National Conservation Council

National Conservation Council
Cayman Islands

Promoting and securing
biological diversity
and the sustainable use
of natural resources
in the Cayman Islands

Annual Report 2025

Staircase up the bluff to Hemmington Forest National Park.

The National Conservation Council exists to promote and secure the biological diversity of the Cayman Islands and ensure the sustainable use of Cayman's natural resources. It acts to protect and conserve endangered, threatened and endemic wildlife and their habitats. The Council oversees the protection of terrestrial, wetland and marine areas with the support of the current generation and for the benefit of future generations of the Cayman Islands.

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APPROVED

Approved at the 25 March 2026 General Meeting of the National Conservation Council

Foreword

The National Conservation Council presents our 2025 Annual Report with a mixture of pride in the technical achievements but with growing concern regarding our legislative momentum. While the Council has worked tirelessly to fulfill its mandate under the National Conservation Act, the pace of final implementation remains largely dependent on executive action.

The undeniable highlight of 2025 came last week with the Cabinet's approval of **Hemmington Forest** as Cayman's first National Park on March 20, 2026. This is a landmark victory for our terrestrial heritage. However, this success stands in stark contrast to several critical initiatives that remain in a state of administrative suspension.

Key conservation frameworks — including the **Seabirds Conservation Plan**, which were updated and resubmitted as far back as November, and **Protected Area Designation**s from even before that — continue to await Cabinet approval and adoption. Similarly, essential management strategies for the **Environmental Protection Fund** remain stalled, awaiting a green light that has yet to materialize. These delays are not merely bureaucratic; they represent a significant hurdle in our ability to protect the islands' most vulnerable species and manage the natural heritage resources entrusted to us as a Council and as a Country. The full efficacy of the National Conservation Act cannot be realized without more timely administrative action. We remain committed to our mission, but we urge a more proactive partnership to ensure our environmental goals are not just drafted, but realized.

Goals Carried Over to 2026

<u>Management Plans</u>

- **Seabirds Conservation Plan:** Awaiting Cabinet approval.
- **Blue Iguana Plan:** Awaiting public consultation.
- **Cayman Sage Plan:** Adopted, however full implementation of the plan remains in question.

Protected Areas

- **Hemmington Forest:** Officially approved as Cayman's first National Park on March 20, 2026.
- Designation remains pending for several areas.
    - **Grand Cayman:** Salina Reserve Extension, Sand Cay (South Sound), North Sound Mangrove Cays
    - **Sister Islands:** Long Beach (Cayman Brac); Southeast Ponds and Tarpon Lake (Little Cayman).

Operations & Infrastructure

- **Alien Species Management:** Council supporting activities by the Department of Environment and Department of Agriculture. The Grand Cayman cat pound is operational, with a facility planned for the Brac. Continuing application of Council-endorsed humane and appropriate procedures for the control of alien invasive species in environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Environmental Impact Assessments:** The E/W Arterial preferred route still remains to be officially decided by Cabinet. Council provided its advice and endorsement of the EAB Final Report (August 2025) in which it recommended to Cabinet their consideration of Route B2, a less expensive and more environmentally sound option than Route B3. Council (and the Department of Environment) remains available to support in the usual ways the Cabinet, Ministry of Infrastructure, and National Roads Authority, as they consider how to ameliorate the environmental impacts of the expected roadworks.
- **Environmental Protection Fund:** Management protocols remain inactive while awaiting Cabinet bringing into force sections 46 & 47 of the Act.

Council Activities, 2025

During 2025 the Council dealt with a number of administrative issues but was still able to advance a number of important conservation issues, while continuing to oversee legally mandated conservation consultations with other Government entities.

Conservation of Wildlife (Protected Species)

- Council reviewed and revised the draft Species Conservation Plan for Seabirds taking account of the Cabinet's feedback on the original draft submitted.

Conservation of Habitats (Protected Areas)

- Council proposed the (draft) management plan for Hemmington Forest National Park, which would be the Cayman Islands' first official National Park. After public consultation this was submitted to the Cabinet for approval. (https://conservation.ky/hemmington-forest/)

Alien Species

- Council (along with the Director of the Department of Environment and the Director of the Department of Agriculture) approved updated procedures for the control of feral cats in environmentally sensitive areas by the Department of Environment, to allow a method less stressful to the cats being killed to be used.

Administrative Activities

- Council provided comments to the Minister and Cabinet colleagues regarding proposals to ammend the National Conservation Act, 2013.
- On February 5, 2025, the Cayman Islands Grand Court ruled in favour of the National Conservation Council in a judicial review against the Central Planning Authority regarding an unlawful, retrospective, after-the-fact planning permission for a road in an area subject to an Interim Directive designating it Critical Habitat for Blue Iguanas. The court ruled that the CPA acted unlawfully by trying to amend the improper permission rather than quashing it. An appeal for the removal of the Interim Directive was subsequently decided by Cabinet, removing the Interim Directive.
- There was a period of reduced activity as Council's membership was unsetteled as Cabinet changed the membership of the Council, a Judicial Review of that decision was brought by past members of the Council and which placed a stay on the actions of the Council, Cabinet changed the membership of the Council again and the Judicial Review was withdrawn.
- The Senior Policy Advisor (Environment) was co-opted onto the Council to improve communication between the Council and the Ministry with responsibility for the Environment.

Sustainable Development

- Council oversaw the successful completion by the Environmental Assessment Board of its review of the Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed East/West Arterial road.
    - NCC Chair's Cover Letter, https://conservation.ky/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/NCC-Chairs-letter-to-Minsister-Ebanks-Wilks-re-EABs-report-on-EIA-for-EWA-w-Case-for-B2.pdf
    - Environmental Assessment Board's Review of the East-West Arterial Final Environmental Statement, https://conservation.ky/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/EAB-Final-Comments-EWA-Combined.pdf
- In 2025 the following section 41 reviews were conducted on behalf of the Council.
    - Planning Reviews: 1,381
        - DPA Section 7 consultations: 1,058
        - NCA Section 41(3) consultations: 272
        - NCA Section 41(4) consultations: 51
            - Directed Conditions (Not all Section 41(4) consultations were necessary/requested): 48
                - Directed refusal: 2
    - Other Section 41 Reviews to other Government Entities: 46
    - Coastal Works Reviews: 17
    - Turtle Friendly Lighting Plans: 17
    - No reviews required Environmental Impact Assessments.
        - Two applications were screened but found not to require an EIA, while one quarry EIA was approved to restart (though the applicants did not recommence).
        - The status of all active EIAs can be found on https://conservation.ky/current-eias/. (Only the Airports Authority EIAs, voluntarily screened and initiated by the Authority in 2024, remain active.)
        - Any that have produced public reports can be found on https://conservation.ky/eia-reports/.

Appendix 1: The Council (Statutory Construction of the Cayman Islands National Conservation Council)

1.1 Purpose

The National Conservation Council (the Council, NCC) is established by, and to facilitate the goals of, the National Conservation Act 2013 (the Act, NCA), that is: to promote and secure biological diversity and the sustainable use of natural resources in the Cayman Islands; to protect and conserve endangered, threatened and endemic wildlife and their habitats; to provide for protected terrestrial, wetland and marine areas; and to give effect to the provisions of certain international conventions (the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean region, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (especially as waterfowl habitat), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the Global Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change).

1.2 Statutory Functions

The functions of the NCC are set out in Part 2, section 3 of the Act, in particular in subsection (9):

(a) subject to this Act, managing and making recommendations on the use of the Environmental Protection Fund;
(b) promoting the biological diversity and the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Islands;
(c) co-ordinating the establishment and adoption by the public and private sectors of national policies for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, including-
    (i) the use of wetlands and wetland resources; and
    (ii) the excavation of aggregate and fill materials;
(d) recommending and maintaining protected areas and conservation areas and conserving, maintaining and restoring their natural resources in accordance with Part 3;
(e) conserving, maintaining and restoring populations and critical habitats of protected species in accordance with Part 4;
(f) promoting the training of professional and voluntary personnel in the fields of research, management and wardening of protected areas and species and the other natural resources of the Islands;
(g) promoting wider understanding and awareness of the significance of the ecological systems of the Islands, the benefits of conserving natural resources and of the provisions of this Act and the Conventions;
(h) publicising the establishment of protected areas and the designation of protected species and raising public awareness, through educational programmes and other means, of the significance and value of protected areas and species and of the benefits that may be gained from them;
(i) encouraging public involvement, particularly by local communities, in the planning and management of protected areas and the conservation of protected species;
(j) promoting the adoption of guidelines by entities for the integration of conservation issues into their decision-making processes and for the achievement of the sustainable use of natural resources;

(k) promoting district, national and regional initiatives, including co-operative enforcement measures and mutual assistance in the enforcement of national laws, in order to further the objectives of the Conventions;
(l) promoting national plans for emergency responses to activities or events, whether caused naturally or not, that present a grave and imminent danger to biological diversity and encouraging international co-operation to supplement such national plans;
(m) promoting national plans for the sustainable management, conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases; and
(n) carrying out such other functions and duties as are specified under this Act and the regulations;

and in subsection (12):

the Council, subject to any directions of the Cabinet, may make orders and guidance notes and issue directives for the purpose of giving effect to the provisions of this Act and such orders, guidance notes and directives may include-

(a) criteria for identifying endangered or threatened species or other species needing protection under this Act;
(b) criteria for evaluating proposals for the establishment and management of protected areas and for the measures required to protect and conserve protected species and their critical habitat;
(c) criteria for the application for, and grant of, monies from the Fund;
(d) criteria for the review, assessment and reporting of activities funded in whole or in part by monies from the Fund;
(e) the form and content of a petition under section 16(3);
(f) procedures for determining the circumstances under which permits and licences may be granted under Part 5;
(g) measures governing the methods and conditions under which the captive breeding or artificial propagation of protected species may be allowed;
(h) procedures for regulating and controlling wild populations and the import, introduction, possession, transportation and release of alien or genetically altered specimens;
(i) procedures for consultation by entities pursuant to section 41(3); and
(j) the carrying out of environmental impact assessments under section 43.

1.3 About this report

This report is prepared in compliance with the duty set out in section 5 of the Act requiring the Council, no later than three months after the end of the financial year, to prepare and submit to the Minister a report of its activities during the preceding year, following which the Minister shall submit it to Cabinet for laying on the table of the Parliament.

This is the tenth annual report of the National Conservation Council and covers the period from 1 January 2025 to 30 December 2025 inclusive.

1.4 Composition of the Council

The Act regulates the composition of the Council. The Council is composed of thirteen voting members (section 3(2)):

(a) the Director or his nominee from the Department of the Environment;
(b) the Deputy Director of Research in the Department of the Environment;
(c) the Director of the Department of Agriculture or his nominee from the Department of Agriculture;
(d) the Director of Planning or his nominee from the Department of Planning;
(e) a person nominated by the National Trust and appointed by the Cabinet; and
(f) eight persons appointed by the Cabinet.

The Cabinet appoints the Chair. Amongst the Cabinet appointees at least four shall have relevant scientific or technical expertise and they are chosen such that there is at least one person from each of the six electoral districts.

The Department of Environment (DoE) is charged with appointing a Secretary to the Council (section 6). John Bothwell, Manager of the Department's Legislation Implementation and Coordination Unit, has remained as Secretary throughout 2025 and since the Council's inception in 2014.

The Council membership in 2025 was as follows.

January 2025

Representation	**Member**
General Member	Stuart Mailer (Chairman) (Marine & Terrestrial Biodiversity Expertise)
East End	Steve Broadbelt
North Side	Dr. Ian Kirkham (Terrestrial Ecology Expertise)
West Bay	Lisa Hurlston-McKenzie (Climate Change & Sustainable Development Expertise)
George Town	Lucille Seymour, MBE
Bodden Town	Pierre Foster
Sister Islands	[unfilled]
National Trust	Frank Roulstone
Department of Agriculture	Brian Crichlow
Director of Planning Planning Officer, representing the Director of Planning	Haroon Pandohie Richard Mileham
Director of Environment	Gina Ebanks-Petrie
DoE Deputy, Research	Timothy Austin
General Member	Patricia Bradley (Avifauna Expertise)

February 2025 (Extraordinary Gazette 11/2025)

NAME	POSITION	REPRESENTING
Gilbert McLean	Chair	
Ezzard Miller	Voting Member	North Side / Technical
Capt. Eugene Ebanks	Voting Member	West Bay
Dr. A. Steve McField	Voting Member	Bodden Town
Arden McLean	Voting Member	East End / Technical
Kenny Ryan	Voting Member	Cayman Brac / Technical
Paula Tathum	Voting Member	George Town
Ian Kirkham	Voting Member	Terrestrial Ecology
Frank Roulstone	Voting Member	National Trust for the Cayman Islands
Director (or Nominee)	Ex-Officio Voting Member	Department of Agriculture
Director (or Nominee)	Ex-Officio Voting Member	Department of Planning
Director (or Nominee)	Ex-Officio Voting Member	Department of Environment
Deputy Director	Ex-Officio Voting Member	Department of Environment

May 2025 (Extraordinary Gazette 36/2025)

Name	Position	Representing	Expires
Dr. Ian Kirkham	Chairperson	Terrestrial Ecology	14 May 2027
Geddes Hislop	Voting Member	West Bay and Wildlife Conservation	14 May 2027
Nikolaus Foster	Voting Member	Bodden Town	14 May 2027
Walling Whittaker	Voting Member	George Town and Environmental Engineering	14 May 2027
Donald McLean	Voting Member	East End	14 May 2027
Harris McCoy	Voting Member	North Side	14 May 2027
Kathleen Bodden-Harris	Voting Member	Sister Islands	14 May 2027
Dr. Samantha Shields	Voting Member	Conservation Medicine	14 May 2027
Catherine Childs	Voting Member	National Trust for the Cayman Islands	14 May 2027
Director (or Nominee)	Ex-Officio Voting Member	Department of Agriculture	Does not expire
Director (or Nominee)	Ex-Officio Voting Member	Planning Department	Does not expire
Director (or Nominee)	Ex-Officio Voting Member	Department of Environment	Does not expire
Deputy Director, Research (or Nominee)	Ex-Officio Voting Member	Department of Environment	Does not expire

Mr. Harris McCoy subsequently resigned from his seat on Council in July 2025.

1.5 Governance

Section 3 of the Act governs the proceedings of the Council. Seven voting members of the Council constitute a quorum. The decisions of the Council are by simple majority and the chair has a casting vote only. The Council is obligated to meet in a place open to the public and cause to be prepared and published the agendas and minutes of all meetings. The Council may, subject to the Act, regulate its own procedure.

The Council's Manual of Policy and Procedure contains rules for administration of the Council, a Code of Conduct, and a procedure for Disclosure of Interests. The Council chose to adopt the model Code of Conduct proposed by the Commission for Standards in Public Life.

In respect of Disclosure of Interests Schedule 2 of the Act provides, in subsection 9:

(1) If a member of the Council has any pecuniary or other interest in any matter to be dealt with by the Council, he shall disclose the fact to the chairman and shall not take part in any meeting at which the matter is considered or discussed.
(2) A member of the Council who fails to comply with subparagraph (1) commits an offence and is liable-
    (a) on summary conviction to a fine of twenty thousand dollars and to imprisonment for two years; or
    (b) on conviction on indictment to a fine of fifty thousand dollars and to imprisonment for five years,
    unless he proves that he did not know that matter in which he had an interest was the subject of consideration at that meeting.
(3) A disclosure under subparagraph (1) shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting of the Council.

Council members are also subject to the provisions of the Standards in Public Life Act and were required to file a declaration of interests with the Commission for that Act. Access to that register of interests would be through the Commission on Standards in Public Life.

The Department of Environment's Freedom of Information staff have been delegated to administer Freedom of Information requests to the Council.

1.6 Meetings

The Council held General Meetings in 2025 on 2 June (no meeting in the first quarter due to the changes of Council members and related Judicial Review), 17 September and 10 December.

Agendas with working papers, and Minutes (once approved), of the meetings can be found at https://conservation.ky/general-meetings/. In accordance with the statutory requirement and the Council's Policy and Procedure Manual, the agenda and working papers for the meetings were published in advance and the public was able to view the proceedings of each General Meeting in full and live on YouTube. The meeting recordings can be viewed at National Conservation Council (NCC) General Meetings - YouTube.

Council also conducts non-binding working groups approximately every three weeks in order to prepare for the general meetings. Council occasionally considers procedural items at these sessions or via correspondence, with those items then being ratified at the next appropriate General Meeting.

Matters for the Agenda are cast as Working Papers (or sometimes Information Papers) prepared by the Department of Environment (with the option for papers to be prepared by Council members either individually or representing Committees of the Council). Matters for decision are usually presented with a recommendation and a draft motion for approval as a resolution of the Council.

1.7 Entry Into Force of the National Conservation Act

Parts 5 and 7 of the National Conservation Act, 2013 (NCA), with the exception of sections 46 and 47 of Part 7, came into force on the 15th day of August 2016. This included section 51, which repealed the Marine Conservation Act (2013 Revision). Only sections 46 and 47 of the National Conservation Act still remain to come into force.

Appendix 2: Section 41 Consultations

Under Section 41 of the National Conservation Act all Government entities are required to consult with the National Conservation Council before granting a permit or licence, or making some other decision, that would be likely to have an adverse effect on the environment. Section 43 of the Act allows the Council, where necessary, to require the proponent to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). When an EIA is initiated, the Council appoints an Environmental Advisory Board (EAB) to regulate the process.

The Council has delegated normal section 41 reviews to the Department of Environment (to the Director, as per section 3(13) of the Act) as an administrative function of the Act. This includes identifying any proposals which may require an EIA and reporting a Screening Opinion to the Council for the Council to decide if an EIA is required, or not.

In 2025 the following section 41 reviews were conducted on behalf of the Council.

- Planning Reviews: 1,381
    - DPA Section 7 consultations: 1,058
    - NCA Section 41(3) consultations: 272
    - NCA Section 41(4) consultations: 51
        - Directed Conditions (Not all Section 41(4) consultations were necessary/requested): 48
            - Directed refusal: 2
- Other Section 41 Reviews to other Government Entities: 46
- Coastal Works Reviews: 17
- Turtle Friendly Lighting Plans: 17

Two applications were screened but found not to require an EIA, while one quarry EIA was approved to restart (though the applicants did not recommence).

EIAs remain international best practice at a relatively minor cost for those projects that require them, especially compared to the potential savings they can identify for the project. They are an important tool for assuring the public that environmentally, socially and economically appropriate decision-making is occurring. The activation of EIAs in local legislation has gone a long way to raising the profile of the Cayman Islands which in February 2013 were assessed as “weak” in each of the four areas of environmental governance (species, sites, development control and people) evaluated by the Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD[1]). Having EIA legislation also assists the Cayman Islands in achieving commitments made under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention, the 2001 Environment Charter, and the Cayman Islands Constitution Order 2009.

Unfortunately, the non-acceptance of Council recommendations, or even Directions under the Act, in some instances remains a significant problem. Non-acceptance of Direction could leave the non-complaint Government agency, or even private sector entities acting on the advice or permission of the non-compliant Government entity, open to legal challenge or prosecution.

The status of all active EIAs can be found on https://conservation.ky/current-eias/. (Only the Airports Authority EIAs, voluntarily screened and initiated by the Authority in 2024, remain active.) Any that have produced public reports can be found on https://conservation.ky/eia-reports/.

[1] https://doe.ky/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FIELD-assessment-environmental-protection-frameworks-overseas.pdf

Appendix 3: Financial

All accounts for the National Conservation Council and the Environmental Protection Fund are held and administered by the relevant Departments and Ministries of the Cayman Islands Government. Accounts for financial reporting or auditing purposes should be sourced from the relevant Departments & Ministries, or the Treasury Department and Ministry of Finance.

In 2026 the portion of the Environmental Protection Fund disbursements managed by the Department of Environment was overbudget by approximately $138,771.40. This reflected the expected results of a Green Iguana Cull budget being less than requested and requiring supplementary funding be applied for and received during 2025. The other projects over and under spends were managed to be nearly within total budget allocation for the projects. The significant overspend in Council legal representation should have been (partially) recovered from the expenses awarded (successful in all cases) but the expenses claims were either not pursued by the Government or if collected not reflected against the budget spent.

EPF Direct Spend 2025

Project	Rock Iguana	Parrot	Turtle Friendly Lighting	SCTLD (Coral Disease)
Jan-Jun Expenditure	$ 3,714.51	$ 2,215.15	$ 37.32	$ 66,418.70
Jul -Dec Expenditure	$ 50.25	$ 6,140.40	$ 57,772.06	$ 83,208.88
TOTAL 2025 SPEND	**$ 3,764.76**	**$ 8,355.55**	**$ 57,809.38**	**$ 149,627.58**
Budget	$ 50,000.00	$ 15,000.00	$ 100,000.00	$ 100,000.00
Over Under	$ 46,235.24	$ 6,644.45	$ 42,190.62	-$ 49,627.58

EPF Direct Spend 2025

Project	NCC Legal	Green Iguana	Grouper
Jan-Jun Expenditure	$ 134,749.32	$ 284,425.01	$ 22,557.00
Jul -Dec Expenditure	$ 1,206.00	$ 599,631.48	$ 1,645.32
TOTAL 2025 SPEND	**$ 135,955.32**	**$ 884,056.49**	**$ 24,202.32**
Budget	$ 75,000.00	$ 750,000.00	$ 35,000.00
Over Under	-$ 60,955.32	-$ 134,056.49	$ 10,797.68

EPF Direct Spend 2025

	TOTALS
Jan-Jun Expenditure	$ 514,117.01
Jul -Dec Expenditure	$ 749,654.39
TOTAL 2025 SPEND	**$ 1,263,771.40**
Budget	$ 1,125,000.00
Over Under	-$ 138,771.40