



Annual Report 2019

Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands

Message from The Commissioner

What an extraordinary year the last reporting period has been. There have been some fantastic achievements. Whilst it is the Covid-19 pandemic that dominates our current thinking, it is valuable to reflect on the achievements of 2019. We showed that by working together with stakeholders we remain true to our principles of stewardship, environmental protection, world-class biosecurity measures and evidence-based decision making. The challenges of 2020 will not alter that commitment.

With the Islands declared rodent free our determination to keep it that way saw the permanent detector dog programme complete a full season, and a new important partnership forged with WD4C to help protect South Georgia for the long-term. Searching vessels bound for South Georgia is now routinely carried out in the Falklands. It is collaboration of this nature that will see both territories continue to progress.

Preserving hard won biosecurity gains is an overriding passion for us all. Work on this will never cease. Nor will our commitment to enforce and protect the conservation measures in our Marine Protected Area. Suspected illegal fishing activity was identified in our maritime zone in May 2019; the teamwork that underpins our approach resulted in GSGS-SI, Marine Management Organisation, our licensed fishing fleet and the Falkland Island Government fisheries department working together. Our fisheries patrol officer, Steve Waugh boarded the vessel in open ocean and carried out a thorough fisheries inspection of the vessel. Interpol and the vessel's flag state, Panama, are continuing legal proceedings.

An exciting new initiative to improve the visitor experience at Grytviken is being brought forward with the South Georgia Heritage Trust. The Main Store provides people with an opportunity to see a part of the whaling station that remains largely intact. This builds on the offer available in the Museum to tell the story of environmental protection in a post whaling era to a wider audience.

Lastly, December 2019 saw GSGSSI brought in to the search for a Chilean C130 lost in the Drakes Passage. The MV Pharos SG participated in the United Kingdom's response in what are notoriously dangerous waters. This endeavour was all the more profound as many of the crew on MV Pharos SG are themselves Chilean. I would like to take this opportunity to state my gratitude once again to the crew of the MV Pharos SG for their efforts; we are very proud of them.

I will end as I did last year – Onward!

Nigel Phillips CBE



HE Commissioner Nigel Phillips CBE

#SGSSI

Governance

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

Staff

GSGSSI said goodbye to Jenni Sol in 2019. Jenni had been our finance, admin and logistics officer for some years adding significantly to the role over the years. We welcome Rebecca Honeybone who joins us to continue to streamline our finances, support the logistical operations in Stanley and take on a bigger role in supporting the running of the South Georgia Post Office and Shop.

Financial

The 2019 figures presented for income and expenditure remain unaudited at 31 July 2020.

At the end of 2019 GSGSSI had successfully secured over £9.5m of income which exceeded our estimates by £1.3m. This sum includes a £650k grant towards the removal of Heavy Fuel Oil at the most polluting whaling stations. At the end of 2019 this was held in our reserves and will be treated as special expenditure when spent.

The total expenditure for GSGSSI was over £3m less than The Appropriation (2020) Ordinance 2019 totalling £6.76m. £2.75m of allocated special expenditure was not required during 2019 largely because agreement was reached to delay instalment payments for the King Edward Point wharf redevelopment shifting the expenditure to 2020 and 2021.

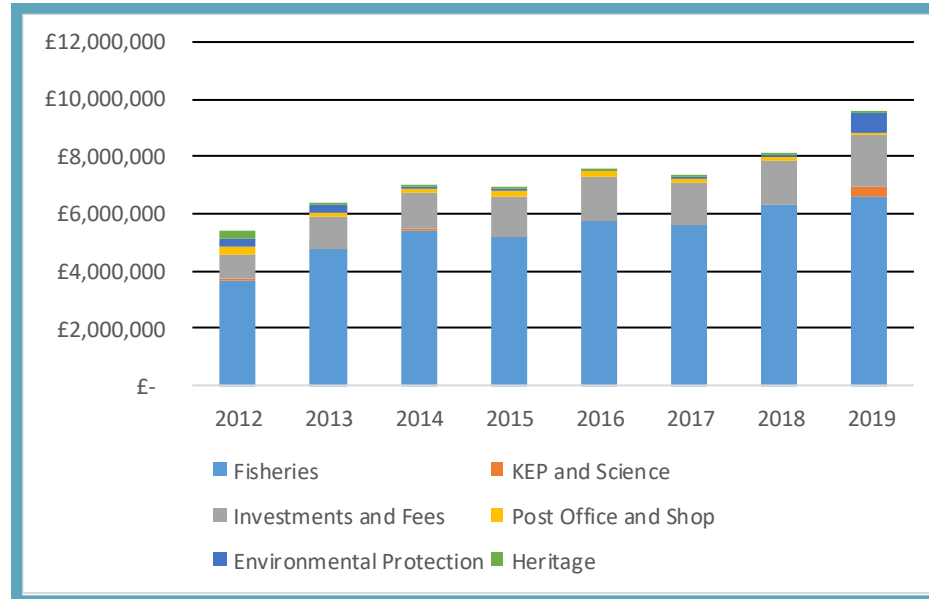


Fig 1: Government SG&SSI Unaudited Income

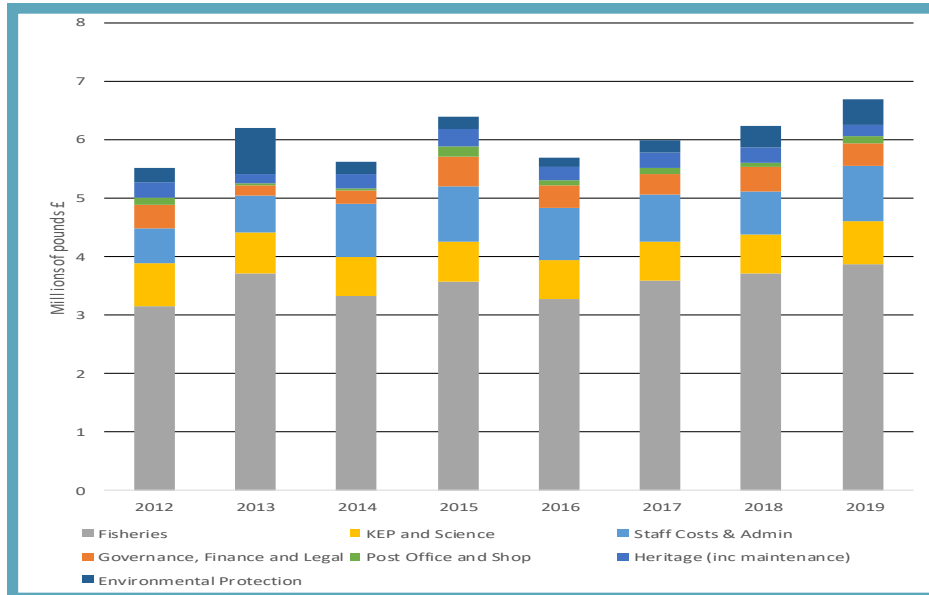


Fig 2: Government SG&SSI Unaudited Expenditure



Director of Fisheries Dr. Mark Belcher completing his tenure as Chair of Scientific Committee at CCAMLR 2019.

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Governance

Post Office

During 2019 a number of new high quality stock lines were successfully added to Post Office stock, created by artists with strong links to South Georgia. These included unique limited edition bronzes, beautiful hand crafted pewter black-browed albatross brooches, whale tail pins and a number of new mounted prints and greeting cards designed exclusively for the Government of SG&SSI.

The operation of the Post Office and the production of SGSSI specific stamps are important part of being an UK Overseas Territory and also an important source of revenue. They offer a far reaching opportunity to show to the world significant events in the Territory. During 2019, there were four new first day cover releases. These included:

- *Grytviken in 3D* the first 3D FDC released by GSGSSI from images taken using laser scanning technology used to map the whaling stations inside and out;
- *South Georgia Food* showing the foods consumed on South Georgia over the years;
- *Habitats Restored* which illustrated the native species now thriving following the various successful habitat restoration projects over the past 10 years, and
- *The Centenary of the Scott Polar Research Institute* featuring Shackleton and the Endurance.

The Post Office processed half a tonne (500kg) of mail, and sold 16,700 stamps and more than 1,100 first day covers.

KEP and Science

- 52 Regulated Activity Permits were issued in 2019. Slightly down in overall number of permits than 2018 but several of the permits covered multi-disciplinary science and outreach projects which suggests a trend towards a more integrated approach to science.
- In early 2019 archaeologists surveyed many of the former sealing sites around South Georgia combining new technology and traditional skills. This was the first heritage based project undertaken with the new Regulated Activity Permit system and will perhaps pave the way for more.
- There was an increased interest in media projects wishing to film natural history notably BBC series Seven Worlds, One Planet featured South Georgia prominently in its opening episode. This gave a huge global audience the opportunity to see the amazing wildlife on South Georgia and some of the challenges it faces.
- Research and monitoring of the South Georgia marine ecosystem continued from the King Edward Point laboratory for the 19th year. GSGSSI/FCO funded research in support of sustainable fisheries management within the SGSSI Maritime Zone was carried out by BAS scientists at KEP and focussed on monitoring population trends of penguins and seals at Maiviken and the ecology of fish in SGSSI waters.
- A new five-year KEP Science Plan was agreed. Highlights include the use of drones to monitor the breeding success of penguins at Maiviken and tagging toothfish with 'pop up' tags to assess the movement and behaviour of this species.
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the King Edward Point wharf redevelopment was completed in 2019. The EIA was reviewed by GSGSSI, independent experts and was available for public comment. 325 detailed technical comments were received. Each comments was addressed by the British Antarctic Survey prior to the RAP being issued and work commencing.



The first GSGSSI Grytviken 3D First Day Cover



Scientists at King Edward Point sharing their knowledge with some younger visitors on a trip to South Georgia

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Governance

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

Invasive Species

Director of Fisheries and Environment Dr Mark Belchier gave evidence to the UK Government’s Environmental Audit Committee enquiry into the threats and potential mitigations for invasive species in the UK Overseas Territories sharing with the Committee the successes evident in South Georgia and how others may be able to learn from their experiences to restore native biodiversity and habitats.

Biodiversity

The GSGSSI submitted comprehensive written evidence to the UK government's (DEFRA) Call for Evidence (CfE) on safeguarding the environment in British Overseas Territories. The submission highlighted that SGSSI are global biodiversity hotspots with relatively pristine environments, however, they are threatened by climate change, high seas fisheries activities and the introduction of non native species. Conservation of this globally important biodiversity for future generations is central to GSGSSI’s aims. By supporting diverse, well managed ecosystems we are placing environmental protection at the heart of GSGSSI activities. Given the migratory nature of many of the iconic species that call SGSSI home using the Territory as an exemplar to spread best practice is key to ensuring SGSSI biodiversity is protected through all life stages. By participating in international fora such as ACAP and CCAMLR we embrace and seek to further build on best practice to continually raise standards and provide a road map for other countries and start a dialogue on how we can best manage global biodiversity.

Invasive Plant Management

GSGSSI have an ambitious multi year programme for tackling weeds and invasive plants. This is part of a strategic approach to habitat restoration and follows the rodent and reindeer eradication programmes in previous years.

In the areas surveyed and cleared of weeds in 2019:

- 846 square metres of Class One species were treated this year compared to 2,733 square metres in 2018 showing a marked decline in plant coverage at treated sites.
- 10,976 square metres of Class Two species were treated this season. This is less than last year again indicating a decline in overall populations of weeds.

There were two notable weed species found during the 2019 work:

- *Rumex acetosa* (common sorrel) was found in the Karakatta Valley near Husvik whaling station, the first recorded for the island. Samples have been sent to Royal Botanic Gardens Kew for confirmation. It is likely that this species has been present for some time but has only become visible due to the absence of grazing pressure from reindeer.
- *Rumex acetosella* (sheeps sorrel) has been found on the rocky cliffs above Grytviken. These sites are not accessible on foot so new methods will be needed to apply herbicide to this area.

The invasive plant management team reported a marked increase in the abundance of tussac grass and burnet - these are two endemic species which were badly affected by reindeer grazing. These native plants are susceptible to being overwhelmed by vigorously growing non-native plants.



Credit: Martin Freeman.

Invasive Plant Management on South Georgia



Credit: Martin Freeman.

Invasive Plant Management on South Georgia

#SGSSI
Conservation

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

Groundfish Survey

The data collected during the GSGSSI led 2019 Groundfish survey will be used to set precautionary quotas in CCAMLR and for the SGSSI fishery. This is the longest running data series in the Southern Ocean to assess how fish populations are responding to climate change, and how they are recovering from overfishing in the 1970s and 80s.

Blue Belt Funded South Sandwich Islands Research

Two major research surveys were undertaken from the RRS Discovery in the South Sandwich Islands funded through the UK Government Blue Belt programme in support of GSGSSI’s management of the MPA. Project DY098, led by scientists from BAS, was the UK contribution to a multinational effort to assess krill distribution and density across the Scotia Sea. Project DY099 set out to investigate the biodiversity of the continental shelf around SGSSI. Led by scientists from CEFAS it focussed on the deployment of camera tech to obtain images of the biodiversity of the seafloor at the SSI, an area that had previously been very poorly studied.

The Licensed Toothfish Fleet

2019 is year two of the 4 year toothfish licensing period. Six vessels share a quota of 2,170 tonnes (more precautionary than the CCAMLR limit). For the second year all vessels deployed a range of cameras and sensors on longlines which continue to provide information on the benthic environment and the potential impact of fishing activity on the seafloor.

The small research and monitoring fishery in the South Sandwich Islands continues to provide valuable scientific data on of Antarctic and Patagonian toothfish populations

The Krill Fleet

Five vessels were licensed to fish for krill at South Georgia in 2019 catching just over 25% of the 279,000 tonne quota.

Marine Protected Area

GSGSSI played a crucial role in bringing to the world’s attention the suspected illegal, unregulated and unlicensed (IUU) vessel detected in late May and boarded by our fishery patrol officer. The Panamanian flagged potting vessel was apprehended to the West of South Georgia after illegally entering the Maritime Zone. GSGSSI notified international authorities resulting in the vessel’s detention and arrest in Indonesia. A multi-agency investigation has since established that the vessel has strong links to Southern Ocean IUU operations and had falsified documents by claiming to be a general cargo vessel.

Outreach

Sue Gregory (Fisheries Manager) represented GSGSSI at the South Atlantic Natural Capital Conference in St. Helena and at the Blue Belt Symposium in Falmouth. These presentations provided an opportunity to share with a broad range of overseas territories and Non Governmental Organisations what excellent work GSGSSI is undertaking to protect the environment whilst permitting sustainable fishing.



MV Pharos SG investigating vessel suspected of illegal fishing



Sue Gregory attending South Atlantic Natural Capital workshop

#SGSSI
Conservation

“The single most important thing an individual can do to protect South Georgia, is to practice good biosecurity.”

Biosecurity Detector Dog Programme

In November we were delighted to announce the start of the permanent biosecurity detector dog programme. This long-term programme follows intensive pilot studies and trials using specially trained rodent detection dogs to ‘sniff out’ rodents hiding on vessels or in cargo bound for South Georgia. The new programme is the best way to protect our rodent free status allowing native flora and fauna species to rejuvenate. Some species like the endemic South Georgia Pipit (the world’s southernmost songbird), are already showing signs of recovery in the absence of rodents. They are now a common sight and sound on the mainland where once they were reduced to a few off-shore tussac islands.

To deliver the detector dog programme, the GSGSSI have established a relationship with Working Dogs for Conservation (WD4C) who will provide ongoing training and support to our locally- based detector dog handler Naomi Baxter, and her dog Sammy. Naomi & Sammy will search all kinds of vessels from cruise ships to yachts, fishing vessels to fishery patrol vessels, minimising the risk of rodents ever reaching South Georgia again. These skills and capabilities will not only benefit South Georgia. There are already plans to use the biosecurity dog team to help prevent rodents from being introduced to rodent-free areas within the Falkland Islands.

Visiting Vessels Biosecurity Audit

The new biosecurity audit was implemented to build on the now familiar biosecurity checks previously undertaken on all passenger landings by the Government Officers. Its purpose is to accurately measure biosecurity risk associated with visitation to South Georgia, and to increase efficacy of biosecurity procedures, such that there would be an improvement on all landings, not just at Grytviken where the checks take place.

A pass rate of less than 85% is deemed unacceptable, and results in GSGSSI instructing the operator to make Grytviken the first call of their next trip so the expected improvements can be checked. The repeat audit process has assured us that the extra measures taken were effective at reducing the biosecurity risk. Vessels with a pass rate of between 85 and 94% were acceptable although recommendations for further improvement were made. Vessel’s achieving pass rates of 95% or above were classified as good, and as can be seen, improvements over the season can be identified in the results.

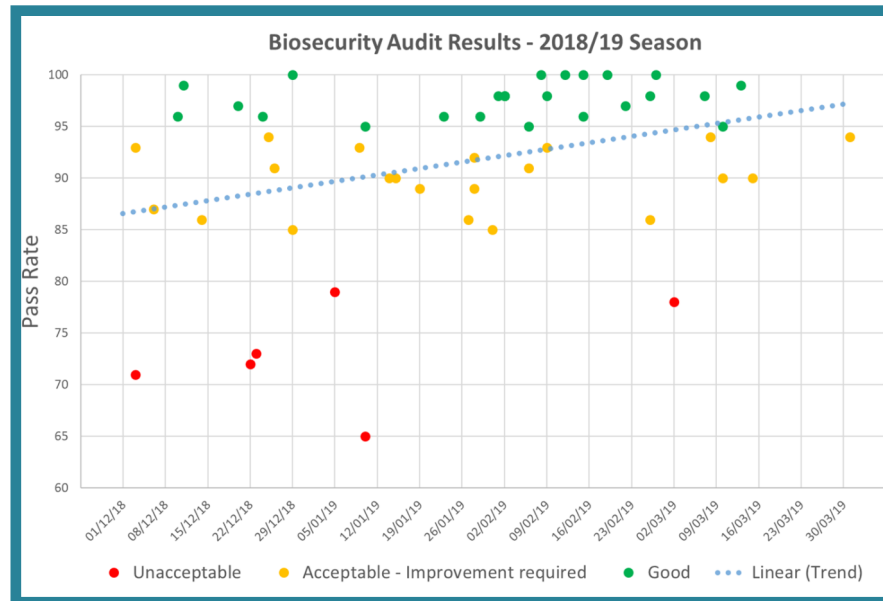


Fig 3: Biosecurity Audit Results



Sammy and his handler Naomi Baxter



Close attention being paid to cleaning boots prior to biosecurity audit

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Biosecurity

“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 International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) annual meeting in Cape Town, where we presented an update of the 2018/19 season, and took a forward look at upcoming plans and projects including seeking to strengthen the collaboration with IAATO given the anticipated growth in tourism.

Managing growth in tourism continued to be a key topic of conversation at IAATO, and has been a focus of effort for GSGSSI. GSGSSI took the step of restricting ship visits to Grytviken to 2 per day. This will help spread out visits ensuring the limited infrastructure at Grytviken and the Government Officers are not overwhelmed. The GSGSSI announced plans to undertake a review of current visitor landing sites, updating management plans for each and developing appropriate monitoring protocols to ensure that the ecological impacts of visitation are carefully monitored and understood, exploring a range of management plan ideas to provide early warning signs of ecological impact that requires mitigation action to be taken.

The GSGSSI and South Georgia Heritage Trust agreed that limited access to the ground floor of the Main Store would form a new and exciting part of the visitor experience to complement the Museum and Carr Maritime Gallery.

The 2018/19 season saw the continued trend of increasing visitor numbers to South Georgia, with 10,351 cruise ship passengers on 77 vessels and 10 yachts visiting the Territory. Other visitors included Royal Navy personnel, science project teams, researchers and fishers.

The 2018/19 season also saw a timely reminder of how hostile the weather can be when 86 passengers found themselves stranded ashore for a few hours at Grytviken before the weather improved for their zodiac rides back to their vessel. Thank you to everyone involved in their safe return.



Demonstrating safe and sustainable visitor landing on South Georgia

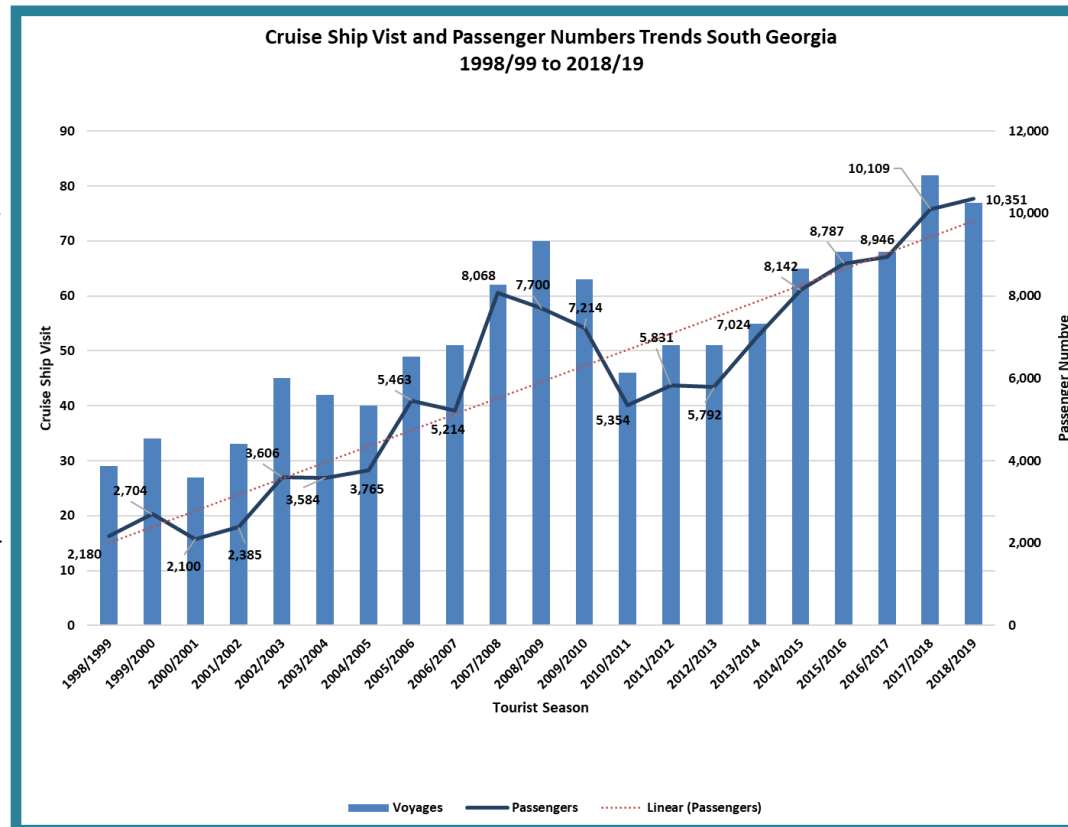


Fig 4: Cruise Ship visits and Passenger Numbers

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Discover

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

- **Grytviken—Conservation Management Plan**

The Grytviken Conservation Management Plan has been followed and a number of recommendations have been accomplished, one such example is the uncovering of the old ship slipway which is located in the Engineering side of Grytviken whaling station. Revealing this adds to the understanding of the engineering support that was available to the whaling ships when the station was operational and adds an interest point on the route to the cemetery.

- **Hope Point— Shackleton's Memorial Cross**

The memorial cross has undergone sympathetic restoration, following recommendations from the Heritage advisory panel.

The original cross is now going to be displayed in the museum allowing more visitors to access it. An exact replica was carefully crafted and will continue to brave the weather of South Georgia on Hope Point.

- **Grytviken—Main Store**

The Main Store is probably the most intact original building at Grytviken. Work has been ongoing over numerous seasons to maintain the condition of this building including external painting of the building in its original colour scheme.

- **Grytviken Cemetery—Shackleton’s Grave**

Anyone who has heard of Sir Ernest Shackleton and his incredible Antarctic adventure will wish to visit his grave in the Grytviken Cemetery. It is certainly one of the most visited sites in South Georgia. The visitor ‘footfall’ to the cemetery has taken its toll, so this year and during a break in cruise vessel arrivals and visitors ashore some urgent restoration work was completed including stabilising the ground around the grave. This work was in addition to the regular maintenance which is carried out annually to the cemetery and graves.

- **Grytviken - Whale Oil / Fuel Tanks**

The tanks at Grytviken are seen as iconic structures, partly because of their size and sheer dominance in the station. The condition of these tanks varies, with some being in good condition and some in a far worse state. Some experimental work was undertaken to stabilise one of the tanks which was just starting to deteriorate, this work will be monitored and if successful it will be potentially be used to help maintain the condition of the remaining tanks at Grytviken, with a procedure that could be replicated at other stations.

Outreach and Collaboration

The Falkland Islands Museum and National Trust already house an Antarctic room with one of our kiosks and in 2019 an exhibition of artwork by Theo Crutchley-Mack was hosted in the museum. Theo spent time on South Georgia as the artist in residence focussing his artwork on the whaling station structures and vessels.



Left: The whaler 'Petrel' and the newly exposed slip way



Right: Shackleton Memorial cross at Hope Point



Above: Grytviken Main Store restored to original colour scheme

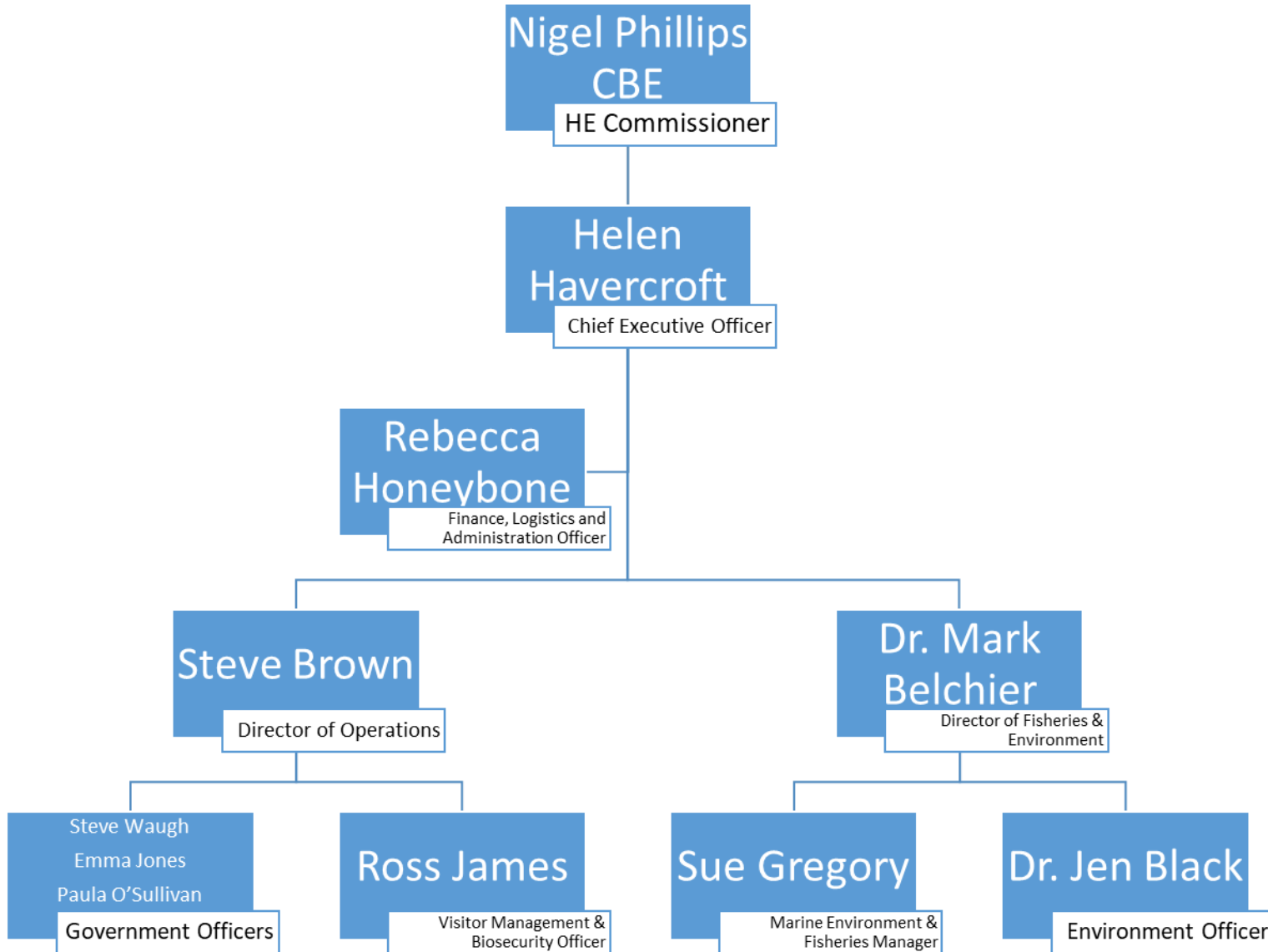


Left: Shackleton's grave following restoration

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Heritage

The Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands



This organisational chart is correct as of July 2020.

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