

Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands



Annual Report 2018

A message from the Commissioner

It is a privilege to serve as the Commissioner for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI). This jewel in the Overseas Territories crown is truly one of the most remarkable places on earth. On seeing it, one cannot help but to commit oneself to become its steward. Indeed, I could readily describe good stewardship to be not only our primary objective, but a passion every member of my team shares.

In 2018 South Georgia was declared rodent free. This incredible achievement would not have been possible without the sustained commitment and funding provided by the South Georgia Heritage Trust. Indeed, it is through working with partners like the Trust that the government leverages its effect. Another key partner is helping us to ensure the Islands remain rodent free; following a comprehensive review by GB Non-Native Species Secretariat (GBNNS), we have identified areas where our biosecurity measures could be upgraded to ensure we remain at the forefront of best practice. Based on their recommendations, the government has decided to make permanent the extended pilot of a rodent Detector Dog Programme. Dogs are the gold standard of rodent detection and their employment is another example of the evidence-based decision making that drives government thinking.

Last year also saw intense effort in our Marine Protected Area (MPA). The culmination of the first five year independent MPA review led to a series of significant enhancements to the MPA that will further protect the Territory's marine biodiversity and ensure our albatross, penguins and fisheries can harmoniously co-exist. But the quest for knowledge can never stand still and in early 2019 the UK Government Blue Belt Programme funded the RRS *Discovery* to conduct research surveys of the South Sandwich Islands. The science from these surveys will contribute evidence to the next MPA review. It is perhaps not surprising that against the background of such significant endeavour, the Marine Stewardship Council re-certified our world-class toothfish fishery with higher scores than previously. It is in keeping with the philosophy of the government that the revenue generated from the fishery is used in its entirety for the protection and further understanding of the MPA. SGSSI is absolutely not a 'paper park'.

With the theme of stewardship running through our activities, we are looking how to manage the widely predicated growth in tourism whilst guarding against the risk of 'loving the islands to death'. Every visitor ashore brings environmental risk, yet they are also a future ambassador for South Georgia and help fund the various conservation efforts to which the government is committed. These efforts include the National Biodiversity Action Plan, delivery against the sustainable development goals, albatross surveys, seal counting and weed eradication. The British Antarctic Survey and International Association of Antarctic Tourist Operators are among a group of key collaborators.

In closing, I am delighted that this report highlights some of the activities SGSSI undertakes in meeting its strategic objectives. There is always more to do, but we have a brilliant team that comprises not just the eleven members of government, but all our partners, contractors and broader stakeholders. Like others who have through history visited this most special of places, we will keep pushing onward.

Nigel Phillips CBE



#SGSSI
Governance

“To manage the affairs of SGSSI and the surrounding 200 nautical mile Maritime Zone through efficient and transparent government”

Governance – Staff

GSGSSI said goodbye to James Jansen in 2018 and welcomed Helen Havercroft as the new Chief Executive Officer. The team wishes James well with his next challenge. GSGSSI also welcomed Mark Belchier, who joins as Director of Fisheries and Environment.

Governance – Financial

At the end of 2018 GSGSSI had over 1 year’s operating budget in reserve, building on our reserve growth in 2017. This reserve is necessary to ensure that we will maintain the required level of reserves by the end of 2019 to support expenditure on the wharf redevelopment at King Edward Point.

Our audited 2018 accounts show a surplus of £1.8m on an operating revenue of just over £8m. The primary source of income continues to be license fees from South Georgia’s world-class fisheries. But with increasing visitor numbers the level of income from landing charges is growing.

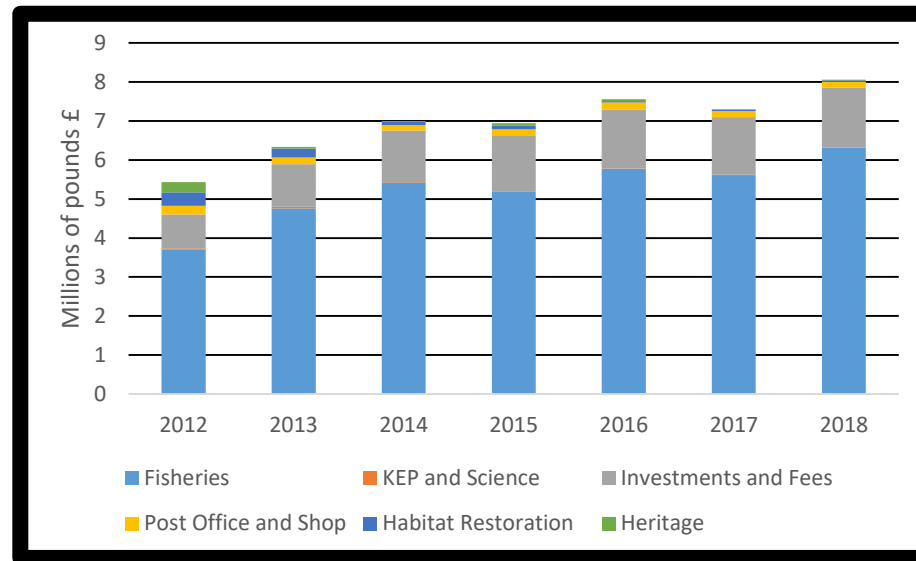


Fig 1: Government SG&SSI Audited Income

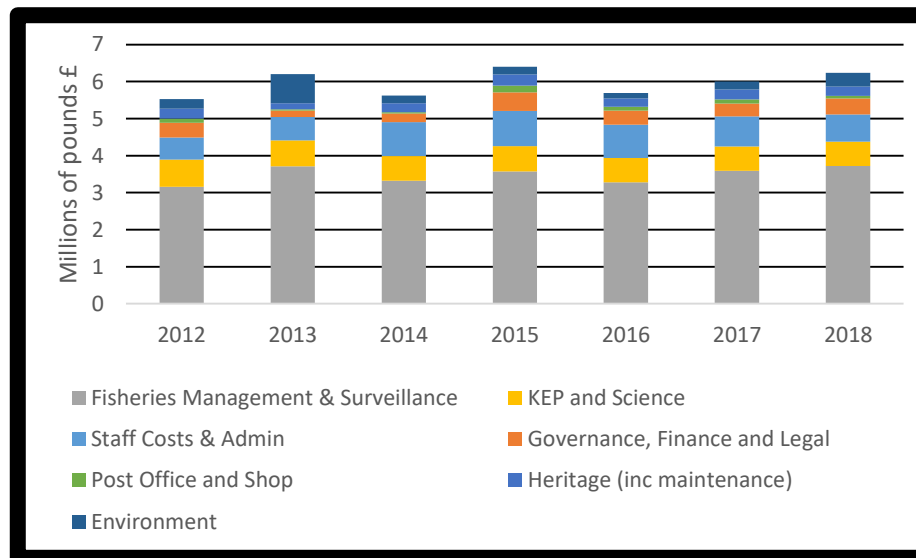


Fig 2: Government SG&SSI Audited Expenditure

Governance – Post Office

The Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) has two Post Offices. A small office is based at King Edward Point (KEP) and a larger Post Office is located at Grytviken in the refurbished Slop Chest building. The latter is predominantly used during the summer period to accommodate tourists and visiting vessels whose passengers wish to purchase stamps and GSGSSI merchandise including branded clothing, commemorative coins, books, maps, postcards etc. Stamps are a key source of revenue and a way to show to the world events that are significant in the Territory. During 2018, there were five new stamp and first day cover releases, which included South Georgia Mapping, Fur Seals, a Royal Wedding (The Duke and Duchess of Sussex), Migratory Species and WWI Centenary: Shackleton's Men. The migratory species issue was particularly significant as it was a theme which was shared across five UKOT's. Because of the large distances, the different habitats and the multiple National borders through which they pass, conserving migratory species presents a particular challenge.

The Post Office processed almost 700kg of mail (receiving 355kg, sending out 325kg) and sold almost 14,000 stamps.

Governance – KEP and Science

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 (BAS). 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 electrical upgrades in the boatshed and the Cook laboratory, the completion of the upgrade to the KEP wide fire alarm system and significant external painting. Aside from these smaller scale improvements to KEP, 2018 has also seen the continuation of the KEP Wharf development project which will see the KEP wharf upgraded as part of the BAS modernisation programme in preparedness for the United Kingdom's new research vessel the RRS *Sir David Attenborough*.

A permitting system ensures all visits, whether for tourism, science or media, have appropriate environmental and risk assessments in place to ensure that visits and activities are safe and environmentally sensitive. In 2018 GSGSSI issued 67 Regulated Activity Permits (RAPs) covering everything from use of UAVs for documentary film making to genetic sampling of whales. The number of RAP permits issued is increasing year on year showing the growing interest in conducting science and media projects in the Territory.



#SGSSI
Governance

“To conserve the Territory’s environment, minimise human impacts and, where practicable, restore the native biodiversity and habitats.”

Environment - Habitat Restoration

2018 saw the culmination of the reindeer and rodent eradication programmes and brought renewed focus on our biosecurity measures for both plants and animals.

Following the removal of grazing pressure from reindeer, non-native plants have flourished and so non-native plant management work on South Georgia is more important than ever. In the 2018 season, 2,833 square metres of the highest priority Class 1 species and 15,112 square metres of the more widespread Class 2 species were treated with herbicide as part of the 5 year South Georgia non-native plant management project.

As vegetation recovers from grazing pressure some species which were previously hidden have become visible and this year *Pernettya pumila*, the Falklands mountain berry, was found near Leith Harbour. It is likely that this was introduced during the whaling era with animal fodder and once fully assessed will be included in the management programme for 2019.

In 2018, Darwin Plus funding was obtained for a collaborative project with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and Indigena. The project includes investigations in to soil seed bank viability, quantification of the dispersal potential of existing non-native plant species and gathering seed and spores of native species to be added to the Millennium Seed Bank. Better understanding of the persistence and dispersal ability of non-native plant species is vital to inform the next phase of the weed management project due to start in 2020.

An audible reminder of the reward for the hard work of the recent eradication programmes and the importance of ongoing biosecurity is the ever increasing populations of the Antarctic's only song bird, South Georgia pipit. Just a few years ago was a rare sight, restricted to just a few off shore islands but now the endemic bird is thriving and can be heard throughout the coastal habitats of South Georgia.

Environment – Marine Protected Area

The highly biodiverse marine environment of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands received further protection in December 2018 when a range of enhancements and extensions to the existing Marine Protected Area were announced by GSGSSI. The MPA was extended to encompass the entire SGSSI Maritime Zone resulting in one of the world’s largest MPAs at 1.24 million km². New no-take zones, where all commercial fishing activity is prohibited, were introduced at the South Sandwich Islands trench (the deepest part of the South Atlantic) and in the south of the South Sandwich Islands- a region of known hydrothermal and high tectonic activity. Coupled with extensions to the existing no-take zones an area of 270,000km² is now fully no-take covering over 23% of the MPA.



#SGSSI
Environment

The enhancements were introduced following the outcomes of the first 5-year review of the SGSSI MPA which began in 2017. Following an extensive review period during which over 200 relevant peer reviewed scientific papers and substantial additional evidence were considered by an expert panel, in November 2018 the independent chair of the MPA review panel submitted their findings to GSGSSI. There was agreement that the MPA was meeting its management objectives and a range of measures were suggested for future consideration.

In addition to the new and increased NTZ's, extending the closed season for the krill fishery, prohibition of commercial mineral extraction, and restrictions on the use and carriage of Heavy Fuel Oils were introduced throughout Maritime Zone.

In December 2018, BAS hosted a 'Darwin Plus' funded workshop to discuss the development of a research and monitoring plan for the SGSSI MPA. Scientists, NGOs and fishing industry representatives attended the workshop which aimed to identify key research and monitoring priorities needed by GSGSSI to assess the effectiveness of the MPA in the future. It is anticipated that Darwin plus project will deliver the research and monitoring plan in 2019.

Environment – Invasive Species

2018 saw the culmination of over a decade of work to deliver a rodent free South Georgia. The final search for rodents was carried out in 2017 when three rodent detector dogs covered a total of 2,420km, with their handlers walking 1,608km searching for signs of rodents. None were found.

In February 2018, The Government embarked on a trial to prove the concept that biosecurity detector dogs could be used to effectively detect rodents on vessels and cargo bound for South Georgia, and therefore significantly reduce the risk of re-introduction. The Falklands-based project was delivered by Working Dogs For Conservation; a US organisation which specialises in developing conservation dog programmes around the world. The trial proved the concept and will be followed by an extension in early 2019, which will build on this foundation in order to deliver a permanent biosecurity dog programme. Biosecurity detector dogs will form a valuable part of GSGSSI's biosecurity system, and will help us to protect the legacy of the rodent eradication project; maintaining South Georgia as rodent free.

In March and April 2018, GSGSSI invited Dr Jill Key from the Great Britain Non-Native Species Secretariat (GBNNS) to visit South Georgia and undertake a critical review of our biosecurity systems. The review was extremely positive, and resulted in a list of recommendations to carry forward. A full report was published on the Government's website, but in summary, Dr Key concluded: *"On the whole, the actions being undertaken to reduce the risk of a rodent incursion to South Georgia are good. Specifically, there is a mix of detection devices being used, people are enthusiastic and aware. There are two additional new elements which would considerably strengthen the system if they go ahead: the rodent detector dogs, and new biosecurity facility."*



#SGSSI
Biosecurity

“To manage SGSSI fisheries to the highest international standards of operation, stewardship and sustainability”

Fisheries

Following consultation, 2018 saw the first year of the new 4-year licensing period for South Georgia toothfish vessels. Six vessels shared a quota of 2,170 tonnes (more precautionary than the limits recommended at CCAMLR) and the greater operational security offered by longer term licensing has provided scope for increased investment and raising of standards across the fleet. Compulsory electronic monitoring (EM) by cameras was introduced in 2018 for all toothfish vessels and is being used for compliance and scientific research, in addition to enhancing crew and observer safety. Industry-led initiatives this season included the deployment of cameras and sensors on longlines to assess impacts of fishing on the seafloor, and the installation of micro-plastic filters on washing machines on all toothfish vessels.

In September 2018 the South Georgia toothfish fishery was recertified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), and following an extensive review of management processes the scores for the fishery increased. An annual MSC surveillance audit for the icefish fishery was also successfully completed.

The research and monitoring fishing programmes in CCAMLR sub-areas 48.2 and 48.4 continued this year, and data collected by vessels and scientific observers contributed to a CCAMLR workshop held in February in Berlin investigating the connectivity of Antarctic toothfish populations across the Scotia Sea region.

2018 was the first year of a two-year licence period for the icefish fishery, and whilst two vessels were licensed, only one vessel fished this year for just 8 days. The season’s catch was 1.3 tonnes from a quota of 4,700 tonnes.

Five vessels were licensed to fish for krill at South Georgia in 2018 with a total catch of just over 23,000 tonnes from a quota of 279,000 tonnes.



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Conservation

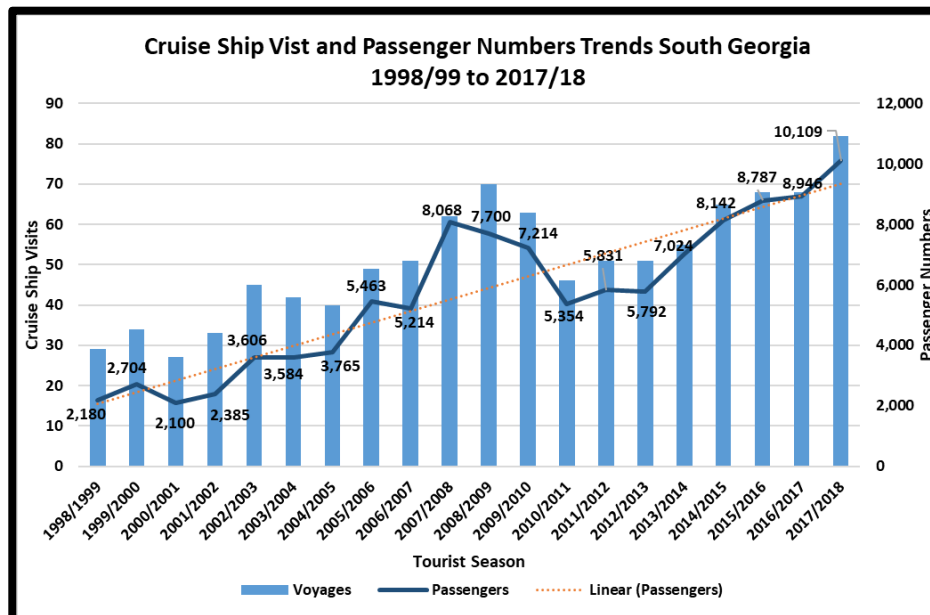
“To facilitate visits that are safe, responsible, environmentally-sensitive and contribute to sustainable management, creating future ambassadors for the Territory.”

Visitor Management

The Government attended the 27th International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) annual meeting, which provided opportunity to discuss with stakeholders the expected growth in visitor numbers over the next 5 years.

Unless carefully managed, increased visitation increases the risk of introduction of non-native species. To address this, a new system was implemented to measure the efficacy of biosecurity procedures on vessels. The system called the Biosecurity Audit, provides the opportunity to measure risk in a standard and statistically significant way. The results of each audit were shared with the vessels operators and tour leaders, along with advice on how standards can be improved. This resulted in a significant improvement in cruise ship biosecurity during the last quarter of 2018.

The 2017/18 season saw the continued trend of increasing visitor numbers to South Georgia, with over 10,100 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 82 cruise ship visits and 14 yacht visits with passengers from 59 countries. The largest number of cruise ship passengers came from the United States with 2,679 passengers (26%). Three excursions beyond the normal landing sites were permitted and undertaken this season.



“To preserve where practicable, and bring to a wider international audience, the heritage of South Georgia”

Heritage – Heritage Buildings

In the Falkland Islands, the Historic Dockyard Museum was given its own South Georgia interactive kiosk for display in the Polar room in the museum. This kiosk has been jointly funded by GSGSSI and the Norwegian Government’s Directorate for Cultural Heritage, and its purchase and presentation to the Dockyard Museum follows a successful winter loan of the kiosk from the South Georgia Museum.

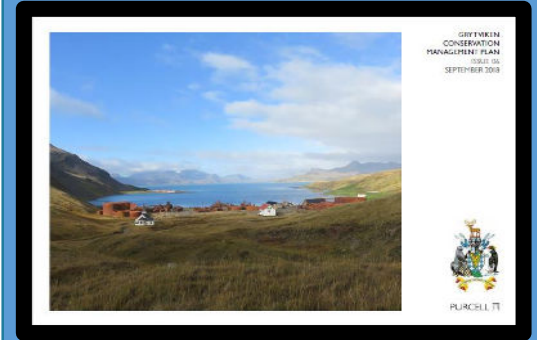
After the publishing of the Heritage Framework and Strategy document in December 2017, 2018 saw the completion of the Grytviken Conservation Management Plan (CMP). This project was awarded to heritage consultants Purcells, and in late March two surveyors visited South Georgia. As well as completing work for the CMP, specific structural and condition surveys were undertaken on the Main Store and the Flensing Plan, two areas already highlighted for potential work to improve the visitor experience and interpretation of the site.

Alongside the CMP project further LiDAR (light detection and ranging) scanning and drone survey work of Grytviken was undertaken by Geometria to complete the original 2012 data set.

Heritage works at Grytviken this year focused on the Main Store with final repairs to the main roof, the starting of the external painting and most significantly a full environmental clean of the inside of the building. The Main Store is being prepared to be opened up to visitors as part of plans being developed in collaboration with South Georgia Heritage Trust.

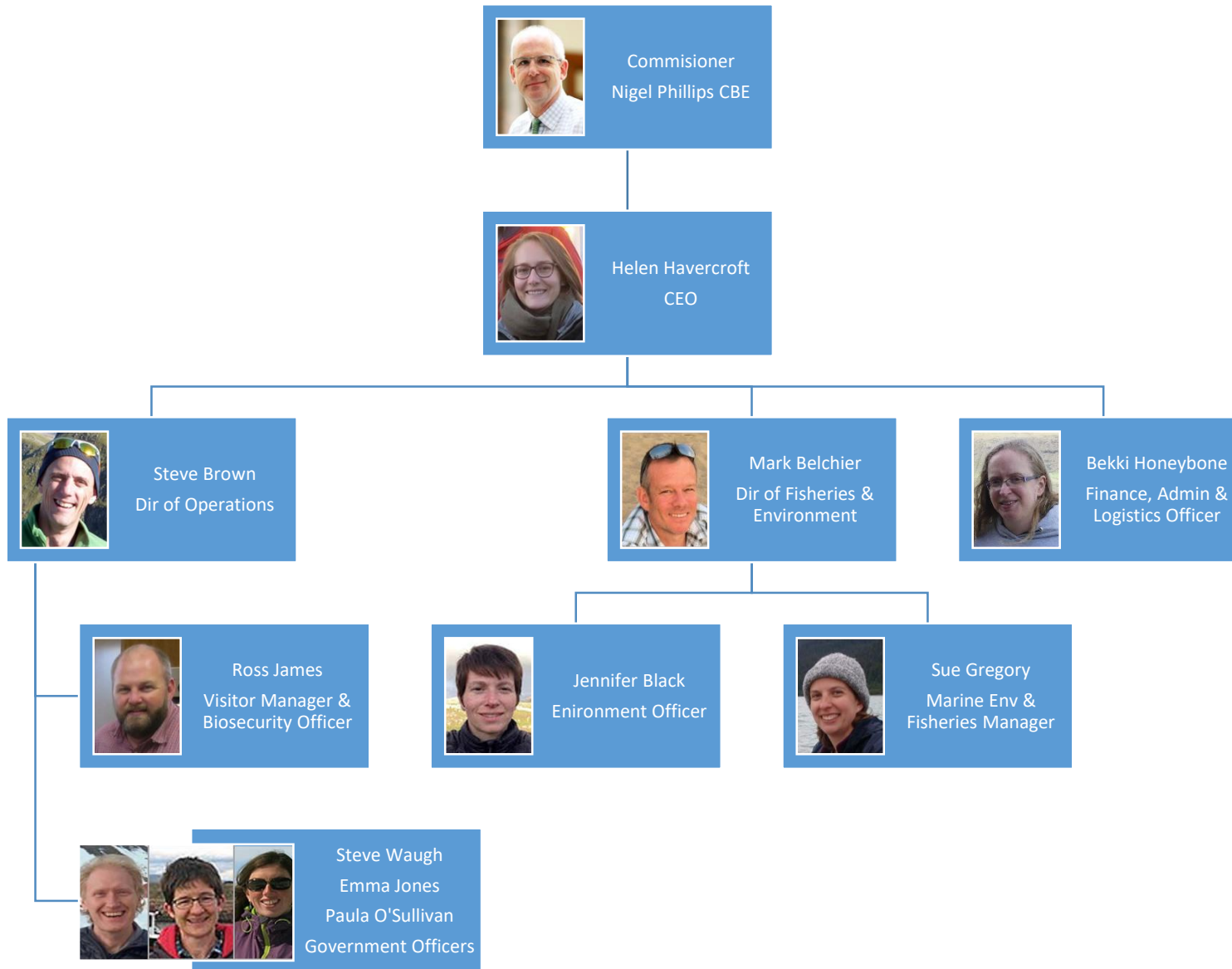
2018 saw all the Islands cemeteries being visited and a condition report compiled about each one. Shackleton’s grave in the cemetery at Grytviken underwent some sympathetic maintenance to the stone surround and Shackleton’s memorial cross and cairn at Hope Point was also expertly restored.

For the heritage works GSGSSI continued to work closely with its Heritage Advisory Panel to discuss and agree its plans for the season. These works were then undertaken by the GSGSSI Heritage and Building team.



#SGSSI
Heritage

The Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands team at the time of publication



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