



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Stephen Doughty MP

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

Mr Toby Perkins MP
Chair, Environmental Audit Committee

24 July 2025

Dear Toby,

The Government thanks the Environmental Audit Committee's Sub-Committee on Polar Research for its report on *The UK and the Antarctic Environment* published on 9 June 2025. We are grateful to the Committee for its work and to all those who provided written and oral evidence.

The UK was the first to claim territory in Antarctica, and the first to ratify the Antarctic Treaty. We have long-term strategic, scientific, and environmental interests in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, and an enduring commitment to our sovereignty of the British Antarctic Territory and South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. We remain committed to upholding and enhancing the Antarctic Treaty system, which after more than six decades, has ensured that Antarctica remains the only continent to have never seen conflict.

British Antarctic science remains world-leading and ongoing investment in the British Antarctic Survey aims to ensure its sustainability to maintain UK scientific excellence into the future. Change in Antarctica has global consequences, and the rate of Antarctic change is accelerating. International scientific cooperation, as enshrined in the Treaty, is vital to understand and predict these changes, including to provide more accurate forecasts and predictions of the impacts for the UK and globally.

The Ministry of Defence also provides a vital role in Antarctica, supplementing UK presence with the White Ensign Ice Patrol Vessel, and more recently, developing capability to support the UK's scientific logistics through air drops. The Royal Navy contributes to hydrographic mapping, international diplomacy, scientific and logistical support.

The UK Antarctic Heritage Trust conserves British heritage in Antarctica, maintaining a number of historic bases and providing education and outreach on the UK's historical and enduring interest in Antarctica. As Antarctic tourism increases so the Government continues to engage closely with UK tour operators who strive to ensure their activities

have no more than a minor or transitory environmental impact. Many operators provide support for science and heritage work.

The Government also works closely with UK fishing operators to ensure the highest standards of safety and environmental responsibility. These vessels also contribute to, and support, scientific work, and in South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands they support the surveillance and monitoring of British waters.

This multi-stakeholder approach to Antarctica reflects the broad range of British interests in the region, whilst demonstrating a shared commitment to the principles and objectives of the Antarctic Treaty system. The Government is grateful for the positive engagement of all those with an interest in Antarctica.

The broad nature of the Committee's recommendations reflects these broad interests, and we will incorporate many of the recommendations as we develop a new Antarctic strategy, which we aim to publish later this year. The Government's full response to the Committee's recommendations is attached.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Stephen Doughty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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