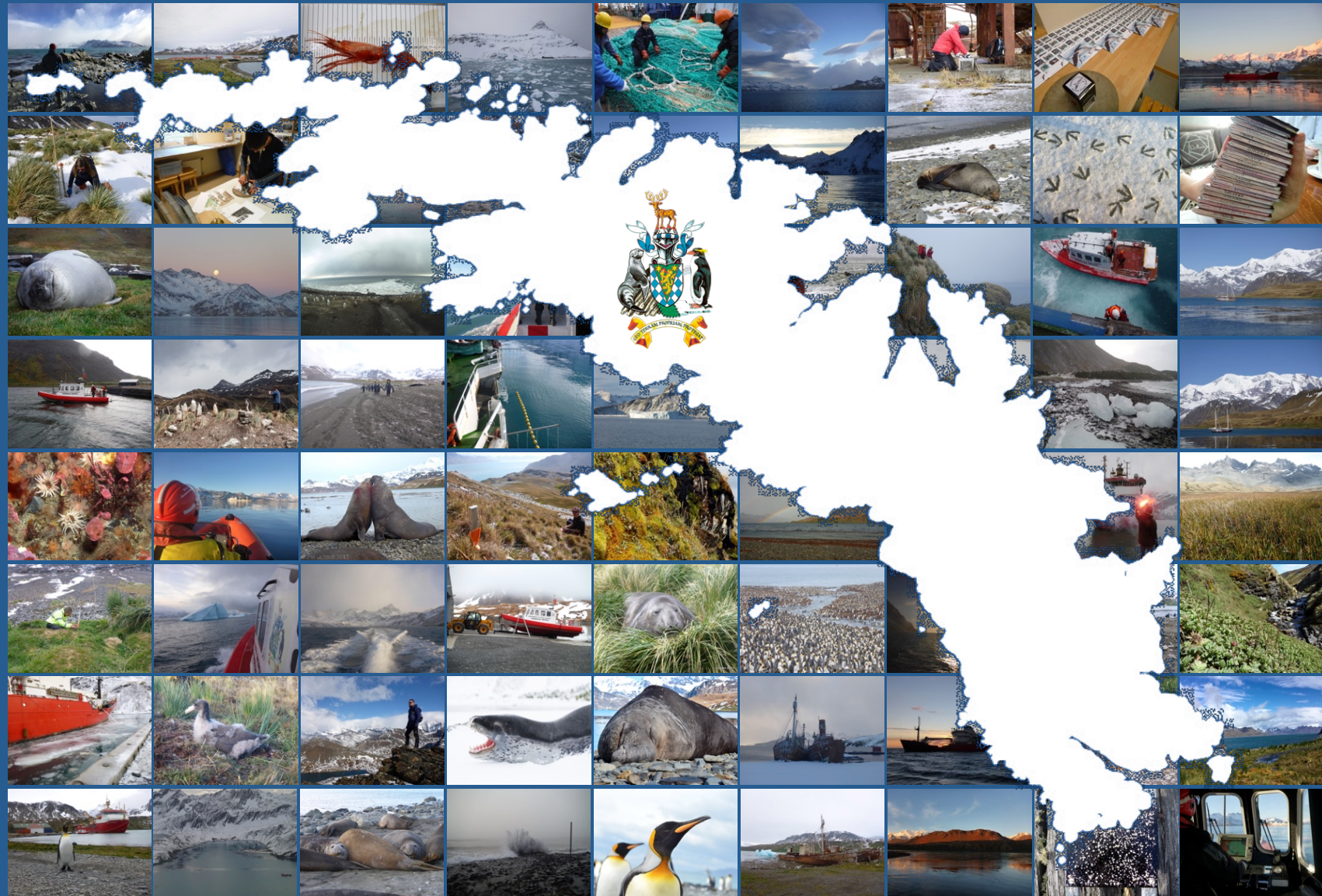


# Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands



Annual Report 2017

## **A message from the Commissioner**

It is a privilege to have been appointed Commissioner for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands and I would like to thank my predecessor, Colin Roberts, for his excellent work.

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands attracts significant historical and scientific interest. By virtue of its location it has been a witness to numerous pioneering exploits of the heroic age and offers a laboratory for modern-day researchers undertaking cutting-edge science in a region that acts as a barometer for the health of the planet. The increasing interest in our natural world, encouraged by extraordinary imagery such as that captured by the BBC's recent Blue Planet II, is turning a welcome spotlight on the environmental challenges that we face collectively.

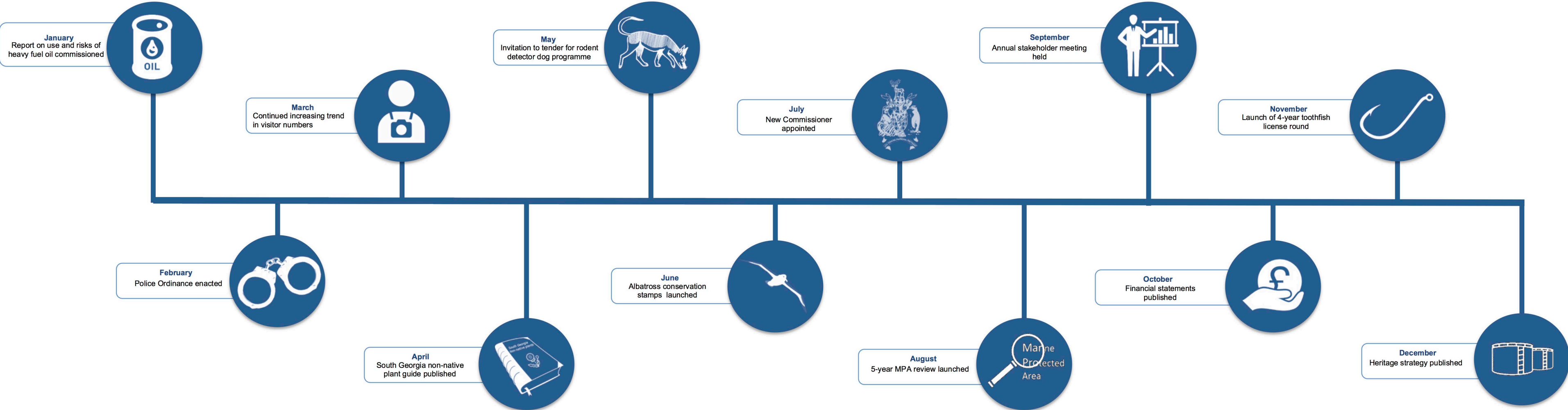
Our actions are guided by our ambition for world-class environmental management. I am proud of the significant efforts towards this end made over many years by the Government and by a wide range of individuals and organisations with whom we collaborate. These have allowed us to develop a reputation as a leader in this field. I have been struck by the nature of these collaborations and the passion and dedication of so many to conserve and protect this important Territory. There is no complacency here and, as this report outlines, work continues on a number of fronts to further these efforts. This includes the first 5-year review of our Marine Protected Area which commenced in August, our work on biosecurity where we are building on our already comprehensive requirements, and the Marine Stewardship Council re-certification of our world-class toothfish fishery due to conclude in 2018.

This report highlights the broad range of work with which the Government is engaged. I look forward to seeing the Territory for myself during my visit in 2018 and to working with our many partners and stakeholders to take forward our ambitious agenda.



***Nigel Phillips CBE***

**Highlights 2017 at a glance:**



## Governance

*This year we said farewell to His Excellency Colin Roberts CVO as Commissioner for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands and welcomed, in September, His Excellency Nigel Phillips CBE. It also marked the second year of implementation of our Strategy 2016 – 2020 which we launched in November 2015. The delivery of the strategy has continued to revolve around close engagement with our partners and stakeholders.*

We have continued our conservative approach to financial management resulting in our audited Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2016 showing a surplus of £1.86m on operating revenue of £7.56m.

The primary source of revenue was the sale of licences for South Georgia's sustainably managed fisheries. The toothfish fishery was the main source of income. Increasing visitor numbers further enhanced tourism revenues above our projections and that trend looks set to continue for 2017. These revenues were complemented by continued efficiencies within Government operations. A breakdown of the Government's main revenue and expenditure lines is provided in Figures 1 and 2.

The Government has now met its objective of holding one year's operating costs in reserve. These reserves will be important in allowing the Government to move forwards confidently where large-scale or long-term investment is required, such as in relation to biosecurity, management of heritage and in the removal of abandoned heavy fuel oil which surveys undertaken this year indicate will be required. We have begun implementing the recommendations from our internal audit of financial processes and further work will be undertaken on these in 2018.

New Commissioner  
appointed



Nigel Phillips CBE takes up  
post as SGSSI  
Commissioner in  
September.

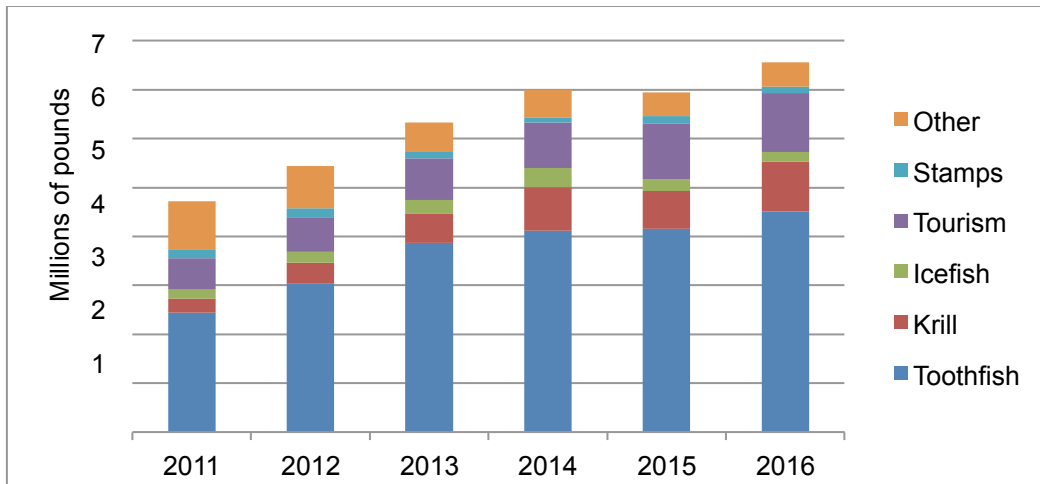


Fig 1: Breakdown of main government revenue lines 2011-2016

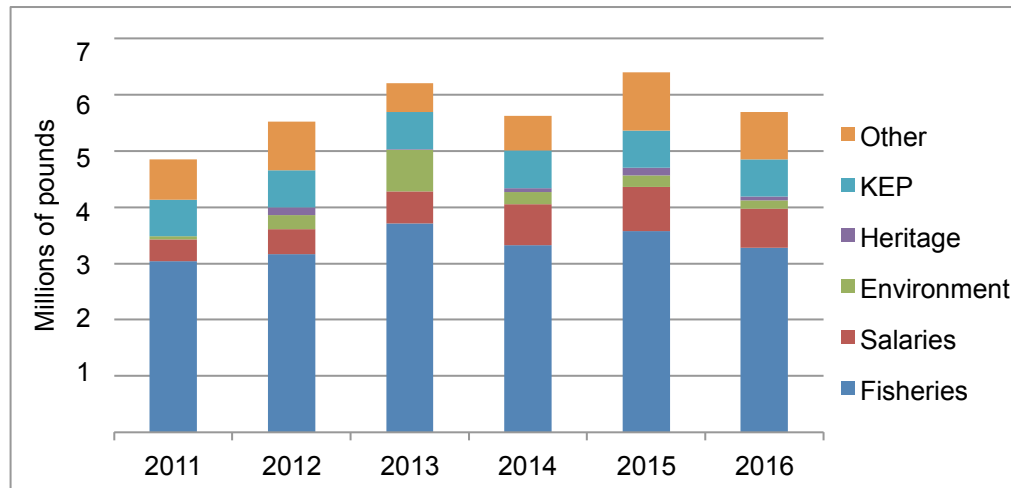


Fig 2: Breakdown of main government expenditure lines 2011-2016

Financial statements published



The Government has met its objective to hold one year's operating costs in reserve.

New legislation has been introduced in relation to policing. The Police Ordinance 2017 provides a framework for policing, replacing out of date provisions from 1967. Government Officers have been appointed as reserve Police Officers in the event that police powers need to be exercised in the Territory. Draft legislation has been prepared in relation to the administration of justice and immigration to similarly update legislative provisions as part of the Government's review of legislation, much of which dates back to the whaling era.

His Excellency Colin Roberts CVO hosted a stakeholder visit to South Georgia in March which provided an opportunity to discuss the work of the Government and partners and further collaboration and knowledge on environmental management, including in relation to other sub-Antarctic territories. In September over 70 people joined our annual stakeholder meeting at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office in London which provided an update across the broad range of activity on South Georgia and provided an opportunity to hear direct from some of our stakeholders on key projects currently underway. Collaboration with the Norwegian Government and Øyas Venner continues, including through a visit to Norway in September, and we are grateful for their support of heritage projects in the Territory.

We have been pleased to support the South Georgia Heritage Trust in their comprehensive monitoring programme to determine the success of the habitat restoration programme. The monitoring work, involving a team of rodent detection dogs and handlers, takes place after an extensive period of planning and preparation. The outcome should be known in mid-2018. We are also working with the British Antarctic Survey and Natural Environment Research Council to plan for the upgrade of key infrastructure assets at both Bird Island and King Edward Point to support the RRS Sir David Attenborough.

This year we launched new stamp issues on albatross conservation, landscapes, Macaroni penguins and the Platinum Wedding Anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. There have also been a number of new coin releases.

### Police Ordinance enacted



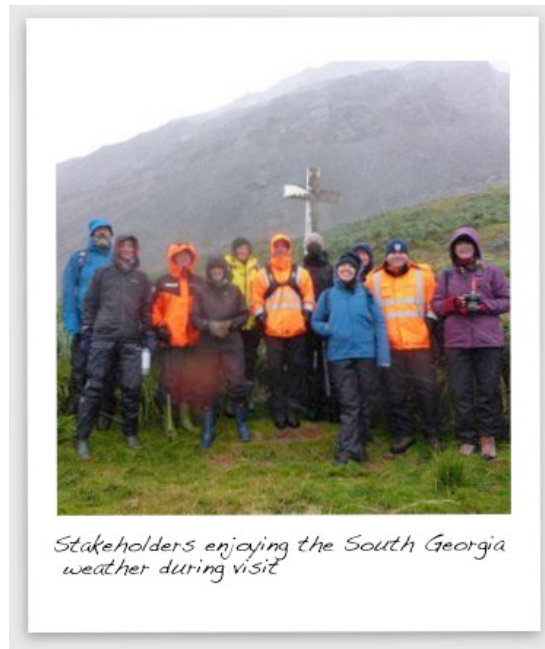
The Ordinance replaces out of date provisions and provides for Government Officers to act as reserve Police Officers.

### Annual Stakeholder meeting held



70 people attended meeting for an update on SGSSI activities in 2017.

This year has seen a number of staff changes within the Government. Jenni Sol started as Finance, Administration and Logistics Officer. We bade farewell to Richard McKee, first employed as Marine Officer at South Georgia, then Executive Officer and Director of Operations in Stanley. We welcomed Steve Brown as his successor, recently Director of Operations with Ascension Island Government. Sue Gregory replaced Paul Brewin as Marine Environment and Fisheries Manager, joining from the British Antarctic Survey. Sue joins from the British Antarctic Survey where she worked as a fisheries ecologist for the South Georgia project. We have created a new post of Visitor Management Officer, responsible for visitor management and biosecurity policy, filled by Ross James who joins from the Falkland Islands Government where he worked as Biosecurity Officer. Finally, Paula O'Sullivan and Emma Jones have replaced Simon Browning and Pat Lurcock respectively as Government Officers, both with previous experience at King Edward Point. We warmly welcome our new staff who bring a wealth of experience of South Georgia and other South Atlantic Overseas Territories. We thank our departing staff for all they have helped to achieve and wish them well in their new challenges.



### Albatross conservation stamps launched



Stamps celebrate 10 years of the Save the Albatross campaign and the launch of our Conservation Action Plans.

## Environment

*The BBC's Blue Planet II shone a spotlight on the environment and underscored the importance of much of our management approach to South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. Our focus on conservation and habitat restoration has continued. The South Georgia Heritage Trust has spearheaded a monitoring programme to determine whether South Georgia is rat-free for the first time in 250 years. The Government has continued to enhance its comprehensive biosecurity standards and taken forward its plans to designate terrestrial protected areas. It has also looked beyond its own confines to tackle some of the external threats to South Georgia's biodiversity.*

After many years of hard work the South Georgia Heritage Trust commenced their monitoring programme in October to determine the success of their rodent-eradication project. A rodent-free South Georgia would represent a remarkable achievement and a unique opportunity for the natural environment to prosper. The extraordinary efforts behind this work are timely; in August a team of cartographers at British Antarctic Survey re-produced a high-resolution updated map of South Georgia. The new map highlights the extraordinary pace of glacial retreat. Aside from the environmental challenges this poses directly, this pace of change will make similar eradication programmes much more challenging to replicate in future.

Biosecurity in relation to rodents remains a top priority and following a competitive tender process a US-based charitable organisation, Working Dogs for Conservation, will undertake a trial of a new biosecurity detector dog programme. During the trial period two dogs will be based in the Falkland Islands to check vessels for signs of rodents before they sail to South Georgia. The project is an integral part of the enhanced biosecurity provision planned by GSGSSI following the work to eradicate invasive rodents and complements a range of other pre- and post-border biosecurity measures already in place.

To ensure our biosecurity measures remain effective and reflect best practice standards GSGSSI undertook an annual biosecurity review in June. In the year to May 2017, 213 biosecurity checks on

Invitation to tender for  
rodent detector dog  
programme



Working Dogs for  
Conservation appointed to  
undertake trial biosecurity  
programme in 2018.



cargo and baggage were undertaken by Government staff at King Edward Point and at the gateway port of Stanley, Falkland Islands. Of the 926 items that were individually inspected during these checks, biosecurity infringements i.e. where biosecurity policies had not been followed, were detected on just 24. This equates to just 2.5% of cargo needing remedial action to ensure biosecurity standards were upheld compared to 6.7% the previous year. Routine Government Officer inspections of biosecurity procedures continue on visiting cruise ships and yachts.

As part of its ongoing work to manage non-native plants, and the final deliverable on a UK Government-funded Darwin project, GSGSSI worked with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, to publish a 'Field Guide to the introduced Flora of South Georgia'. The aim of the guide is to build knowledge and interest amongst visitors in the identification of non-native plants. Increased capacity to recognise non-native species alongside cutting-edge weed management techniques and rigorous biosecurity procedures means that weed management can be targeted at the areas that most need it and the likelihood of introducing or re-introducing a non-native plant species will be reduced.

In January 2017 GSGSSI launched a series of Conservation Action Plans to protect the albatross. Declining populations of the black-browed, grey-headed and wandering albatross has resulted in their designation as 'Priority Populations' by the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels. The main cause of the declines has been attributed to incidental mortality associated with fisheries operating outside of South Georgia's maritime zone. The Conservation Action Plans, are intended to guide actions required to improve the conservation status of albatross populations at South Georgia and globally. GSGSSI is now looking to better understand and address these external threats, and is working in conjunction with the British Antarctic Survey and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to undertake an initial study to identify where and when albatrosses are at risk so as to better target education, conservation and monitoring and in June a series of commemorative stamps to raise funds for this initiative was launched.

As well as projects to protect individual species, GSGSSI has been undertaking work to protect terrestrial habitats more holistically. In May it established a new collaboration with the United Nations

## South Georgia non-native plant guide published



Publication marks the culmination of the Darwin project and seeks to build capacity in non-native plant identification. Copies are being distributed to visiting vessels to support citizen science.

Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre to develop proposals on protected area designations for consultation with stakeholders. The project will use the latest systematic conservation planning techniques, and tools to assist in spatial prioritisation based on key biodiversity features, threats, geological features, sites that are important for visitors or scientific research, heritage assets and wilderness areas. The project will deliver GSGSSI's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and seeks to ensure the proper protection and long-term monitoring of the environment.



*Black-browed albatross as featured  
in Conservation Action Plans*

## Fisheries

*GSGSSI has continued to identify opportunities to enhance its approach to fisheries management and to underpin its operation of some of the best-managed fisheries in the world. The 5-year review of our sustainable use Marine Protected Area will support this. The effect of our precautionary management policy, underpinned by high quality science and collaboration with stakeholders, is increasingly visible on the water and in the stock assessments. GSGSSI's fisheries operate within an international context; our standards help to drive up others in the region and we supported the UK delegation to the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) at their annual meeting in October.*

We continued our work to further enhance sustainability across our world-class fisheries and marine protected area. We introduced 100% international observer coverage in the krill fishery, ahead of the CCAMLR requirement, and commissioned an analysis of the risks arising from the use of heavy fuel oil and of bunkering activity.

2017 was the second year of the 2-year toothfish licensing period. The six licensed vessels shared a total quota of 2,200t, a lower catch limit than that recommended by CCAMLR reflecting GSGSSI's more precautionary stock management approach. Industry-led implementation of new technologies to raise operational standards continued in 2017 including enhanced use of camera technology on a number of vessels to improve crew safety, provide evidence of compliance, assist scientific observers, and aid development of by-catch mitigation measures.

In August GSGSSI consulted on longer term licensing of the toothfish fishery with a view to supporting the long-term precautionary management of the fishery and provide scope for raising standards through greater operational security. In response to the consultation GSGSSI launched a 4-year licensing round for the toothfish fisheries in November. Updated licensing criteria reflect the importance of compliance, welfare and safety, raising fishery standards, and experience that will enhance the delivery of world-class, responsibly-managed, sustainable fisheries. Changes to GSGSSI's fisheries legislation, including to the compliance and enforcement framework, are planned to take effect in 2018, the detailed proposals for which will be subject to consultation.

Launch of 4-year  
toothfish licence round



Licensing round launched in  
November with changes to  
fisheries legislation planned  
in 2018.

The long-term scientific toothfish fishing programme at the South Sandwich Islands was continued by two vessels, in addition to a new research programme in CCAMLR sub-area 48.2 investigating the connectivity of toothfish stocks in the maritime zone to other regions of the Southern Ocean. Investing in research that provides greater understanding of our fisheries in a wider ecosystem context will allow enhanced stock and ecosystem management in the future.

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) re-certification process for the South Georgia toothfish fishery commenced. The final report and re-certification decision are due in May 2018. Successful MSC surveillance meetings were held in September for both the South Georgia toothfish and icefish fisheries.

2017 was the second year of the two-year icefish licensing period and two vessels fished. The biennial groundfish survey for monitoring icefish populations and the broader ecology of the South Georgia shelf was undertaken in January 2017. Survey results indicated trends of recovery in some previously exploited fish species and produced a healthy biomass estimate for mackerel icefish. The season's catch totalled 110 tonnes from a quota of 2,074 tonnes.

Krill catches at South Georgia were relatively low in 2017 with the season starting later than in previous years. The five licensed vessels fished a total of 134 days, catching 18,558 tonnes of krill (see Figure 3).

The "roaming" observer programme continued for its fourth season on toothfish vessels and the second season on krill vessels. The roaming observers promote best practice and ensure consistency across the fleet where possible, in addition to providing recommendations for improvements in protocols and working conditions, and carrying out additional observations and science taskings.

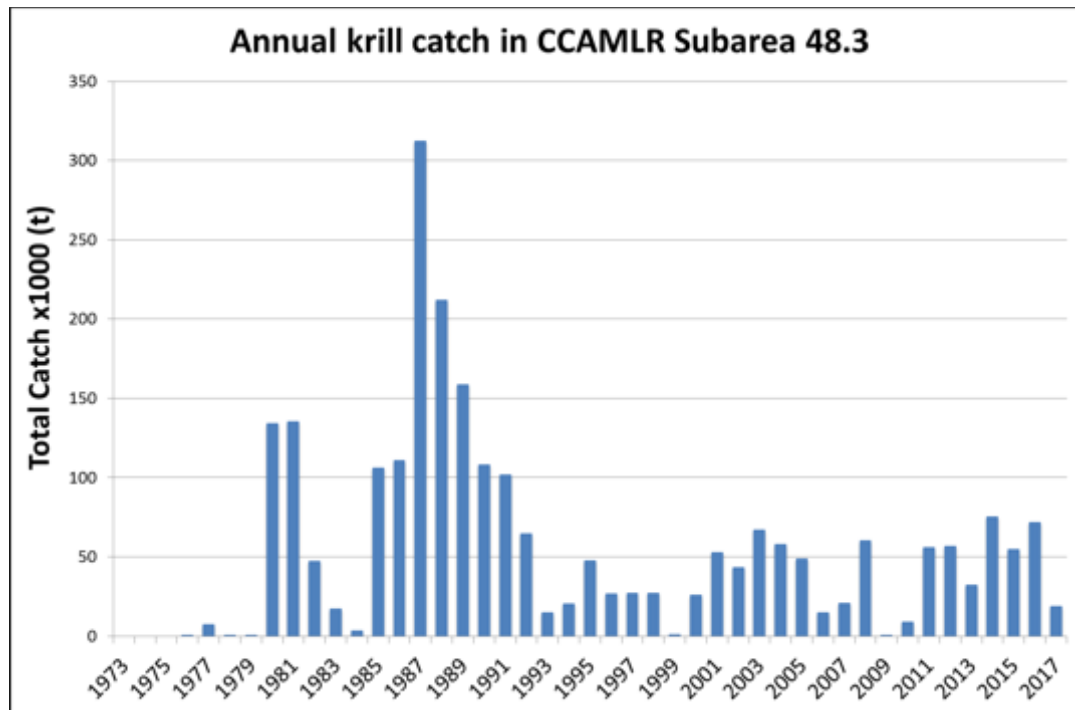


Fig 3: Annual krill catch in CCAMLR Subarea 48.3

GSGSSI launched the first 5-year review of its marine protected area. A data prioritisation workshop was held in Cambridge in May where a range of scientists and stakeholders collated information on research and monitoring activities at SGSSI, and in August GSGSSI invited stakeholder submissions to inform the review process. An an-hoc advisory panel was established to undertake an initial evidence-based assessment of the effectiveness of the existing measures around South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, and develop priorities for future research and monitoring. An advisory panel met for two days in November to review information, assess whether the MPA objectives are being met, and make recommendations on future research priorities. GSGSSI has appointed an

### 5-year MPA review launched



A data prioritisation workshop held in Cambridge Identified over 200 scientific publications relevant to the review process which is due to report in 2018.

independent, external scientist to chair the panel which hosts independent science advice and representatives from stakeholder groups. The panel is due to report to Government in the summer of 2018.



*Fisheries patrol vessel Pharos SG  
at work in the MPA*

## Visitors

*Visitor numbers to South Georgia reached a new record this season and we have sought to work increasingly closely with IAATO and directly with operators to ensure their passengers enjoy safe and environmentally sensitive visits. GSGSSI is conscious of emerging developments in the tourism sector and ensuring it is able to respond to those successfully, while maintaining high standards of conservation and biosecurity, will be an important element of its future work.*

The 2016/17 season continued recent trends of increasing visitor numbers to South Georgia with over 8,900 cruise ship passengers visiting the Territory. The passenger landing fee remained at £125 for up to 72 hours. Other visitors included Royal Navy personnel, science project teams, researchers and fishers. There were a total of 68 cruise ship visits and eight yacht visits with passengers from 62 countries. The largest number of cruise ship passengers came from the United States with 2279 passengers (26%).

Expedition applications returned to normal levels following last season's Shackleton centenary anniversary year, with six expeditions being undertaken this season (five of which were Shackleton traverse expeditions).

The Government attended the 26<sup>th</sup> IAATO annual meeting at which it provided an update on the recent GSGSSI-commissioned medical review which provides guidelines to operators on the provision of medical care for visits to South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. The annual meeting also provided an opportunity to update stakeholders on the project to develop terrestrial protected areas which has been subject to initial stakeholder consultation. This project will provide a more robust basis for our visitor management policy and provide an evidence-based approach to managing visitor sites, taking into account the different uses and values of the sites. It will also complement existing work in the Marine Protected Area and it will form a key part of GSGSSI's contribution to the UK's commitments to global conservation targets including CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets and UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Continued increasing trend in visitor numbers



Over 8,900 cruise ship passengers visit Territory making it the busiest year yet. Other visitors include scientists, media, fishers and Royal Navy personnel.

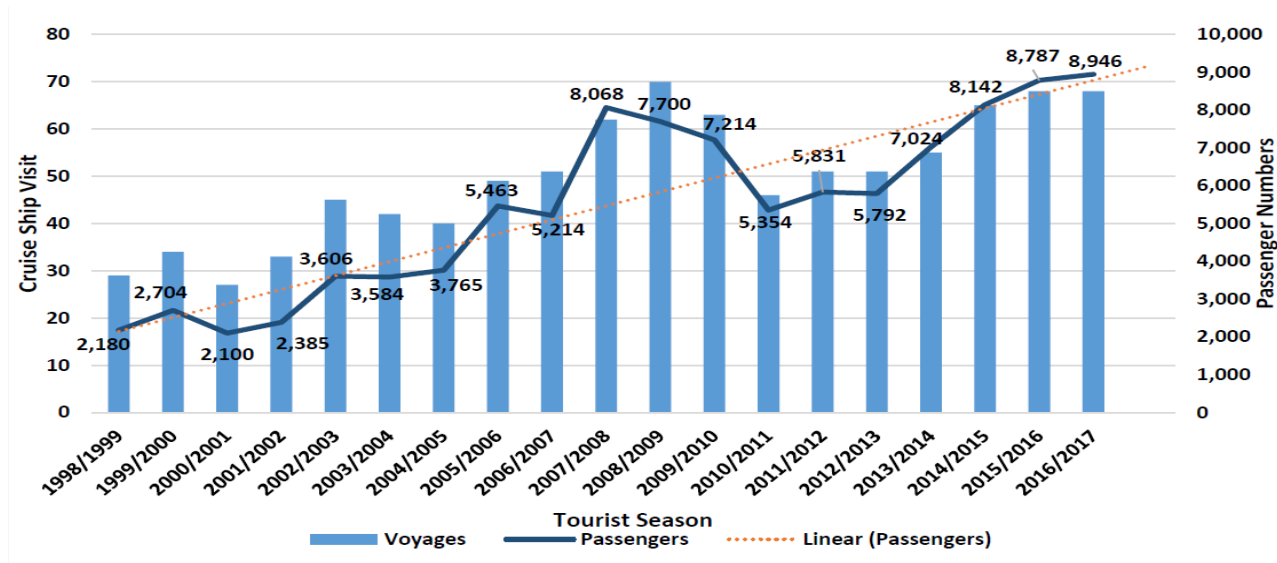
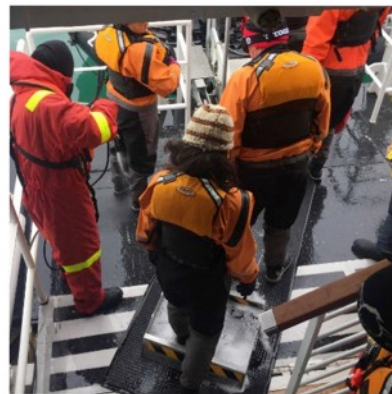


Fig 4: cruise ship visits and passenger number trends at South Georgia

Biosecurity remains a priority and spot-checks of visitors by Government Officers identified an overall high standard of biosecurity controls. Draft immigration legislation has been prepared following consultation and is due for implementation in 2018.



Bootwashing on cruise ships to help stop spread of invasive species



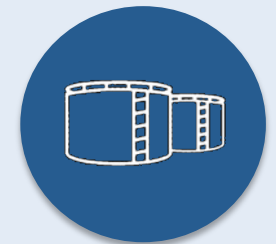
## Heritage, Works and Infrastructure

*We are delighted to have published our Heritage Framework and Strategy. This sets out how GSGSSI proposes to meet its heritage objectives and its guiding philosophy. A key aspect of this work is a Conservation Management Plan for Grytviken, due to be published in 2018. It will guide a more holistic approach to the management of heritage assets at Grytviken. Our annual maintenance and works programme, undertaken by our expert team of craftsmen and women, will continue to underpin this.*

The Government's Heritage Framework and Strategy was published in December. This will guide GSGSSI's future heritage work and sets out the conservation principles on which its approach will be based. A key element of this Strategy is the development of a conservation management plan for Grytviken for which an invitation to tender was launched. Following recent work to identify and record the Territory's heritage sites, structures and key artefacts, a process to prioritise these was commenced with the aim of facilitating their appropriate monitoring and management. GSGSSI also published its policy on the release and movement of artefacts which recognises the need to bring heritage to people who will be unable to visit South Georgia in person and to loan objects through the museum for display and/or ex-situ restoration.

The annual maintenance programme saw the completion of practical heritage restoration works on the church round windows using traditional methods. The central stores has seen the second half of the roof repairs completed. This sympathetic restoration has required replacement roofing sheets on the main roof while retaining the original materials on the lean-to. Historic and scientific huts, as well as the Prion Island boardwalk, have undergone inspection and general maintenance. GSGSSI continued to work closely with its Heritage Advisory Panel to discuss and agree its plans for the season and is grateful to the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage and Øyas Venner (Norwegian Friends of South Georgia) for their continued financial support for this work. The future plan for the central stores, working in conjunction with the South Georgia Heritage Trust, is for the building to be opened up and included as part of the museum and visitor experience. GSGSSI was delighted to reach

### Heritage strategy launched



The strategy defines our conservation principles and intention to develop a conservation management plan for Grytviken.

agreement with the Royal Geographical Society for an extension of the loan period of Frank Hurley's original lantern slides, which remain on display in the Slop Chest this season.

In March Adler & Allan Ltd carried out a survey of the former whaling stations on South Georgia to identify quantities and types of remaining oil waste and evaluate its condition. Their report identified options and estimated costs for managing the residual oil waste and protecting the environment. While no immediate large-scale environmental risk was identified some steps have been taken this season to address a small number of issues with potential to cause localised pollution events. GSGSSI will consider further how best to tackle the residual waste over the longer term. GSGSSI finalised its asbestos management plan which guides its approach to working in contaminated areas.

As well as continuing to carry works out on heritage projects GSGSSI continues to invest in and improve the administration and research facilities infrastructure at King Edward Point (KEP). This work is carried out in conjunction with the British Antarctic Survey. Continual improvement ensures that the modern well-equipped facilities remain in a condition suitable for their current use and for the expected future requirements. This year has seen the boatshed undergo an electrical upgrade and external painting, while the fire alarm system across the site continues to be upgraded. Works on the reserve water supply pipework from Gull Lake to KEP have also been commissioned.



*Grytviken church windows being lovingly restored by hand*

## Report on use and risks of heavy fuel oil commissioned



The report considered the use of heavy fuel oil and bunkering activity in the maritime zone. A survey of heavy fuel oil remaining in the former whaling stations was also conducted.

**Meet the GSGSSI team**



**Nigel Phillips**  
*Commissioner*



**James Jansen**  
*Chief Executive Officer*



**Steve Brown**  
*Operations Director*



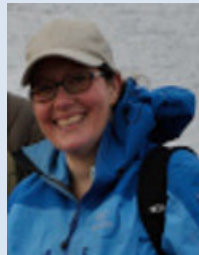
**Sue Gregory**  
*Marine Environment  
& Fisheries Manager*



**Ross James**  
*Visitor Management  
Officer*



**Jennifer Lee**  
*Environment Officer  
(part-time)*



**Jenni Sol**  
*Finance, Administration  
and Logistics Officer*



**Emma Jones**  
*Government Officer*



**Steve Waugh**  
*Government Officer*



**Paula O'Sullivan**  
*Government Officer*