National Conservation Council
Cayman Islands

NCC STATEMENT

ON THE LIFTING OF THE BLUE IGUANA INTERIM DIRECTIVE

OCTOBER 2, 2025

The lifting of the interim directive will have no immediate impact on the Blue Iguana Conservation (BIC) iguana release programme in the two reserves (which were part of the critical habitat within the former interim directive). Longer term implications for iguana conservation in the Cayman Islands will have to be assessed by the NCC, DoE, National Trust and others involved & interested in iguana conservation on all three islands.

The lifting of the interim directive will prevent the National Conservation Council (NCC) from directing binding conditions of approval for applications which may adversely affect Blue Iguanas in the previously-designated critical habitat. In this case, the NCC is not able to direct the inclusion of speed bumps or other speed control measures, which are vital to ensure that Blue Iguanas do not get killed by vehicles. Blue Iguanas are still a protected species, which means that the DoE is able to prosecute if Blue Iguanas are harmed (in accordance with the definition in the National Conservation Act (NCA)) but not able to proactively prevent their harm (through requiring speed bumps in their territory).

The Department of Environment has a draft conservation plan which is currently undergoing internal review. There is a process within the NCA for bringing the plan to the NCC and then the Cabinet for approval, after public consultation. Currently data collection is ongoing to refine portions of the draft plan but given the lifting of the interim directive we may have to advance the plan to public consultation sooner, with the knowledge that ongoing refinements will continue over time as more data is collected.

The NCC does not support the lifting of the interim directive but respects the decision of Cabinet. We hope that in any future similar decisions, the Council will have an opportunity to provide input into the decisions being considered by Cabinet.

345-949-8469 www.conservation.ky conservationcouncil@gov.ky

Activities which were illegal before the interim directive remain illegal and the responsibility for enforcement also remains with the relevant governing agencies. Planning permission is required to clear land by mechanical means, including for vehicular access over existing rights of way.

When the road was constructed without Planning Permission, there were several aspects of the environment that were impacted including unpermitted take of mangroves and risk to Blue Iguanas. The DoE cannot enforce planning legislation but did successfully prosecute the take of mangroves under the NCA, resulting in a conviction and a $40,000 fine. To our knowledge, the Department of Planning has not at any point taken enforcement action against the breaches of the Development and Planning Act. The cessation of the interim directive designating critical habitat has now removed the NCC's ability to address risks to Blue Iguanas.

For any development proposals that now come forward the NCC has lost the ability to direct conditions of approval as outlined in the interim directive, e.g., traffic calming measures on roads. The NCC will now only be able to recommend measures, leaving the decision to enact these recommendations, or not, in the CPA's hands. The interim directive also allowed for ongoing iguana protections after development, such as the need to keep pets indoors or under control when outdoors (similar to the Animals Act requirement to keep dogs under control when outdoors) and gave the DoE access to undertake alien invasive species controls to protect Blue Iguanas.

There is no unfettered right to development of property in the Cayman Islands (as evidenced by the need for Planning Permission for something as simple as a shed or other minor works). The issue of environmental conservation in the national interest vs landowner & development interests is one that everyone is wrestling with around the world. It is generally accepted that the need for conservation of rare iconic species like the Blue Iguana requires some accommodation by private interests. The interim directive represented a way for people to live with wild iguanas. This goal remains the mandate of the NCC.

Despite the interim directive having been lifted, it is the NCC's hope that the landowners will voluntarily adopt the directive's conditions and act as responsible stewards of our natural heritage.