



Salomon lagoon

Environmental assessment

Members of the Trust's Executive Committee meet with other organisations to share experiences for mutual benefit. At one such meeting with the Southern Oceans Working Group of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum on 16 April 2007 your Secretary was made aware of the procedure in place for ensuring that the Overseas Territories fulfil their obligations concerning the environmental consequences of major works. This procedure puts into effect the UK government's undertaking as a signatory of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* to take into account the environmental impact of any major projects, and it is useful to take as an example the proposition to build an airport on St Helena.

Where there is inadequate local legislation relating to **Environmental Impact Assessments** (EIAs), as is the case in St Helena, the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) requires its consultants to apply—in a proportionate way—standards that would meet either the normal expectations of the planning process in the UK or those set by an appropriate international funding agency such as the World Bank or the European Commission, depending on the nature and location of the project. The procedures all tend to be very similar.

Faber Maunsell was commissioned to undertake the EIA process for the St Helena airport project and that had been running for eighteen months. In addition to their core assessment work, specialist advice and studies had been provided by several experts: for example, Philip and Myrtle Ashmole on invertebrates, Neil McCulloch on the Wirebird and Dr Aptroot on lichens. *Atkins*, the consultants procuring the Design/Build/Operate contract, had been developing reference designs for the airport and associated works in close consultation with the environmental consultants, and had been updating the specifications and **Environmental Management Plan** (EMP) accordingly. The implementation of the requirements of the EMP would be a contractual obligation.

It was expected that in September 2007 an Application for Development Permission, supported by a formal **Environmental Statement**, would be submitted to the planning authority in St Helena. This would be followed by a consultation period during which representations on material planning considerations could be made. An independent third-party reviewer would be commissioned to support the St Helena Government's review of the Environmental Statement. Despite the lack of specific legislation on EIA matters in St Helena, both DFID and the St Helena Government are determined to ensure that the EIA process follows the best possible practice. The EIA consultants are working on the assumption that their output should meet the normal expectations of the planning process in the UK.

On 16 April 2007 four consortia were in negotiation, two dropping out later, and these contractors were invited to tender in May. The two that accepted the invitation went to the island in June 2007. A number of key policy documents had been developed that cover strategic issues, including the **Land Planning and Development Control Plan** and, later, the **Sustainable Development Plan**. As part of the EIA for the airport project, the consultants had been tasked with including a strategic overview of environmental issues, so far as these could be envisaged at the current state of knowledge of possible future commercial developments.

The consortia's tenders will be evaluated jointly by the St Helena Government and DFID and, if all goes well the airport should be ready in 2012.

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