



Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Stephen Doughty MP
Minister of State for Europe, North
America and UK Overseas Territories
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

The Rt Hon. Dame Emily Thornberry DBE MP
Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee

07 July 2025

Dear Emily,

I undertook to provide further information on some of the themes discussed during my evidence session on Monday 23 June concerning the Diego Garcia Base Treaty.

The main area was the future arrangements for environmental protection across the Chagos Archipelago. The UK and Mauritius are both committed to promoting the conservation of the environment of the archipelago, including its unique marine environment and biodiversity. Article 5 of the Treaty confirms that the UK will provide support and assistance to Mauritius in the establishment and management of its Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Chagos Archipelago. We understand that this will likely continue the prohibition on commercial fishing across the Exclusive Economic Zone, but is expected to provide for sustainable and/or traditional fishing in areas identified for resettlement.

The terms of the UK support to Mauritius are to be recorded in a separate written instrument, which will likely be an environmental cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The detail shall be reached with Mauritius in the coming months. My officials have already begun initial conversations with Mauritius to develop this. At present, we anticipate the MOU will cover the following thematic areas:

- Marine Protected Area: technical support for the creation of a high calibre MPA, and sustainable fisheries management in proposed resettlement areas;
- Habitat and Species Protection: initiatives to maintain the current standards in the protection of marine biodiversity;
- Scientific Partnership: building strong collaboration between UK and Mauritian scientific communities, including relating to environmental monitoring across the archipelago;
- Training and Capacity Building: providing the necessary skills to Mauritian officials in the above areas; and

- Disaster Management Plan: the establishment of measures to deal with environmental hazards, such as the grounding of a commercial vessel and the associated chemical and oil leakage.

This package will be supplemented by arrangements to cooperate on maritime security, referenced in Article 3 of the Treaty. This shall incorporate future patrolling arrangements for the archipelago and technical support for Maritime Domain Awareness, including information sharing through regional bodies like the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. These capabilities will be used – as they are currently – to counter Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as the trafficking of narcotics, arms and persons, people smuggling and piracy.

The Committee asked a number of questions about the funding of these cooperation initiatives. The UK will not be making any additional direct payments to Mauritius to support the establishment of the MPA. Our support shall be in the form of technical assistance as described in the Strategic Partnership Framework (SPF) signed by the Foreign Secretary on the same day as the Treaty. This is outlined in the Communiqué published on gov.uk¹ and includes:

- technical expertise to develop and manage the Chagos Archipelago Marine Protected Area;
- the provision of training and institutional partnerships to boost Mauritian maritime security capability and strengthen fisheries protection; and
- consideration of patrolling capability across the Chagos Archipelago.

As I explained last week, the SPF is much broader than these environmental initiatives and is intended to capitalise on the normalisation of bilateral relations with Mauritius following signature of the Treaty and provide a platform for strengthening the relationship over the coming years. Like many similar arrangements with other countries, it is designed to set a framework to achieve a range of shared goals, including in this case strengthening growth and trade, cooperation on maritime security and irregular migration, climate and the environment, good governance and institutional reform, and broader political cooperation, for example in multilateral institutions.

There was also a specific question about the comments in February of the Mauritian Fisheries Minister, the honourable Dr Arvin Boolell. His statement about the future issuing of fishing licences is clearly at odds with the stated position of Prime Minister Ramgoolam, though I note that the point he was making was more to do with sovereignty than fisheries policy and was made well before treaty signature. My view is that we should put more stock in the clear commitments by the Mauritian Prime Minister to the DEFRA Secretary of State at the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice on 9 June, and his confirmation last week (26 June) of the budget that had been allocated to the creation of a Chagos MPA.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-communication-uk-mauritius-strategic-partnership-framework>

In any event, I remain confident that the Government will reach a robust environmental protection framework with Mauritius in the development of the MOU described above.

During the evidence session, there were also several questions about the functioning of the Joint Commission, detailed in Annex 3 of the Treaty, which will first meet after entry into force of the agreement. I wanted to confirm in particular the appointment process. As is clear from paragraph 2 of Annex 3, both the UK and Mauritius shall appoint one senior representative as co-chair of the Joint Commission and four additional representatives. These individuals will likely be officials with related responsibilities from relevant government departments (for example, I expect it would include the British High Commissioner to Port Louis and the Commander of British Forces on Diego Garcia). The terms of reference of the Joint Commission shall be finalised in the coming months, well ahead of entry into force.

I would be happy, as I offered last week, to provide further information to the Committee on the environmental protection arrangements, the Joint Commission, or any other area of interest, when we have had more detailed conversations with Mauritius about the shape and scope of the cooperation arrangements.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen Doughty". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Stephen Doughty MP
Minister of State for Europe, North America and UK Overseas Territories