

JNCC – UK Overseas Territories Report Series

**Coral Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories Working Group (C-COT)
Roadmap (5–10 year plan)**



Report Number: 4
Authors: Kalli De Meyer
Publication date: August 2024
ISSN: 2753-6270
Front cover photo: © Alex Mustard

This report has been produced as part of the JNCC – UK Overseas Territories Report Series for the JNCC-led programme of work: Building Environmental Resilience and Security in a Changing Climate through Biodiversity Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories. JNCC is supporting the UK Overseas Territories to build the resilience of key ecosystems through a nature-based solutions approach.

Project details

This report forms one of the outputs for the Darwin Plus funded project, *A collaborative approach to coral disease in the UK OTs* (DPLUS 147). The report was led by project partner Kalli De Meyer [Nature2] in conjunction with JNCC and the Coral Reef Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories (C-COT) working group.

This document should be cited as

De Meyer, K. 2024. Coral Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories Working Group (C-COT) Roadmap (5–10 year plan). *JNCC – UK Overseas Territories Report 4*, JNCC, Peterborough, ISSN 2753-6270. <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/8ffe723d-1f89-4a77-a67a-26849b2c4a44>.

Acknowledgments:

This report acknowledges contributions and guidance from members of the Coral Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories (C-COT) working group and report editing from JNCC. The report was funded by the UK Government through Darwin Plus.

Evidence Quality Assurance:

This document is compliant with JNCC's [Evidence Quality Assurance Policy](#).

Summary

The Coral Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories (C-COT) working group was established in response to a call from the UK Overseas Territories (OTs) for more cross OT working and a need to galvanise a response to the new and highly invasive coral disease, stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD).

Darwin Plus project 147 is a partnership between the governments of the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Support is provided by regional network expert, Kalli De Meyer (C-COT Chairperson and Director at Nature2) and science support is provided by Dr Greta Aeby. Recognising the broad scale of threats to coral reef ecosystems, the project shares knowledge and resources across all the Caribbean and Western Atlantic OTs, including Anguilla, Bermuda, and Montserrat. Monthly virtual meetings and the use of an on-line Microsoft TEAMS resource repository enable partners to share their experiences with Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD), collaborate with experts in the field, present results of treatment and management interventions, share outreach resources, and benefit from training and capacity building initiatives.

Consultations around the future of the C-COT working group began at the C-COT Miami workshop in June 2023 and were led by Kalli De Meyer. Following the workshop, the findings were written up and presented back to the group in plenary and through individual online meetings. This report presents the findings of these consultations.

The confounding message from these consultations indicate that C-COT members feel the working group has been highly beneficial, and that they would like it to continue. The future Roadmap of C-COT can be summarised by five themes: the C-COT Secretariat, fundraising, representation, managing coral reefs and capacity building.

These themes, as well as the details outlined below, will form the basis for an initial one-year plan for running the C-COT Secretariat, strengthening academic and regional linkages, and addressing priority areas such as data management. During this time a longer-term (3–5 years) bid will be developed through C-COT that will address the full suite of actions for the future of the group.



Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. C-COT	1
1.2. Roadmap	1
2. Methodology	2
3. Results – Road Map Recommendations	3
3.1. Themes.....	3
3.2. C-COT and the C-COT Secretariat	3
3.2.1. Recommendations	4
3.3. Fundraising.....	6
3.3.1. Recommendations	6
3.4. Representation and networking.....	7
3.4.1. Recommendations	7
3.5. Managing coral reefs	9
3.5.1. Recommendations	9
3.6. Capacity building, training and resource sharing.....	11
3.6.1. Recommendations	11
4. Next steps.....	13
4.1. Short-term.....	13
4.2. Longer-term	13



1. Introduction

1.1. C-COT

The Coral Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories (C-COT) working group (previously called the 'Collaborative Coral Reef Working Group', CCRWG) was established in response to a call from the UK Overseas Territories (OTs) for more cross OT working. The group was first piloted with funding from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in December 2020. In early 2021, C-COT was formally established through funding provided via Darwin Plus project number 147 'Collaborative approach to managing coral disease in UK Overseas Territories', with funding until March 2024. The project was developed in response to the need for a cross-territory collaborative approach in addressing the emerging threat of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD), first identified in the UK OTs in 2019.

The project is a partnership between the governments of the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands, the first OTs to find SCTLD in their waters. Support is provided by regional network expert, Kalli De Meyer (C-COT Chairperson and Director at Nature2) and science support is provided by Dr Greta Aeby. Recognising the broad scale of threats to coral reef ecosystems, the project shares knowledge, and resources across the Caribbean and Western Atlantic OTs, bringing together government and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) representatives from Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, and other key stakeholders.

C-COT meetings also provide an opportunity to hear from experts in the field of coral reef conservation and to discuss how members choose to benefit from project resources, such as facilitated and funded training initiatives. The Secretariat, made up of Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) staff members and group Chair Kalli De Meyer, host and maintain online meetings, network with regional bodies, and provide science and other support services. Monthly virtual meetings and the use of an online Microsoft TEAMS resource repository enable partners to share their experiences with SCTLD, collaborate with experts in the field, present results of treatment and management interventions, share outreach resources, and benefit from training and capacity building initiatives.

1.2. Roadmap

This Roadmap provides a forward look to the future of C-COT, mapping out the steps needed to maximise the benefits of the working group for coral reef conservation in the UK OTs. The Roadmap brings together a list of objectives under five different themes which describe specific, key activities of the C-COT project identified by members and Nature 2 in the early stages of the consultation process. This report lists recommendations which have emerged following the consultation process for each theme, and a table outlining the timeframe recommended to take forward these activities.

2. Methodology

The consultation process has been led by C-COT Chair and DPLUS147 project partner, Kalli De Meyer (Nature2). Regular consultation has happened since 2019, however this report focusses on the financial year 2023–2024.

The roadmap and discussion around the future of C-COT was introduced by Kalli De Meyer at a workshop held in Miami in June 2023, beginning with an overview of the project's accomplishments and an interactive discussion of participant priorities and expectations for the future. The discussion formed the basis of this C-COT Roadmap for the next 5–10 years, prompting the identification of main themes to structure the Roadmap, and guiding its creation by Nature2.

Between December 2023 and January 2024, one on one meetings were held with each OT, JNCC and Kalli De Meyer to get feedback on the Roadmap presentation. Each objective and theme were discussed to obtain feedback specific to each OT, and whether they felt the Roadmap resonated with their experience throughout the C-COT project. This feedback was then incorporated and presented back to the group in a monthly meeting in February along with discussion highlights and emerging recommendations. The consultation process methodology is summarised in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1. Steps taken and approximate dates for consultations between JNCC, Kalli de Meyer and relevant OTs, in developing the C-COT Roadmap.

Step in consultation process	Date
Miami workshop session on C-COT future	June 2023
Write up	October 2023
One on one meetings with each OT in C-COT	December 2023 to January 2024
Presentation back to C-COT	February 2024

3. Results – Roadmap Recommendations

The following provides an overview of the conclusion of consultation with C-COT partners including problems and challenges identified during this consultancy and expert recommendations.

3.1. Themes

During the consultation process the following themes arose which have been used to structure the Roadmap (see Figure 1):

- C-COT and the C-COT Secretariat
- Fundraising
- Representation and networking
- Coral reef management
- Capacity building, training and resource sharing

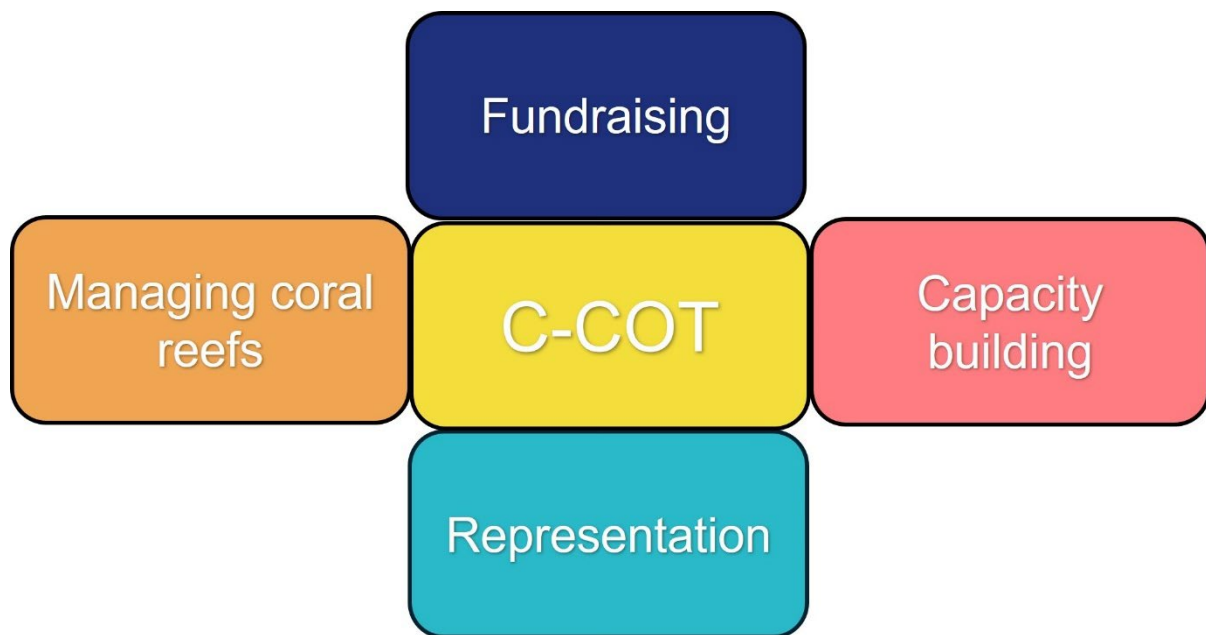


Figure 1. Visual representation of the five themes of the C-COT Roadmap: C-COT (and the Secretariat), Fundraising, Managing Coral Reefs, Representation and Capacity Building

3.2. C-COT and the C-COT Secretariat

The C-COT working group has demonstrated over the past two years that it has a significant role to play in terms of coral reef conservation in the Caribbean. It has shown itself to be resourceful and resilient and committed to a co-operative approach to conservation. C-COT members report that the group has responded effectively to the region-wide threat of SCTLD, producing its own treatment strategy, providing training, engaging with stakeholders, monitoring disease progression and testing a wide range of treatments.

The highest priority identified during the consultation was to secure onward funding after the end of the Darwin Plus project for this work to continue. Without a source of funding to cover the basic cost of the C-COT Secretariat, meetings to provide continuing support of the UK OT entities to address overarching issues and threats, this co-operative initiative will be lost along with the important work facilitated and executed by C-COT to protect coral reefs in the UK OTs.

The consultations that provide the basis for this Roadmap make it clear that the OTs currently lack the capacity to adequately staff and run the C-COT Secretariat. In addition, their responses reflect the fact that they are overburdened, underfunded and lack the resources to manage the marine resources in their care.

C-COT members have communicated that JNCC and Kalli De Meyer have successfully delivered the Secretariat and Chair functions for C-COT and have proved to be a highly valued resource by all those involved. The Secretariat has not only secured considerable funding resources for coral reef conservation in the Overseas Territories but has shown a dedication to local involvement and a high degree of sensitivity in its dealings with the Territories. The Secretariat listens and is viewed to be well placed to support C-COT through its access to scientific and technical support, conservation networking and information resources as well as funding opportunities.

The conclusion is that in the short term the C-COT Secretariat should continue to be staffed and lead by JNCC and Kalli De Meyer (Nature 2). In the medium - to long-term it is most desirable that the Secretariat be based in the UK Overseas Territories once sufficient funding and capacity within the OT partner organisations has been established to make this possible.

3.2.1. Recommendations

Recommendations include (see also Table 2):

- Secure funding to allow C-COT to continue to develop as a regional network of coral conservation professionals post March 2024 with regular (monthly) meetings and annual face to face workshops whereby C-COT can act as a central hub for information exchange and provide ongoing support to OT partners.
- JNCC and Nature2, as highly valued partners, should support the C-COT initiative and continue to provide a Secretariat until such time as the Territories are able to take over this task for themselves.
- The C-COT Secretariat should continue its active engagement with other regional bodies and initiatives, monitoring the external landscape seeking opportunities for collaboration as well as actively engaging with relevant experts.
- The C-COT Secretariat should help partners to prioritise their local funding needs and assist with funding acquisition, developing joint funding proposals and building internal capacity for project fundraising.
- The C-COT Secretariat should continue to improve internal communication and information resource sharing through the central information repository and regularly distributed newsletter and should assist with the development of joint outreach material and similar outputs.



Table 2. Time-based recommendations for the C-COT group and the Secretariat’s role, as outlined by the C-COT group.

C-COT and the Secretariat	2024	2025	2026	2027
Develop C-COT Secretariat with JNCC and eventually transfer to base in the Overseas Territories	X	X	X	X
Secure funding to cover C-COT overhead costs for meetings, workshops, information exchange and to provide support	X	-	-	-
Actively engage with regional bodies and initiatives and with relevant science experts	X	X	X	X
Help partners prioritise and address funding needs through joint proposals and build internal capacity for project fundraising	X	X	-	-
Improve internal communication including central information repository, newsletter and joint outreach material	X	X	-	-
Develop a web presence (website) to improve access to information	X	X	X	X
Maintain up to date centralized information database [TEAMS or similar]	X	X	-	-
Develop centralize information resource on topics of interest: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change: monitoring, adaption, mitigation and modelling • Reef restoration options • Reef resilience • Ecosystem services evaluations • Disease and bleaching • Reef mapping • Aquaria and ex situ coral refugia options • Water quality monitoring and water management • Coral reef resilience • Pollution 	X	X	X	X
Disseminate research findings and best available science on emerging issues	X	X	X	X



3.3. Fundraising

‘no funding, no capacity, no time’

Extensive consultation with partners has revealed that even where coral reef conservation is considered a high priority within our OT partners, there is low capacity to implement conservation measures on the ground. This was summed up by one respondent as ‘no funding, no capacity, no time’.

Lack of funding can be seen, amongst other things, as a reliance on project funding, which does not provide a long-term sustainable basis for conservation. No management entities appear to be fully staffed whilst some have virtually no staff and do not own basic resources required for effective coral reef monitoring and management.

3.3.1. Recommendations

There is an urgent need for adequate structural funding to support coral reef management bodies throughout the UK Caribbean Overseas Territories. Recommendations include (see also Table 3):

- Determine **roles and responsibilities** regarding coral reef conservation by stimulating dialogue with and between the UK and OT governments, while including NGO partners.
- Establish funding priorities, record and identify readily available sources of funding, and cultivate existing funding sources and partners to cover short-term needs.
- Where they exist, use **sustainable finance studies** to identify potential sources of revenue both at the UK and Overseas Territories level with strong involvement by all partners to ensure effective adoption and determine funding needs to adequately manage coral reefs (including via the Blue Belt Sustainable Financing Hub). Where they don’t exist, conduct sustainable finance studies.
- Develop a joint sustainable **fundraising strategy** which addresses structural, capital and project funding.

Table 3. Time-based recommendations for fundraising relevant activities to be taken within the OTs.

Fundraising	2024	2025	2026	2027
Determine roles and responsibilities with UK and OT governments	X	X	X	X
Establish funding priorities, record and identify funding sources to cover short term needs	X	-	-	-
Conduct Sustainable Finance study to review existing and potential new sources of financing for coral reef conservation and determine funding needs to manage coral reefs	-	X	X	X
Develop joint fundraising strategy	-	-	X	X

3.4. Representation and networking

‘no attention for coral reef conservation’

C-COT members recognize that there is potential to bring coral reef conservation higher in the priority list for decision making through planned and coordinated communication efforts within C-COT, maximizing the power of joint messaging across a UK OT platform.

Discussions with C-COT partners have included:

- How best to engage decision makers and make them aware of the high value of reefs both in shoreside protection, as a tourism product and an important source of food security, as well as highlighting their potential pharmaceutical value, ecosystem services provided, cultural and historical value and more.
- Mainstreaming information on the value of coral reefs to ensure that all government civil servants are aware of the high value of coral reef conservation. Pointing out the low cost of reef conservation in comparison to the high cost of losing coral reefs has also been suggested.
- It has also been suggested to take joint action when having discussions about coral reef conservation with the Council of Ministers.

C-COT members have expressed the desire to join up with regional organisations such as the Regional Activity Centre for the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region (CAR-SPAW-RAC), as well as aligning activities with the Blue Belt programme, which has expanded into most of the C-COT member OTs. C-COTs work could be strengthened by making more links to other UKOT based strategies, such as the UK Government’s OT Biodiversity Strategy and the Marine Conservation Society’s UKOT Strategy.

3.4.1. Recommendations

The first step towards a solution should take into consideration the fact that the majority of UK Caribbean Overseas Territory economies are based on offshore finance and similar. Therefore, the most persuasive arguments for decision makers are most likely to be based on sound economic considerations. Recommendations include the following (Specific activities aligning with the recommendations below are outlined in table 4).

- Determine **roles and responsibilities** regarding coral reef conservation by stimulating dialogue with and between the UK and OT governments, while including NGO partners.
- Conduct **economic valuation studies**, such as TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity), which can help to highlight, in economic terms, the low cost of action vs the high cost in inaction, and potential future loss of coral reefs. It is critical that the work be conducted in very close collaboration with civil servants and decision makers to ensure effective adoption.
- Continue to develop strong **network connections** to support coral reef conservation with international, national and regional partners and stimulate dialogue with stakeholders at the local level.
- Moving forward, seek to **strategically align** coral conservation initiatives across NGOs, agencies and programmes, such as Blue Belt, Marine Conservation Society, International Coral Reef Initiative and SPAW and integrate and align biodiversity tools such as Biodiversity Strategies, Coral Action Plans and similar.

- Develop a UK Caribbean **OT joint statement on the importance of coral reef conservation**. This statement should include an approach to identifying and nurturing potential champions within governments and in civil societies, and should focus on approach development, messaging, and communicating who to approach and how.

Table 4. Time based recommendations for specific representation and networking activities to be carried out in and for the benefit of the OTs.

Representation and networking	2024	2025	2026	2027
Determine roles and responsibilities with UK and OT governments	X	X	X	X
Conduct economic valuation studies (e.g. TEEB)			X	X
Continue to develop strong network connections: attend relevant regional meetings and ensure representation at regional fora	X	X	X	X
Align coral conservation initiatives	X	X	X	X
Develop sound (economic) arguments for coral reef conservation based on government priorities: Natural Capital accounting, blue carbon, existence, and genetic value [white papers, positioning papers]	X	X		
Use Joint Ministerial Council meetings to establish value of coral reef conservation– issue joint statement (of value of reefs and capacity needs)		X	X	
Introduce coral conservation into state visits, visits by dignitaries, etc.		X	X	X
Promote mainstreaming and inter-departmental collaboration through outreach and information	X	X	X	X
Develop and implement targeted communication strategy (messages, audience, means) including social media and community voice methodology	X	X		
Develop targeted communication materials and showcase C-COT and territory coral conservation achievements		X	X	X
Ensure representation at key international, regional and sub-regional meetings and fora	X	X	X	X



3.5. Managing coral reefs

‘Are we looking at the right thing?’

Protecting the marine environment and coral reefs in the face of global climate change requires effective management of existing conservation areas and species, coupled with disease management, invasive species control and restoration efforts. At this stage, C-COT is a working group focused on disease control and mitigation. Funding for the coming 3 to 5 years will allow the working group to expand into the role of a regional network for the UK Caribbean with a broader remit than coral disease. The biggest causes for concern in the Overseas Territories are the effects of global climate change which are likely to disproportionately affect the Overseas Territories, particularly in terms of sea-level rise, increased frequency and intensity of storms, ocean warming and acidification. These are fundamental threats not only to the region’s valuable marine and coral reef resources but to the human populations which depend on them. It should be considered that pressures from climate change will disproportionately affect low-income households and are likely to increase poverty. In light of this, climate change effects are addressed at all levels and throughout the work of the regional network.

The recommendations below (see also Table 5) focus on using protected areas as a tool for coral reef management, a conservation approach used throughout the region, but also reflecting wider actions. The Blue Belt programme is expanding to many of the C-COT UKOTs and will provide an opportunity to act on many of these elements.

3.5.1. Recommendations

- Assemble the best available information on enhancing coral reef resilience using resilience models to aid decision making, invest in and promote in-island support for resilience studies, and determine the OT and UK Government responses to climate change.
- Develop climate change scenarios including accurate predictions of sea level rise and vulnerability assessments.
- Critically review coral reef conservation efforts, including status and trends of coral reefs, resources and management effectiveness of existing Marine Protected Areas and cost of management.
- Update inventory of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and critically evaluate conservation effectiveness (area, location, biodiversity, IUCN management category, goals, connectivity, management tasks).
- Where required, establish Marine Protected Areas with varying levels and types of protection including corridors, connectivity and zonation, based on current international recommendations to protect 30% globally by 2030.
- Develop and implement management plans for all MPAs ensuring they are effectively managed and well resourced.
- Align, review and implement coral reef conservation tools including Biodiversity Strategy and Coral Action plans.
- Commit to coral reef restoration efforts in situ and ex situ including assisted reproduction and evolution, development of aquaria and wet labs, gene banking and cryopreservation.
- Ensure adequate legal mechanisms to protect coral reefs, strengthen and harmonize existing legislation.

- Invest, monitor and implement novel methods of disease treatment and invasive species control.

Table 5. Time based recommendations for specific coral reef management activities to be carried out in and for the benefit of the OTs.

Managing coral reefs	2024	2025	2026	2027
Collect and analyse coral reef monitoring data to understand status and health of coral reefs	X	X	X	X
Assemble best available information on enhancing coral reef resilience	X	X	X	X
Develop climate change scenarios including accurate predictions of sea level rise and vulnerability assessments	X	X	X	-
Review coral reef conservation efforts, status and trends of coral reefs, resources, and management effectiveness of MPAs	X	X	-	-
Update inventory of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and critically evaluate conservation effectiveness (area, location, biodiversity, IUCN management category, goals, connectivity, management tasks)	X	X	X	X
Establish MPAs to meet global 30% recommendation	-	X	X	X
Develop and implement Management Plans for all MPAs	X	X	X	X
Align, review and implement coral reef conservation tools including Biodiversity Strategies, Coral Action Plans etc.	X	X	-	-
Commit to coral restoration efforts, in situ and ex situ	X	X	X	X
Ensure adequate legal mechanism, strengthening and harmonizing existing legislation if necessary	-	-	X	X



3.6. Capacity building, training and resource sharing

With limited resources in the Caribbean Overseas Territories there is an urgent need to build capacity for coral reef management and conservation, monitoring, data management and storage and to interpret and implement research findings and studies. New approaches to capacity building should be explored such as UKOT staff exchanges and funding for members to access other regional training opportunities.

Within C-COT, there are examples of project partners with extremely successful links with UK and global universities. These partnerships have benefits on both sides, but the OT is able to use this resource to reliably deliver annual monitoring programmes. C-COT could explore strengthening these links with other universities and other C-COT partners, learning from these existing relationships.

Data management is a clear area where C-COT members have identified potential benefits from further resourcing. Group members have previously had access to data management training but have been unable to dedicate the time needed to keep up with high data collection demands and data processing software updates.

3.6.1. Recommendations

Recommendations include the following (see also Table 6)

- Facilitate and support cross-OT coral conservation projects.
- Identify, evaluate and address operational, training and information needs.
- Strengthen university links to help increase capacity for coral monitoring and data management.
- Develop and maintain a **joint regional research agenda**.
- Agree and adopt standard monitoring protocols.
- Create learning network: share training opportunities and create opportunities for peer to peer and staff exchanges.
- Actively foster the review and implementation of research findings and studies.
- Address the need for data storage, processing and report writing.

Table 6. Time based recommendations for capacity building activities to be carried out in and for the benefit of the OTs.

Capacity building	2024	2025	2026	2027
Facilitate and support cross territory coral conservation projects	X	X	X	X
Identify, evaluate and address operational, training and information needs	X	X	X	X
Strengthen university links to help increase capacity for coral monitoring and data management.	X	X	X	X

Capacity building	2024	2025	2026	2027
Develop and maintain joint regional research agenda	X	X	X	X
Agree and adopt standard monitoring protocols	X	X	X	X
Create learning network: share training opportunities and create opportunities for peer to peer and staff exchanges	X	X	X	X
Actively foster the review and implementation of research findings and studies	X	X	X	X
Address the need for data storage, processing and report writing	-	X	X	X



4. Next steps

The results indicate a clear desire from C-COT members to continue the online working group. Practically, the next steps can be split into two planned phases: short and long term.






4.1. Short-term

JNCC will use the recommendations from this Roadmap to seek funding for a one-year interim period. This will allow JNCC to continue to run the Secretariat alongside Kalli De Meyer as Chair. The group will plan one in-person meeting to run alongside an existing regional meeting, where possible to achieve the best value for money. C-COT will start addressing priority topics as well as responding to new and emerging threats such as: data management, coral disease and coral bleaching. Existing connections with regional groups such as NOAA and Blue Belt will be continued and strengthened.

4.2. Longer-term

In the meantime, JNCC will coordinate C-COT to prepare a 5-year project proposal to take forward the priorities listed in this Roadmap. The project will incorporate funding and the necessary planning to embed the C-COT Secretariat within the Caribbean. New partnerships will be sought to take forward elements of the project as decided by the group.

For further information please contact:
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Quay House
2 East Station Road, Fletton Quays
Peterborough PE2 8YY
Communications@jncc.gov.uk

-  jncc.gov.uk
-  twitter.com/JNCC_UK
-  linkedin.com/company/jncc
-  facebook.com/JNCCUK
-  youtube.com/JNCC_UKvideo

