infrastructure, which includes some of the monitoring that it needs for longer-term dataset collection. That is part of its annual funding. There are three-year grant opportunities but, yes, that is one of the challenges that the scientists face. For example, for InSync, the UK wants to be involved in it and it is extremely important, but the funding round for that will come in the next funding round of government. It is quite challenging to make commitments now.

Q383 **Barry Gardiner:** Can I disentangle two things here, because it is important? First is the short-term nature of the funding that we give, the three to five years as opposed to the decade-long projects, and the scale



of funding that, therefore, is required. Instead of £3 million to £5 million, maybe looking at £10 million to £15 million if it is a longer-term project. That is one issue. The other is the one that you have adverted to when you were talking about collaboration. It is very difficult to get these collaborative projects to conception because each country is applying a national procedure to the funding that they will put into it and, therefore, seven out of eight countries might all agree but the final country might not.

Do we need a better mechanism for these international collaborative projects to find agreement, perhaps setting up a body that could be accepted by each of those countries to deliberate on the efficacy and value of those projects and the scale of them? It seems to me that these are separate questions. They are very much interrelated, but they are separate questions. One is about the mechanism for agreeing international collaborative projects, the other is whether we are thinking in terms of the scale and the timeframe that we need to get these big projects off the ground.

David Rutley: One thing is slightly tangential but important to underpin your concerns about the long-term view. Despite some challenge from the Chair and others about the amount of investment—is it enough, is it too much—we are making some big investments in science here. That should reassure the Committee that we are in here for the long haul and that is a view that is held across the House, certainly across the Committee, from the conversations that we have had, in the Antarctic. That underpins the point about being here for the long term. We need to get the science return on that capital investment.

The other thing to clarify is that we do not need consensus to get this collaboration going. This collaboration could be between two countries. I recently was in Chile. Many of you were in Chile and you met with the science body there. I signed a continuation of our collaboration agreement for science in the Antarctic. We can do good science bilaterally, multi-country; it does not have to be consensus. InSync will require a huge amount of collaboration, but we can collaborate at different levels depending on the science that we need to do.

Q384 **Barry Gardiner:** I am pleased by the optimistic and progressive way that you are talking about it, Minister. We heard from Professor Bentley. He said, “Funders have got better over time at making bilateral arrangements, multilateral arrangements are still tricky to pull off”. He explained that, “Quite often there is double, triple, quadruple jeopardy in things being reviewed simultaneously in different countries”. It is that structural mechanism. Normally, I would be asking the witness whether they thought that it was a positive recommendation that the Committee put into its report, but I cannot very well ask a Government Minister if he wants us to recommend to himself what we should be saying.

David Rutley: It has not stopped the Chair on other questions.



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Barry Gardiner: Absolutely. Can I put it this way? Do you see the problem that Professor Bentley has outlined, and do you think it important that we should try to address those issues at a structural level?

David Rutley: I can see the challenge and I think that there are structural challenges that are probably more challenging now. There are mechanisms that we have used over the years. You may want to talk about that, Jane, about how we have got through some of these challenges in the past.

Jane Rumble: Yes, I might suggest that we have DSIT write. My understanding is that there are some countries with whom we have a double jeopardy agreement, or we certainly did have. With the United States, for example, where we have very similar processes of science, there is an agreement that if one funds, the other will take that. There is a similar agreement with the Norwegians.

However, you are right that there is a real challenge. Quite often international collaborations work because you have one party that takes the lion's share of it and others dock in where and if they can. The equality of overall funding can fall down with certain members not being able to join. The way that the scientists go about it is to try to not have a single point of failure in their grant bids, so that people can come and join if they can do. However, the challenge that you have set out is real.

Q385 **Barry Gardiner:** Thank you. Let me move to the other side of the equation now and talk about how Government assess the effectiveness and the efficiency of their spending on research and logistics in Antarctica. You have the Antarctic infrastructure modernisation programme. That is £670 million on polar infrastructure. How are the Government assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of that programme?

David Rutley: On this we will need to get some written responses from DSIT, because I know the laser-like focus that you have been giving to this issue. We will do that.

Strategically, is it enabling us to fulfil the dual function of BAS's role, which we talked about at the very beginning? That will be key, and it will do, based on what we see now in terms of the infrastructure. Does it help inform our science and does it help cement our place in providing and continuing to provide world-leading Antarctic science? They will be key questions, certainly from our perspective. In terms of individual projects, NERC and UKRI will have their own criteria on that.

Q386 **Barry Gardiner:** Finally, can I pay tribute to what has been done in the Blue Belt programme? I think that it is one of the most significant and one of the most important things that the Government have done, not just in environmental policy but at all. I think that it is fantastic. You are anticipating a "but", and the "but" is this. The programme post-2025 is not yet funded. Perhaps you could tell us when we will have certainty



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about its post-2025 funding, and make me praise even your Administration for the generosity of that post-2025 funding.

David Rutley: It is fair to say that there is not certainty on funding for all government programmes beyond 2025. There will no doubt be a new CSR and a review of funding overall. However, our ambitious Blue Belt is very clear, and thanks for the tributes. It is also the fact that there is such huge support in Parliament for this. That helps give weight to the need to take this work forward.

We have seen real successes through the Blue Belt programme, not just in the Antarctic but also in the overseas territories. In the Antarctic this year it will support the review of the South Orkney Southern Shelf MPA, which will be good. It will support the development of a new state of the southern ocean report. There will be penguin monitoring in the South Orkneys, which, given everything that we have talked about today, will be key. It will continue to support calculation monitoring and test new radar technology to support fisheries patrols. Any Government will want to continue that work, given the weight of the impact of the things that we are considering today. We cannot make a complete commitment in terms of the absolute spend, but everybody in this room would realise that we need to continue to support this programme fully and wholeheartedly. It is mission critical.

Barry Gardiner: And, indeed, to expand the BBNJ. Thank you very much.

Q387 **Chair:** You may have answered this already. Given the complex structure—DSIT to UKRI to NERC to BAS—and given that the Government have announced, for example, that they were going to cut 76,000 civil servants to pay for the 2.5% defence spending, what guarantee does BAS have that it will not find huge cuts in its budget one year? What is the mechanism that allows BAS to be reasonably certain that its funding will be maintained?

David Rutley: Again that will have to be a question for the Science Minister. However, again when we look at the scale of the investment that we have made in polar science and in Antarctic science in particular in terms of capital investment, it is obvious that there will be an important and continuing role for BAS to play.

Q388 **Chair:** Of course, but you see what I mean. With UKRI in particular being a huge organisation now with 3,000 civil servants, and NERC, BAS is at the bottom of the heap, isn't it? BAS may well lose out from some government spending cut programme.

David Rutley: I personally would never regard BAS at the bottom of the heap.

Chair: In structure.



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David Rutley: It punches well above its weight internationally. However, Chair, you tempt me. You tempt me too much and I cannot speak beyond my competence.

Q389 **Chair:** Okay. Let me move on to ask a serious question about infrastructure. Before I do so, can I just say that I think that the Committee as a whole is immensely impressed by the infrastructure all around. Our voyage on the SDA and what we saw at Rothera is extremely impressive. I would not want my questions to be interpreted as being negative in one way or another. None the less, it is right that we ask them.

What are we doing about the fact that because it has taken so long to rebuild Rothera there are significant gaps in the science? The science has been delayed because, as we saw for ourselves, there is one very small lab and huge quantities of accommodation but not much scientific activity or none at all. The science in Rothera has been delayed because of the infrastructure. What will the Government do about that?

David Rutley: It has been delayed not just because of infrastructure, it has been delayed partly because of Covid and the weather. There has been some cancellation of projects, or postponement. However, as we saw, and as you have highlighted, the infrastructure has now been built to a high quality. That will ensure that we have the scientific capability for decades to come. We will be in a better place. Sometimes when you create new infrastructure it can cause disruption or changes to plans, but then you are in a better place to conduct those activities going forward. Clearly, from a logistics perspective, we will be in a far greater place once the runway is completed and once that infrastructure is in place in the near future.

Q390 **Chair:** Can we focus for a moment on the Sir David Attenborough herself? We heard that she is currently being used—the background is that it went from two ships working with BAS down to one. Partly as a result of that, we heard that 70% of her time is being used for logistics and for shifting crew and that kind of thing, and 30% for scientific research. First, is that correct, and secondly, if so, surely that is a very strange way to use hundreds of millions of pounds worth of scientific research vessel?

David Rutley: I will let Jane come on to the technical points or the numbers there that you ask. To be clear, BAS also has the freedom to charter additional support and it has used that with cargo vessels helping to support the building infrastructure programme. It is not just about one vessel. Although there has been a change, clearly, from two to one, there is extra capacity that can be used as appropriate.

Q391 **Chair:** Of course, that is true. None the less, previously you would have a ship that does logistics, largely—carts people and equipment and supplies around—and the scientific ship that does the science, whereas now the SDA is doing both. For example, I was very impressed by seeing the



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moon pool when I went to visit the ship when she was first up in London here last year. However, when we were on board the moon pool was totally covered in cargo and could not be used even if they wanted to because there was tons of stuff on top of it. A number of people we spoke to were firmly of the view that the ship was not being used for the purpose for which she was built, she was being used largely for logistical purposes.

David Rutley: On the 70:30 split we will have to come back to you, Chair, through DSIT. We do not know that figure. Clearly, there is a dual use and there will be different times at which it carries out a supply function and a science function. That is clear in terms of its requirements. We will see that this year—and I know you will be delighted in this—with SDA going to Greenland. It is showing that it can go outside of what might have been more traditional roles before and will be able to carry out a good science function there, without a doubt.

Q392 **Chair:** We are glad about that. We hoped that the ship would go to the North Pole, which is theoretically possible and what a great thing that would be. However, I am glad that she is going to Greenland and doing a bit of work there.

How do you see the role of the SDA? Is she a scientific research vessel or is she a support vessel for BAS operations in Antarctic?

David Rutley: She also has an important role, one which we talked about on the visit, in terms of soft power as well. People appreciate the science that we are able to do and its implications as well. Therefore, it has a multifaceted role and it needs to do both of those things. That is the point. We have one vessel now rather than two and it needs to do both those functions.

Q393 **Chair:** We also heard from the Falklands Government that they were concerned that the Pharos is being used excessively to resupply BAS bases in South Georgia because of going down from two ships to one. Does that ring any bells?

David Rutley: I am afraid not. We can take a look at that question and get back to you.

Q394 **Chair:** The Falklanders' view was that the Pharos was being used unreasonably for BAS and that, therefore, she was not being used sufficiently for their purposes. You might want to look into that.

Finally, I am puzzled slightly by the precise relationship with HMS Protector. She is there, she is not armed, she is flying the red ensign. What is she for and what is the relationship with BAS and with the Government?

David Rutley: Protector is the Royal Navy's ice patrol ship, obviously, and it is deployed in the South Atlantic near Antarctica during the austral summer. She upholds the UK's commitment to the Antarctic treaty and



provides valuable logistic support to both BAS, as we saw, and to the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust through supply drops and the transportation of personnel and goods. She also undertakes hydrographic surveys in the region and contributes to the safety of navigation in an area that has not been widely mapped.

Protector's presence benefits UK science, and in this past season she carried two scientists from Oceanites, a US-UK penguin monitoring foundation, enabling them to survey penguin colony populations. Protector also carries out another role. It is a white ensign British sovereign vessel. This is critical to demonstrating our sovereignty over the British Antarctic Territory and to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. As the UK's only ice-class defence asset, she plays a vital role in supporting the UK in Antarctica. Therefore, there are multiple roles.

Q395 **Chair:** Who pays for her?

David Rutley: MoD.

Q396 **Chair:** MoD is paying for scientists and for oceanographic surveying and for all sorts of things. That has nothing to do with defence of the realm, does it?

David Rutley: There are elements of that but it also carries out other functions as well, supply and the other sovereign vessel facilities.

Q397 **Chair:** It supplies to BAS bases, it does not supply to military bases. The Ministry of Defence's job is to defend the realm and to kill the King's enemies. This ship seems to me to be being used for BAS functions, for scientific functions, for a variety of functions, but not for defence functions at all. Indeed, under the treaty she is not allowed to be used for defence functions.

David Rutley: Yes, but it is also important that it carries out the role of protecting our interests. Another key—

Q398 **Chair:** What interests? Hang on, what interests?

David Rutley: Let me just finish the sentence.

Chair: I apologise.

David Rutley: No problem, it is your Committee. Protecting our interests, one of which, as I highlighted, is our sovereignty.

Chair: Protecting our sovereignty.

David Rutley: Protecting our interests. One of our key interests in the Antarctic, as we talked about right at the beginning and throughout, is the dual issue of sovereignty and science, our presence.

Q399 **Chair:** If other nations had military vessels in Antarctica protecting their sovereignty, would we be content with that?



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David Rutley: There are other countries that have a permanent presence there, yes. Look at what is going on with both Chile and Argentina.

Q400 **Chair:** Yes. America does not, though, or does it have military vessels? No. Chile and Argentina do and we do. Also, isn't it odd that the MoD budget is so much under stress and we are trying to increase the spend to 2.5% of GDP and we are going to fire 76,000 civil servants, but here is an MoD vessel being used for functions that are for BAS and for science and come under DSIT? They do not come under MoD at all.

David Rutley: As I said, there are commitments that we have made under the Antarctic treaty, and HMS Protector helps us with those functions. I understand the thrust of your question, Chair, but what we are trying to do here is use our assets to carry out a range of roles. The funding streams need to come through different Departments but they enable us to achieve our objectives.

Chair: I am told that another vote is imminent. Therefore, let's move straight on to question 8.

Q401 **Clive Lewis:** When we were out in the Antarctic, travelling on the Sir David Attenborough, not so much at Rothera, we did see a lot of shipping and a lot of tourism. What are the Government doing in terms of the rapid growth in the tourism industry in this area? Do you think that those operators could self-regulate or does it require more policing and more regulation?

David Rutley: It is an interesting question. As you say, there were a number of vessels there in a very sensitive area. They often focus, understandably because of the amazing environment there, around the Antarctic peninsula. We believe that it is important to regulate tourism throughout the Antarctic treaty and the environmental protocol. In addition, most of the tourism operators are members of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators. This includes providing practical management tools within the self-regulatory framework to ensure that members work together effectively to provide practical mutual support in things like search and rescue as well.

Coming to the point that you are making, it is clear that tourism is growing in popularity. New operators cannot be mandated to join IAATO and that is why the UK is advocating for the development of a comprehensive tourism framework. I wanted to get that on the record before we get caught up in any vote. Sorry, I am skipping through things but I wanted to make sure that we got that on the record. That needs to be agreed at an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. Tourism needs to be safe, responsible and clearly sustainable.

Q402 **Clive Lewis:** How do you police that? If you bring this new, robust legal framework in, how would it be policed?

David Rutley: It needs to be brought into place first, but carry on.



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Clive Lewis: Yes, so that is a great start, but clearly making sure that operators that are operating for a profit, one would presume, are going to do as is required, how do we ensure that they will do that? Obviously, shortcuts could be taken.

David Rutley: I am going to ask Jane to come in here because she deals with these issues day in, day out.

Jane Rumble: At the moment every tourist vessel will have some permit or authorisation from its national competent authority and that competent authority will determine sanctions. There have been examples of non-compliant vessels being denied future permits or being fined. The proposal that we have put forward to have an international regime is that that would make it more of a level playing field. Then it would be breaching international law, not just up to a state party to determine what sanction it took against a vessel. It would try to make it more of an onus on the flag state or the competent authority state that authorises the activity to take action.

Q403 **Clive Lewis:** It is one thing to be on a sea-going vessel looking at the Antarctic, it is another thing to go on land. Being on land, given the sensitive nature of the Antarctic and many of the unique species that are there, do you think that it is right that people should be able to go on to the Antarctic? Can that be policed? Can that be looked after in the way that is required and necessary?

David Rutley: Could I pay tribute to some of the work that Jane has done over the years, which is very well respected? We saw that in our travels. We helped to introduce the concept of site guidelines to the treaty system to support safe and consistent and well-managed visits to those sites. You are right that these things have to be monitored and reviewed. Jane, is there anything that you want to add to that? You have been doing some important work there.

Jane Rumble: Yes, my personal view is that people seeing Antarctica is more likely to make them engaged in wanting to protect it. Why should a scientist get to go ashore and a tourist cannot? That said, it has to be extremely well managed. We do not want to love Antarctica to death and we need to make sure that everybody who is making a landing abides by the rules. That will hopefully be part of the regulatory framework. We do not at this point have significant evidence of environmental impact of tourists landing, but obviously there is a lot of monitoring to make sure that that remains the case and that sites are properly managed and closed if you get any adverse human impact.

Q404 **Clive Lewis:** Some countries play nicer than others, don't they? We know that the US and other countries have not ratified key agreements related to Antarctic tourism. What are the British Government doing diplomatically to try to bring them to the table and to get them to sign?



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David Rutley: We are working with them bilaterally to encourage countries to do this. You are right that the US has an important role here, no question about that, given the weight of tourism from US vessels. That said, most tourism operators do sign up to these and implement these approaches in a meaningful way. That is a good thing but that needs to continue.

That is why I want to again come back to the framework that you talked about. It was clear at the last ATCM meeting, the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, that we were able to start negotiations on a comprehensive framework. At the next ATCM, which is, as we said before, in May, the UK suggested and submitted an outline framework and potential elements to be included in the framework. We have support working with Finland, France, Germany, India and the Netherlands on this. There is a bilateral engagement piece here but there is also a multilateral one. I think that the Committee would wish Jane well with these conversations, and I certainly do, and hope that we can make further progress. Hopefully, more of the consultative parties will get behind some of these other countries as well.

Q405 **Clive Lewis:** Do you know the main stumbling blocks and why the US have not signed up to these treaties?

David Rutley: The issue is that there are different processes. I will let Jane say this, but what I have learnt through working with the US is that it has a different approach to signing off treaties. There can be challenges in Congress but I do not know enough about this particular treaty.

Jane Rumble: I think that that is largely it.

Q406 **Clive Lewis:** Finally, turning to UK tour operators, site guidelines can be quite critical for ensuring the safe provision of tourism in those Antarctic areas. What are the Government doing with British tour operators to ensure that they adhere to those site guidelines and comply with them as well?

Jane Rumble: Our main operators are Noble Caledonia, Arctic Trucks, White Desert. We are about to take HX Expeditions, which was Hurtigruten. All those are members of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators. The original site guidelines were written in conjunction with the person who is now the boss of the Antarctic programme of Noble Caledonia, so we are very happy that our operators engage with us very closely. They are very keen and, in fact, they would like to see more site guidelines developed. So far we have good, compliant operators.

Q407 **Chair:** The timing is brilliant. Thank you very much indeed. First, thank you to both of you, David Rutley and Jane Rumble, for the evidence that you have given this afternoon, and more importantly for the great co-operation that you have given us on a visit to Antarctica and going back before that, right into the Arctic inquiry before. The level of co-operation



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and help that we have had from the Foreign Office and from BAS has been quite exceptional. We are extraordinarily grateful to you for it and, to a lesser extent perhaps, for the DSIT Science Minister. We are grateful that he was here, too.

Thank you very much for all that you have done. We will be producing the report sometime between now and the summer recess, within the next couple of months. If you think of other things that you would like us to have in there but you have not managed to get into the evidence this afternoon, do please write in and we will seek to add things as we go along. I hope that the report, when you see it eventually, you will view as being both well informed and questioning but none the less useful and helpful to the overall approach to science and geopolitics in Antarctica. Thank you very much for your evidence, which has been extremely helpful.

David Rutley: Thank you. May I just say something briefly, because we will all have to dash in a second? As I said at the beginning, we are very grateful for the constructive challenge here. We all recognise that there are key equities that we need to consider and move forward. The point that was made about the Antarctic strategy I think will be key. The report from the Committee will be important. Depending on the timing, I think that it will make it into the strategy that we will publish in the autumn. The timing works well and the sequencing works well. Thank you for the huge amount of work and for the work that the clerks have been doing as well. It has been genuinely epic. It has been very difficult to organise all this. We are delighted, in FCDO, in your interest and the way that this agenda is being moved forward cross party.

Chair: I think that you are right. It is probably the last time in Hansard we can say Dawn Amey, with particular regard to the writing of it all and the questions and the production of briefs, and Rebecca Lees have both been outstanding assistants and, indeed, our learned assistants' advisers. Thank you to both of you for the fantastic work that you have done. Thank you all.