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From: Commander J M W Topp, Royal Navy (Retired)

Diego Garcia
BFPO 485

QEB 264/001/95

The Commissioner
British Indian Ocean Territory

REC
13 MAY

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This has been the most encouraging of my three visits as your Conservation Consultant to the British Indian Ocean Territory. There is a greater awareness of the environment and the need to care and conserve.

2. My long report of 1 March 1993 raised a large number of issues and made recommendations which were approved in the Commissioner's letter of 25 March 1993. My letter of 15 February 1994 reported disappointing progress in the implementation of the Commissioner's instructions, and your Representative provided a comprehensive progress report in his letter of 31 October 1994.



3. East Point Plantation (EPP). It is more than sad to see that not only is EPP deteriorating rapidly but the excellent restoration work completed in 1991 is being thrown away because the job has not been finished. Wind and rain sweep through the whole Manager's House, shutters and doors are broken and there is still no sign of repair action even though the money was paid nearly a year ago for the work to be done. I strongly recommend you write to the Americans about this matter and/or put a metaphorical bomb under them at the US/UK Talks.

4. I spent three energetic days with 2 Filipinos, their chain saws and some machetes clearing the orchard behind the Manager's House and pushing back the ever encroaching vegetation. Just for the record we felled mainly a large number of invasive trees: *Hibiscus tiliaceus*, *Tabebuia pallida*, *Morinda citrifolia*, *Casuarina equisetifolia*, in that order.

5. Museum and Archives. As your Representative reported, the Display Boards were received in August but only 6 of them and not the 12 recommended. I brought out 28 colour photographs made by FCO from my slides and with help of ROPO 5, the Editor of the Tropical Times and his computer for the captions and a US civilian for backing paper, we made up 6 displays using 20 photographs. Now I am curious to know when the Boards will actually be displayed in the airport, Turner Club, gymnasium, medical centre or wherever - c.f. paragraph 2.

NATURE CONSERVATION

6. There is a general improvement in American attitude which is a product of increasing national awareness of the environment and its importance, especially among the young, and a willing appreciation that we share a responsibility for nature conservation in Diego Garcia. This is most encouraging. We also currently have a strong BRITREP who gets out and about and knows what is going on. All of this, together with your support, appropriate legislation, policing and education, greatly assists. Comments below and seeming complaints should be read in the above context and seen as extensions to improvement.

7. "Scavvy" Clearance and Grounds Maintenance. There is still an inclination to over mow and forget the importance of vegetation which is literally holding Diego Garcia together. I pointed out to ROICC, [REDACTED] an example of over mowing at the south east corner of the airfield where completely unnecessary pounding with heavy mowing machines has turned an area into semi desert. He entirely agreed and thanked me for telling him. Our problem is low level workers rigidly applying the Contract requirements without any common sense.

8. More serious is clearing *Scaevola taccada* from the shore. I wrote, at the request of your Administrator, on this subject with respect to the erosion at BOQs 6 to 9. The lesson has been learned a dozen times that one MUST leave a minimum of 5 metres of "scavvy" along the shoreline. I was therefore staggered to find one day that a coastal strip in front of the CPO Club, next door to BOQ 6, had been scraped clear. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I reported the event to BRITREP who instigated a Police investigation. It is only "scavvy" that binds the sand and controls the run off of the rain.

9. The Nursery. The Nursery was started in Palmsville in 1984 and provides plants for ornament and landscaping. It was flourishing. It is now neglected and has been for about half a year. The curse of Diego Garcia strikes again. A flourishing nursery obviates the need to bring in plants from abroad with all the disease and parasite problems that involves.

10. Flora and Fauna Once again I found some newly introduced plants but in other respects the flora and fauna appear unchanged since my last visit. You will be aware of the Viper and huge "spider" introduced by an aircraft from Fujairah in September 94 but intercepted by the ever vigilant BIOT Customs and done to death. The introduction of a malign species to this delicate island ecology would be a tragedy and a public relations embarrassment. An example of how this may come about is via SS Cleveland on her 37 day round trip to Guam and Singapore.

11. When SS Cleveland berths no precautions are taken to prevent fauna from slipping ashore. Containers are placed on the wharf and opened. Nothing is done to prevent alien flora and fauna

from escaping, nor are there any instructions by the US Navy to the contractors except a temporary order some while ago about the Brown Tree snake. We need to do better. Suggest this matter be placed on the Agenda at the next US/UK talks and the US requested to take appropriate measures.

12. Litter The huge amount of litter on the sea shore and just inland where it is pushed by high tides, comes on ocean current from far away; it is a Walrus and Carpenter problem. The drinks cans and filter tips (half life 17 years) come from human beings ashore and could be reduced. Prevention is better than cure. Education would assist prevention.

[REDACTED]

// 13. Britops Inclement weather meant I spent 3 days away for 3 hours ashore in the Salomons during which time I walked around Boddam. The only adverse report was that I saw what I think was a "Crown of Thorns" on the ocean reef. I took photographs which I will show to experts and report further if I am right. I hope I am wrong.

14. 1996 Expedition I investigated communications, stores, fuel, berthing, weather reporting and participation for the 1996 expedition and everywhere met great interest and enthusiasm and support for this project.

15. Weather Throughout my stay there was bad weather which made some activities such as botany uncomfortable and some like nature photography next to impossible. I feel Brit Rep could do better in this area. - a joke

16. 1991 Fuel Spill Air Ops South Refuelling Apron. I was given a full tour and progress report on this spill and the very considerable efforts being made to recover the fuel. I believe the US authorities are doing everything possible to make good this damage, in a thoroughly researched and excellent programme. I can supply further details if required.

17. [REDACTED] to PACNAVFACENGCOM in Hawaii and thus responsible for, inter alia, the Pest Management Plan (PMP) and the Natural Resource to Management Plan (NRMP) for Diego Garcia. He is a distinguished entomologist in his own right, has studied the insects of Diego Garcia for 20 years, was responsible for the introduction of the baculovirus to control the Rhinoceros Beetle and plans to participate in the 1996 Chagos Expedition as an entomologist. He is keen, under an PMP to eliminate cats and rats from Diego Garcia. Eliminating cats and rats will obviate the costly necessity of never ending cat culling and rat suppression. Elimination will be expensive and must be total or it is a waste of money. Funds can be made available. Both cats and rats are alien species introduced to Diego Garcia by man. The elimination of both species will be beneficial to other and natural island species life

especially birds and turtles. Such a PMP should be fully supported by the British Government.

18. Public Relations will be an important part of this plan. Cats have an "aaah" factor, rats do not and that is why it is sensible to eliminate both species simultaneously. On island PR should be left to island authorities. International PR should be arranged by State Department and FCO. Carefully handled this plan could provide international acclaim and praise. It could show Diego Garcia in a warm environmental light and counter successfully the adverse comment on BIOT not signing the Rio Biodiversity Agreement because of the US/UK Defence Agreement.

19. The way ahead should be for the US to forward written proposals as soon as possible for close examination and consultation with experts and thought about the PR angle and all in good time for the US/UK Talks in April to put the final seal of approval.

JM Topp

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