



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Foreign &
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Office



Department
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Development



Darwin Plus: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2015)

Project Ref No	DPLUS021
Project Title	Ascension Island Marine Sustainability (AIMS) – A Fisheries and Marine Biodiversity Project
Country(ies)	Ascension Island
Lead Organisation	Ascension Island Government Conservation Department (AIGCD)
Partner(s)	South Atlantic Environment Research Institute (SAERI), Shallow Marine Survey Group (SMSG), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), British Antarctic Survey (BAS)
Project Leader	Dr Nicola Weber / Dr Sam Weber
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	31/10/2015 HYR2
Project website	www.ascension-island.gov.ac/government/conservation/marine/

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up) (max 500 words).

The project is progressing well towards stated outputs within the agreed timetable:

3.1 Monthly inshore sublittoral surveys are now complete for a full 12 months (June 2014 to June 2015) and a full year of quarterly intertidal surveys is also complete.

3.2 September marked the 7th month of settlement panel photography at sites around the island. Panels deployed at one site were lost during a period of heavy sea swell.

3.3 Additional species records have been added to the increasing species inventory, particularly invertebrate records from the SMSG expedition in July 2015, which included collection dives and investigation of biogenic habitats including reef-forming algae. Unidentified specimens have either been despatched to taxonomists or negotiations over collaborative work are in progress.

3.4 A visit by British Antarctic Survey scientists and the research vessel RSS James Clark Ross took place in October 2015 for the collection of offshore biodiversity data, which are currently being analysed.

3.5 Analysis of benthic habitat photographs for inshore biodiversity and community associations from all AIMS project and SMSG sublittoral surveys has been completed. Settlement panel photography is continuing (3.2).

4.1 Habitat classification system is on-going, with continued collection of habitat information using sidescan sonar and validation using drop down camera and diving survey records.

5.2 Otolith collection, sectioning and reading is on-going, with 1164 otoliths collected, of which approximately 90% have been sectioned, with reading continuing. Arrangements for validation of AIMS fish ageing readings by external fisheries scientists have been made.

5.3 Approximately 560 gonads fixed, stained and sectioned with histological analysis and validation of reproductive status observations on-going

6.2 Inshore stakeholder consultation (Inshore Advisory Group), the final meeting before the proposed licensing conditions were taken to Council occurred in August 2015. Attendance was moderately successful with overall positive feedback of the process and recommendations from fishermen, conservation staff and other marine stakeholders

6.3 For the implementation of an inshore licensing scheme, recommendations from the Inshore Advisory Group were submitted to island council at the end of September 2015 for approval with an introduction of licensing and regulations projected for January 2016. A new Fisheries Conservation and Management Ordinance has also been presented to council which will prevent fishing in any of the 200nm EEZ (including inshore areas) without a fishing licence. We are currently awaiting feedback from HMG before the new legislation can be adopted.

7.2 Development of predictive models of abundance, these models have been developed for two commercially-sought tuna species and two species commonly considered as bycatch. These results are being expanded into an internal report, completion date set for end of December 2015.

7.3 Deployment of mechanical tags in the recreational inshore fishery is on-going. All 7 PAT tags of phase 1 have been deployed and 4 tags from phase 2, with 2 left for deployment as the opportunity arises. Three PSAT tags from phase 1 have transmitted data.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities (max 300 words).

Progress towards Output 8 remains limited due to continued discussion within the UK Government and negotiation with the Ascension Island Government as to the future of Ascension Island's offshore waters.

2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Changes will be discussed once a final agreement has been reached.

Discussed with LTS: Yes/No

Formal change request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance: Yes/No

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g., more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully as it is unlikely that any requests to carry forward funds will be approved this year. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project and would like to talk to someone about the options available this year, please indicate below when you think you might be in a position to do this and what the reasons might be:

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

N/A

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with LTS International through a Change Request.

Please send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g., Subject: DPLUSXXX Darwin Half Year Report**