National Conservation Council

General Meeting
7 August 2026; 1pm
Government Administration Building, George Town
YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/@CaymanIslandsDOE)

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
   a. Attendees, Apologies, Quorum
   b. Declaration of Interests
   c. **SIPL Annual Register of Interests due July 30**
      https://www.standardsinpubliclifecommission.ky/register-of-interests

2. Confirmation of Minutes of 25 March 2026

3. Updates for Council
   a. Administrative
      i. Judicial Review re Control of Feral Cats in Environmentally Sensitive Areas
      ii. Freedom of Information (https://doe.ky/resources/freedom-of-information/foi-public-disclosure/)
      iii. Bat House Appeal
   b. Environmental Assessments
      i. East/West Arterial
      ii. Airports
   c. New Spear Guns in 2027
   d. Protected Areas
      i. Ironwood Forest
      ii. Brac Bluff Lighthouse National Park
   e. Cayman Forward
   f. NCA s41 Report
   g. Little Cayman World Heritage Nomination process

4. Next Meeting
   a. October 2nd (To Be Confirmed & Announced)
   b. December 4th

5. Any Other Business

6. Adjournment

7. Attendance Appendix

Council Member	**7 August 2026**	**Representation**
Dr. Ian Kirkham		Chairman; Terrestrial Ecology
Geddes Hislop		West Bay, Wildlife Conservation
Nikolaus Foster		Bodden Town
Walling Whittaker		George Town, Environmental Engineering
Donald McLean		East End
Handel Whittaker	Apologies	North Side
Kathleen Bodden-Harris		Sister Islands
Dr. Samantha Shields		Conservation Medicine
Catherine Childs		National Trust for the Cayman Islands
Wilbur Welcome		Director of Agriculture
Haroon Pandohie		Director of Planning
Richard Mileham		Planning Officer, representing the Director of Planning
Gina Ebanks-Petrie		Director of Environment
Timothy Austin		DoE Deputy, Research
Emily Gilman		Acting Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Environment
John Bothwell		Secretary

National Conservation Council

General Meeting
25 March 2026, 1pm
Government Administration Building (George Town)
YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/@CaymanIslandsDOE)

MINUTES

1. Call to Order
   a. A quorum being present (see appendix) the meeting was called to order at 1:05pm.
   b. Apologies: Walling Whittaker (Travel); Dir Wilbur Welcome, Tim Austin (Travel).
   c. No members had any interest to declare.

2. Adoption of Minutes of 10 December 2025
   a. There being no modifications to the draft minutes a motion to approve was moved by Geddes Hislop and seconded by Nikolaus Foster. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Meetings
   a. Control of Feral Cats in Environmentally Sensitive Areas
      i. Council noted the Judicial Review. The JR is limited to DoE's cat controls. Council hoped it would be resolved quickly. Regardless that DoE feral cat controls continue as there is no injunction against activities.
   b. Council noted Cabinet approval of Hemmington Forest National Park management plan. Congratulated DoE for the work so far, and looked forward to the future work on this Park and others.

4. Reports
   a. Environmental Assessment Boards
      i. E/W Arterial: DoE/EAB is meeting with NRA to see what impact their ongoing design refinements and possible route changes will have on the roadworks, taking into account the EIA results previously provided to the NRA.
      ii. Airports: CIAA have put out an RFP for a consultant to do the EIA. EAB reviewed their RFP. Now with CIAA to advertise for and select their consultant. [EAB will again advise on that selection.]

5. New Matters
   a. Increase in Spear Gun User Licences
      i. The Secretary presented the draft motion and its background.
      ii. Clarified that DoE had requested additional conservation officers for 2026/27 but that was not approved. There may be opportunity to get additional persons mid-budget [through supplementary budget request made by the Ministry] but

that is future and no certainty the request will be successful. (Council noted the need for increased enforcement.)

iii. The motion was moved by Nickolaus Foster, seconded by Kathleen Bodden-Harris. Council then considered the motion and related information.

iv. DoE clarified points in response to questions by Council.

1. The maximum of 170 licences, as set out in the Directives, were based on the historic licence numbers when the NCA was passed, and considering the 2021 enhancement of the Marine Parks, while also considering the lack of robust fishery data and erring on the side of not risking increasing take to unsustainable levels. It was judged by the DoE that with the increase in no-take protected areas (Marine Parks enhancement 2021) Cayman should be able to maintain the previous fishing levels, including the 170 previously active spear gun licence holders.

2. The year group categorising of applicants will be for fairly considering applications based on most recent use (active licence) first. Starting with renewing all current licence holders who apply, then working back by year. Until the number of licences remaining (from the 170 total) is less than the number of applicants in that year group, e.g., 8 licences but 10 applicants. At which point the 8 licences will be distributed at random between the 10 applicants.

3. Spear fishing licence conditions and other rules will otherwise remain as current. Including, but not limited to, spear fishing only outside the reef (water bodies deeper than 25ft, outside the barrier reef; no take of marine life on SCUBA), 3 fish per spear gun user per day, no parrotfish spearing. General & grouper size limits, and species that cannot be taken (Nassau grouper, parrotfish,, sharks & rays, other 'protected at all time' fish), will continue to apply.

v. The licence remains for one gun, identified by tag and photograph on the licence. The licence (or gun) cannot be 'handed down' or transferred from the owner to someone else.

vi. New rules would allow licence holders to get new guns (or parts). The entry into practice of these new rules is pending the resolution of the question of issuing new licences to persons not currently holding a licence.

vii. An amendment to the motion was moved, to guarantee the funding & education components in advance of the new licences (meaning that licencing would begin in 2027).

1. Mover Cathy Childs, second Handel Whittaker. (Appendix II) Council considered the amendments.

2. The amendments should bring benefits to sustainable fishing, and recreational enjoyment of the reef (residents & tourism benefit).

3. Council was keen that there be increased education & enforcement.

a. Council would want there to be a quiz at the end of the (online) education component. But noting that there could need to be in-person education & examination options provided as well.

b. Potential for other education to be included *vis-à-vis* the importance of sustainability (sustainable tourism & sustainable fishing).

c. The education could be extended to other persons particularly to and through tourism operators, e.g., North Sound operators, e.g., flyers or a video & possibly delivered to or linked to the DoE app & website. Both to educate and to make sure that the material being produced is robust and accurate.

d. Education will be driven by the DoE Public Education & Outreach Officer. Council members offered their experience and assistance in designing the education package.

e. Council asked if public education could be targeted to travellers, possibly via or with the support (financial or otherwise) of the Department of Tourism, either in the airports or on the airplanes. And onto the cruise ships.

f. Council encouraged increased signage along public beaches, etc. And special attention to starfish (echinoderm) conservation rules.

g. Responsible spear fishing has the opportunity to be sustainable.

h. Council voted on the motion to amend.

i. For: Passed by acclimation

ii. Against: None

iii. Abstain: Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Richard Mileham

iv. The amendment motion was carried.

viii. Council noted there is currently active spear fishing, and interest in more licences being available for people to continue the recreational activity.

ix. Council would encourage DoE for more fish size slot limits, to support sustainable fishing.

1. DoE will consider, pending research, as reasonable options are identified.

x. Council considered the amended motion.

a. For: Passed by acclimation

b. Against: None

c. Abstain: Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Richard Mileham

d. The amended motion was carried.

b. Annual Report 2025

i. Council noted that this was its 10th Anniversary Report.

ii. Council further noted the Forward (goals for 2026), Council's 2025 actions, and the EPF budget expenditures.

1. DoE's budget met the shortfall in the legal fees. But costs awarded were not recovered and applied against the funds expended. This was complicated as the JR was CIG vs CIG. It might have been different if it was CIG vs private

iii. Council identified typos to be corrected.

iv. Council were displeased with the 'thinness' of the 2025 report. Council considered a '2026 report card' for the next year.

1. Many of the Council's goals are outside of its control. Council should acknowledge when it gets something as far they can. But Council should continue to strive to make big changes.

2. Need for more ways in 2026 for the public to know what the Council does, and what the Council can and is supposed to do.

3. The brevity was good, but more narrative (and pictures) for 2026. To make it more readable. Perhaps a short 'story' body, with the appendixes for more information.

v. Council noted that the Annual Reports can be found at https://conservation.ky/annual-reports-2/ and are tabled in the Parliament.

vi. Council considered the Motion to Adopt the Report.

1. Moved by Handel Whittaker, Seconded by Nikolaus Foster.

2. For: Passed by acclimation

3. Against: None

4. Abstain: Gina Ebanks-Petrie

5. The motion was carried.

c. Council Manual Update

i. The Secretary presented modifications to the Council Manual, to be ratified by the Council.

ii. The motion was moved by Geddes Hislop, seconded by Kathy Childs.

iii. Council considered the changes.

iv. Council proposed removing the no public opposition (5.7.2) as there could be statutory conflict for statutory appointees carrying out other people's instructions.

v. Council agreed to make these changes at a later date.

vi. Council considered the motion to ratify the changes.

1. For: Motion carried by acclimation (all for)
2. Against: None
3. Abstain: None
4. The motion was carried.

d. Shark Project Briefing

i. DoE delivered a briefing on its upcoming shark project.

ii. Increase in shark population is still too low to be statistically significant. The increase is anecdotal but strong enough anecdotal to act on it & be hopeful that it will soon be detectable. (Council members endorsed the anecdotal increase with personal observations.)

iii. 2029 will be another decadal population survey and it can then be assessed if the numbers are statistically increased or not. (There are also ongoing SharkLogger reports which are also assessed periodically to determine if there has been a statistical change in sightings made.)

6. Next Meeting
   a. 17 June 2026, 1pm, Government Administration Building (open to public via live broadcast on YouTube)

7. Any Other Business
   a. This year is 40 years of Marine Parks in the Cayman Islands with the first Parks Gazetted in Grand Cayman (February) and then (April) in the Sister Islands. DoE will be conducting ongoing publicity around the event and the Marine Parks themselves.

8. Adjournment
   a. There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 2:31pm.

9. Attendance Appendix

Council Member	**25 March 2026**	**Representation**
Dr. Ian Kirkham	Present	Chairman; Terrestrial Ecology
Geddes Hislop	Present	West Bay, Wildlife Conservation
Nikolaus Foster	Present	Bodden Town
Walling Whittaker	Apologies	George Town, Environmental Engineering
Donald McLean	Present	East End
Handel Whittaker	Present	North Side
Kathleen Bodden-Harris	Present	Sister Islands
Dr. Samantha Shields	Present	Conservation Medicine
Catherine Childs	Present	National Trust for the Cayman Islands
Wilbur Welcome	Apologies - late	Director of Agriculture
Haroon Pandohie	-	Director of Planning
Richard Mileham	Present	Planning Officer, representing the Director of Planning
Gina Ebanks-Petrie	Present	Director of Environment
Timothy Austin	Apologies	DoE Deputy, Research
Morgan Golden-Ebanks	Present	Acting Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Environment
John Bothwell	Present	Secretary

WP-05ai: Motion To Increase Spear Gun Licencing (As Amended at the General Meeting)

1) Spear gun licences are currently only re-issued to persons who hold a valid licence, and a licenced spear gun.
2) The National Conservation Council (Licence and Permit) (Amendment) Directives, 2021, allow for the issuing of up to 170 licences.
3) The National Conservation Council has previously considered options, and then requested guidance from the Minister of Environment on the preferred direction, for issuance of new (non-renewal) licences. The Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability has now requested a framework from the Council for the issuance of new (non-renewal) licences.
4) The Department of Environment has provided for the consideration of Council a recommended method for the issuance of new (non-renewal) licences.

It is therefore proposed that the National Conservation Council recommend to the Cabinet that

A) Spear gun licences continue to be limited to persons who hold, or at most have previously held, a spear gun licence.
B) Licences be distributed in order of how long ago applicants held a licence.
C) Licencing begin with persons renewing a currently active licence, ensuring that they will be able to continue to practice their recreational activity.
D) The prioritisation ranking be done in annual groups, prioritising for persons still with previously licenced guns.
E) The Regulations allow a maximum of 170 licences to be issued. Licences shall be issued by year group until the number of available licences remaining is fewer than the number of applicants remaining in that year group. At that point those last licences shall be distributed randomly among the remaining applicants in that year group.
F) Fish biomass (population) and diversity studies, particularly for reef fish, continue and if fish populations begin to decrease (either individual species or in general) for any reasons fishery controls (issuance of new spear gun licences annually when available, or otherwise) will have to be reconsidered.
~~G) The issuance of licences in 2026 implement the licencing period set out in the National Conservation Council (Licence and Permit) Directives (2022 Revision).~~
    ~~i) 5b(1) An application for a spear gun licence under this Part shall be made to the Council during the period beginning 1st June and ending on 31st August annually.~~
    ~~ii) There be no pro-rating of licence fees ($50 per year).~~
~~H) This process be continued in subsequent years.~~
I) The Cayman Islands Government 2028/29 Budget should include an increase for enforcement and for public education by the Department of Environment, particularly to support sustainable spear gun use in the Cayman Islands.

J) Cabinet bring a request to Finance Committee for Supplementary Expenses to be added to the 2026/27 Budget for the Department of Environment (using Environmental Protection Fund monies if needed) for

i) Additional enforcement officers;

ii) public education and outreach on sustainable spear gun use.

K) The Department of Environment is asked to initiate a sustainable (spear) fishing component of the licencing process for this year.

i) This should include a mandatory online educational component to ensure that all new or renewing license holders are aware of local regulations, basic fish ID, and speargun safety practices.

L) To allow time for the preparation for enforcement and user and public education, the issuance of the additional (full 170) licences begin in 2027, implementing the licencing period set out in the National Conservation Council (Licence and Permit) Directives (2022 Revision).

i) 5b(1) An application for a spear gun licence under this Part shall be made to the Council during the period beginning 1st June and ending on 31st August annually.

ii) There be no pro-rating of licence fees ($50 per year).

M) **This process be continued in subsequent years.**

N) That with the issuance of spear gun licences applied for in keeping with 5b(1) of the Regulations, section 9 of the Regulations may then come into full practice, facilitating the import of new spear guns (and parts for licenced guns) by persons who hold a valid spear gun licence.

O) That the National Conservation Act section 3(13) Delegation to the (Director of the) Department of Environment to process, decide, and issue permits on behalf of the National Conservation Council be continued and include the issuance of spear gun permits as above.

~~P) When endorsed by the Cabinet this process shall enter into force and should begin immediately and automatically, i.e., the Department of Environment initiate the licencing of current and additional spear gun holders as described and delegated above.~~