
Interim Report
of the
Islands Committee
of the
National Assembly



August 2020

The Islands Committee composed of the members listed below, submits its Report on the Islands to the National Assembly for consideration and approval.

Hon. Wavel Ramkalawan – Chairperson

Hon. Charles de Commarmond - Vice Chairperson

Hon. Bernard Georges – Member

Hon. Clifford Andre – Member

Hon. Stephen Pillay – Member

Hon. Sebastien Pillay – Member

Hon. Wilbert Herminie – Member



Bird Island, Northern Sand Spit
3°42.8' S 55°12.4'E



Picard, Aldabra
9°23.5' S 46°12.2'E



Coetivy Island
7°8.7' S 56°16.2'E



Goëlettes, Southern Beach Farquhar
10°13.6' S 51°7.7'E

DISCLAIMER

This does not purport to be the final report of the Islands Committee. It is a draft incomplete final report, produced in order to be tabled prior to the dissolution of the National Assembly announced by the President on 30th July 2020. The Committee has felt that it was its responsibility to the Assembly, notwithstanding, to present so much of the report as had already been prepared, with the following explanation.

The intention of the Committee was to visit the remaining islands (Cousin, Cousine, Curieuse, the La Digue satellites and Felicite, among the near granitic islands, and Providence in the Farquhar Group) prior to concluding the report. The near islands (mostly privately-owned) could not be visited for reasons beyond the Committee's control and the visit to Providence was delayed pending the construction of the airstrip there and then further delayed by the Covid-19 lockdown.

The Committee, additionally, and in accordance with best parliamentary practice, was not intending to present the report to the Assembly until those who are mentioned therein, and the owners or managers of the islands visited, had had an opportunity of seeing the final report in draft and commenting thereon.

Finally, our conclusions are tentative and not as full and detailed as we would have wished. Fuller conclusions, naturally, could only be made after all islands had been visited and the comments of stakeholders received.

Members are asked to receive this draft report bearing the foregoing in mind.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Islands Committee would like to extend its appreciation to all the staff of Ministries, Departments and Agencies, island owners and managers as well as all other individuals who have collaborated with the Committee over the compilation of this report. A special mention goes out to all secretariat staff and stakeholders who have provided the Committee with supporting documentation as well as insight and explanations, all of which have helped to foster a clearer picture and appreciation of the state of our islands.

In particular we want to thank the following:

1. Islands Development Committee for facilitating our visits by organising both transport and accommodation to islands under their management.
2. The Seychelles Islands Foundation for allowing us to visit Aldabra
3. The owners of D'arros and St. Joseph's Atoll under the management of Save Our Seas in the visit to these islands
4. The owners and management of Bird Island for welcoming us
5. The owners and management of Denis Island for sharing their vision with the team
6. The Aride Island Foundation for facilitating our visit to Aride
7. The Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust for sharing their plans and projects with us
8. All other persons mentioned in the report who shared their experience, thus enabling us to get a clearer understanding of our islands.

Our regret remains that the Committee did not get the opportunity to complete its work. We have been deprived of the opportunity to meet and listen to others who had valuable experience to share. This is a task that we leave for a future National Assembly Islands Committee.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. The Islands Committee

On Tuesday 8th November, 2016, Hon. Wavel Ramkalawan, Leader of the Opposition, moved the following motion before the National Assembly, "*Swivan bann notis dan Gazet Ofisyel date le 23 e 30 Septanm e le 7 Oktob 2016 konsernan letablisman D'Arros ek St. Joseph Atoll koman en Reserv Spesyal, sa Lasanble I rikord son lobzekasyon pour en tel plan e an menm tan etabli en 'Select Committee' pou etidye e raport avek Lasanble sitiasyon zeneral nou bann zil elwanye.*" ("Following the notices in the Official Gazette dated September 23, 30 and October 7, 2016 regarding the establishment of D'Arros and St. Joseph Atoll as a Special Reserve, this Assembly records its objection to such a plan and at the same time establishes a Select Committee, to study and report to the Assembly on the general situation of our Outer Islands.") The motion was approved unanimously.

B. The Terms of Reference for the Committee:

The TOR as approved by the National Assembly are:

- i. To visit all Outer Islands of the Republic, as well as other Seychelles islands, to engage with their owners, those responsible for their management and those employed there, so as to take stock of their actual development as well as future strategies for their use.
- ii. To engage with persons from all development fields - agriculture, fishing, housing, tourism and nature conservancy, amongst others - with a view to understanding the challenges and advantages of islands and thereby recommend plans for their use.
- iii. To consider new initiatives for the optimal development and use of all Outer Islands.

- iv. To consider ways in which all Outer Islands can be made freely accessible to Seychellois to visit, to reside on or to develop.
- v. To report to the Assembly on ways in which all Seychelles islands can be rendered more closely part of the national territory, more transparently administered and better used as part of the national development strategy.

C. Members of the Committee

- i. The members of the committee, chosen by their respective caucuses were Hon. Wavel Ramkalawan (Chair), Hon. Clifford André, Hon. Bernard Georges and Hon. Stephen Pillay (LDS), Hon. Charles de Commarmond (Deputy Chair), Hon. Chantale Ghislain and Hon. Sebastien Pillay (US). Subsequently, Hon. Ghislain was replaced by Hon. Wilbert Herminie.
- ii. The secretary of the Committee was the Clerk of the Assembly, Ms. Jutta Alexis, assisted by Ms. Debra Esparon.

D. Work Program

- i. After the Committee was formed, an initial meeting was organised with the Islands Development Company (IDC), headed by Mr. Patrick Berlouis, the Chairperson of the IDC Board, together with Mr. Patrick Lablache, a Board member and Mr. Glenn Savy, its CEO. The IDC welcomed the initiative and offered to facilitate our visits to the islands under its jurisdiction, but also to those to which it could organise access, namely Aldabra Atoll, D'Arros and St Joseph Atoll, and Coëtivy.
- ii. The Islands Committee was welcomed on Aldabra, a World Heritage Site, by the Seychelles Islands Foundation, whereas on D'Arros, Save our Seas shared the work they were doing on that island and the adjacent Atoll of St. Joseph.
- iii. The visit to Aride Island, a gift to conservation by the Cadbury family, was facilitated by Aride Island Foundation, whereas the owners of Bird and Denis Islands offered us the possibility to visit two privately-owned islands engaged in tourism and other activities.

- iv. The Committee also had the opportunity to engage with Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SECCAT). This gave us a deeper insight into their work and allowed us to support their project in the interest of our country.
- v. A series of meetings was held with persons who either had first-hand experience of the islands or who were interested in exploring the best ways to exploit the islands.
- vi. The Islands Committee was hoping to conclude its work by visiting the satellite islands of La Digue and Praslin, as well as Fregate Island. Unfortunately, this was not possible. However, we do intend to do so in the future.

2. General Overview

A. General Perception

- i. The general perception of our people is that, since Seychelles is made up of over 100 islands, there much land available for development. Our people often talk of using the Outer Islands for greater food production so that they can become the bread basket of our country. The exact number of islands is not known for sure, numbers ranging to 115 to over 200. It is part of the responsibility of the Islands Committee to provide clarity and thus place things in perspective so that we can have a realistic knowledge of the situation on and of the islands. It is only when we understand the fragility of the islands that we will become more careful when including them in the overall sustainable development plan of our country.

B. Geographical and Historical

- i. Whereas the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of our archipelago is 1,374,000 km² in area, the total land area is only 459 km², of which the total area of protected land makes up 47.06% (as announced by former President J. Michel in 2010, in support of the fact that Seychelles is fulfilling its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).) This means, simply, that we do not have much land. We have to stop thinking in terms of the number of islands, but rather in terms of islands

where real sustainable agricultural or other development can take place. Here again, we have to bear in mind that there are no rivers on the coralline islands. Consequently, apart from storing rain water, the only other natural source is well-water.

- ii. Our forefathers mastered the art of wells and have preserved the water table. We have no option but to follow in their footsteps because simple mistakes can destroy the delicate balance of keeping the limited fresh water in wells from mixing with the underlying sea water. However, we live in modern times, and with the technology of desalination and sewerage treatment at such an advanced stage, this should help in the provision and saving of water both for human consumption and other uses.
- iii. Each island has its own specificities. The tension will always be present between human habitation and conservation. There is a fine line which our nation will have to draw, given the huge bird populations that are present on many islands. How do we exploit these marvellous sights and contribute to helping the scientific world better understand the message of these heavenly creatures?

C. Marie-Louise

- i. The Committee is grateful that the government responded to its recommendation to close the prison on the island of Marie-Louise and convert the island to bird conservation. When the Committee visited Marie-Louise island in 2018, there were only 6 prisoners who were living in the same quarters as the guards.

D. Potential

- i. It is obvious to the Committee that, whereas some islands have the potential for tourism, fishing, agriculture and related activities, some will have a purely nature conservation vocation. Some islands should not be touched at all, but left to nature to take care of them with little oversight from humans, except to enjoy their beauty on carefully marked out tracks and guided tours. These, for example include South Island of Farquhar, North Island of Poivre, most of the atoll of Cosmoledo, Aride among others.
- ii. On the other hand, there is potential for tourism on many islands. Most of these have been identified and projects have either been completed or are in the planning stage. Presently, Providence, Platte and Coëtivy have been identified for tourism projects. Obviously, there is a need not only to look at foreign tourists, but local tourism. The Seychellois have to be part of any tourism project and residents should be offered the possibility of visiting and enjoying the islands, being a partner in their development and residing there where possible.

E. Protection

- i. The protection of our islands is of utmost importance. If the country is to benefit to the maximum, we need to protect our resources. Islands like Aldabra, Cosmoledo, Farquhar, Assumption and Providence are closer to Madagascar and the Comoros than to Victoria. It is common knowledge that the Malagasy and Comorians plunder our resources, while Seychellois exploit these and sell illegally to Madagascar. The issue of surveillance and security should feature high on the country's agenda.
- ii. As we talk of protection, we have to bear in mind that poachers from Mahé, Praslin and La Digue do visit the Outer Islands to harvest birds, dolphins and turtles.
- iii. As mentioned above, the necessity for a greater presence of Coast Guards on those islands is important. Sooner or later, the country will have to come up with a plan to protect our resources.

3. The State of the Outer Islands

A. Islands Visited

- i. The Islands Committee visited the following islands: Farquhar, Desroches, Poivre, D'Arros, Alphonse, Platte, Rémire, Marie-Louise, Assumption, Aldabra, Cosmoledo, Astove and Coëtivy. All these islands, with the exception of Cosmoledo, have an airstrip and a management team overseeing them.

B. Utilities

- i. As far as utilities are concerned, all inhabited islands were being well taken care of. They had electricity, running water and modern toilet facilities. Alphonse and Aldabra had already switched to solar electricity through the use of photovoltaic panels. This has been very successful and brought with it huge savings. The prevailing idea at the time of our visits was that all the other islands would follow suit.

C. Workforce

- i. The workforce of most islands comprised both Seychellois and non-Seychellois.
- ii. The general impression was that it was becoming very difficult to attract young Seychellois to work on the islands. The reasons given varied from lack of entertainment, boredom and lack of awareness.
- iii. However, among the Seychellois employed, it was interesting to note that they were enjoying the experience as it gave them the opportunity to plan and save for the future. The main complaint was that they felt foreign workers received better treatment.
- iv. The Committee addressed this issue with the management of Alphonse Resort and D'Arros. Since then, Alphonse has appointed a Seychellois Human Resources Manager. It does not seem that D'Arros has improved, as reports indicate that most Seychellois workers are leaving the island.
- v. This is an area of concern that needs to be addressed. It is also to be noted that, since the reopening of Farquhar, there are more Seychellois workers. The Four Seasons Hotel on Desroches has also attracted a number of local employees.

D. Staff Accommodation

- i. The accommodation facilities used by workers on all the islands visited were of a good standard and well kept. Following cyclone Fantala on Farquhar, which had destroyed all the houses, new cyclone-proof houses were being built.
- ii. We had the opportunity to see their construction. These have now been completed.
- iii. On the island of Assomption, which is in the cyclone belt, the houses had just been built. Desroches, Poivre, Alphonse, Platte, Rémire, Coëtivy, Astove and Marie-Louise all had good accommodation facilities for the staff.

E. Transport

- i. The biggest issue as far as developing the Outer Islands is concerned is the cost of transportation.
- ii. To illustrate this point, we can use Farquhar as an example. We were visiting when a landing craft was unloading construction materials. The cost of the materials on Mahé was approx. SCR40,000, but by the time the cargo reached the island, the cost had spiralled to SCR450,000.
- iii. This is a real concern that has to be taken into consideration when planning any development projects, including agriculture, fishing and tourism.
- iv. Air travel to the islands is also costly and will have a direct effect on local tourism.

F. Erosion

- i. The rise in sea level is taking a negative toll on the islands. Most of them have started to see large areas of land disappear.
- ii. This is not affecting only the Outer Islands but also the islands of Bird and Denis.
- iii. Bird has had to move its whole lodge back from the coast, Denis island has seen the erosion of part of the island in front of its restaurant, while on Rémire the vestiges of the Veevers-Carter house, built in the 1960s, now lie wholly underwater. Desroches and Platte have not been left out. It is a real concern which demands urgent attention.
- iv. The solution remains a worry as it has been predicted that at the pace climate change is happening with greater tides and currents, all low-lying coralline islands are at risk of complete disappearance.

G. Local Tourism

- i. Presently, there are some islands that make special provision for promotional rates for Seychellois tourists.

- ii. The following islands have special accommodation for residents: Silhouette, Platte, Desroches, Astove, Farquhar and Alphonse.
- iii. The biggest barrier is availability of seats on IDC aircraft to Platte, Desroches, Astove, Farquhar and Alphonse.
- iv. This is an issue that needs to be addressed as this would open the islands more to residents.

H. Conservation

- i. Conservation organisations were present on all the Outer Islands. They expressed satisfaction with the work they were doing, especially with the increase in turtles that were now nesting, but still expressed concern regarding the constant presence of poachers.
- ii. Another big issue was Fish Aggregating Devices (FADS). We observed significant examples of bamboo and nylon ropes on the beaches of all islands we visited.
- iii. Some were also caught in the coral reefs. It appears that there has been some development in technology whereby these FADS can now be detected as they approach an island and can be collected by conservation organisations for a fee paid by the fishing vessels which lay them.
- iv. This is an ongoing issue that will need a lasting solution.

4. The Visits

A. Farquhar

- i. Quick Info:

Type: Atoll

Distance: located 770 km (416 nm) south west of Victoria, Mahe.

Airstrip: North Farquhar has a 1,170 metre (3,840 ft) paved airfield (ICAO: FSFA) that is located near North East Point.

Number of Islands: 11

Land area: 8.357 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview:

The visit to Farquhar took place on 18th February, 2018. It was chosen as the first group of islands to be visited because the Committee felt it was very important to experience first-hand the catastrophic damage recently caused by cyclone Fantala to the islands comprising the Atoll. The flight from Mahe is approximately 1hr 45 minutes to North Island, where the airstrip is located.



Before we landed, we overflowed the 11 islands of the Atoll to observe the damage caused by the cyclone. This was heart breaking. Everything had been destroyed. Except for a few trees and the hard bunker, everything had been flattened. The coconut plantation, telecommunication facilities, the village, the pier and the Grande Case had taken direct hits and been obliterated.



Fortunately, no lives were lost as all workers had been moved to other islands, or had taken shelter in the cyclone-proof bunker, prior to the cyclone hitting the islands.

iii. Reconstruction:

Reconstruction works by IDC had started. The new buildings were designed to be cyclone-proof, with concrete roofs. Apart from the village for the workers, the new tourism

accommodation too was being rebuilt. It was obvious that the infrastructure on North Island would soon be completed. The main concern was the cost of transportation of building materials from Mahé.



The main task would comprise clearing the island of the thousands of coconut, casuarina and other trees that had been destroyed. Work was progressing slowly. It was obvious that a bigger workforce was required. The positive side of the destruction was that, with proper planning, it would give the island a new look and could even give it back the possibility of greater agricultural production. To allow trees to simply create the old forest would be a wasted opportunity.

iv. Recommendations:

Tourism: Farquhar has already publicised itself as a renowned fly-fishing centre. The new accommodation should give clients greater security from the elements. This activity should be further encouraged and can be a significant source of income. Furthermore, the sheer beauty of the place should be a tourist attraction in itself. By putting emphasis on the Noddy colonies on North Island and Golette island, and the red-footed booby population of South Island, Farquhar could become an obligatory stop on the bucket-list of bird lovers.

Local tourism must be further encouraged. Seychellois would definitely enjoy a peaceful holiday on Farquhar.

Rental Homes: The idea of building a few houses for locals who would rent these for a period is to be recommended.

The facilities would be basic, in order to keep the rent affordable, but sufficient to accommodate those wanting to enjoy such a life.

It is not recommended that the houses be sold as this could

lead to only a few enjoying the facilities, whereas renting would allow more residents to enjoy life of the Outer Islands for a few weeks or months at a time.

Agriculture and Fishing: Some agriculture would be possible, though not on a large scale. A variety of crops such as tomatoes, maize, sweet potatoes, chilly, egg plant could do well. This would help reduce imports from Mahé.

Some livestock production, mainly poultry, quail and turkey would be possible. Larger-scale beef production with cattle imported from Madagascar is another area which can be considered.

The lagoon is a rich fishing ground. An experiment was carried out several years ago with exporting live groupers, but this failed. We feel that the Farquhar fishing industry should be given a new impetus, perhaps putting emphasis on the production of salted fish.

Once the plantation on the island is restored, bee-keeping should also be encouraged since honey production could well be another industry that should be developed.

Conservation: Farquhar Atoll should be seen as a nature conservation area. South Island should be kept in its pristine state, dedicated to the birds, and the same for Goelette Island where annually several thousand pairs of Sooty Terns come to roost.

The devastation wreaked by cyclone Fantala provides an opportunity for the rehabilitation of South Island, and the elimination of introduced species of vegetation, such as coconut and casuarina may give Seychellois and visitors alike an idea of what our islands looked like before the arrival on human beings.

While fishing activities should be allowed in the lagoon, the conservation of groupers and sea cucumbers must be high on the agenda.

B. Desroches

i. Quick Info:

Type: Coral Island

Distance: 227 km SW from Victoria, Mahe

Airstrip: The island has a 1,372-metre (4,501 ft) long paved airstrip in the southern part (IATA code DES, ICAO code FSDA).

Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 4.027 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview:

Desroches is probably the most developed island in the Amirantes group. Luxury villas under private ownership were built over the last 15 years.



While the villas are privately owned, their maintenance and provision of utilities are taken care of by IDC. Desroches was also the first island to have a hotel. This was a basic establishment but the

Four Seasons group has since built a luxury hotel.

There is an arrangement with the owners of the private villas for renting out the villas as an add-on to the hotel.

There is a local village for Seychellois workers.

The island has a herd of sheep and has been involved in tortoise breeding. Some agricultural activity takes place, although the main activity centres around the hotel. Local

tourism is popular.

There are two specially-built bungalows rented to residents on full board basis.

Another important industry is construction of casuarina furniture.



A significant proportion of the timber and furniture in the villas and hotel was produced on the island from casuarina timber locally grown. The farm produces vegetables for the hotel, and – as mentioned above – the management of the island provides both utilities and maintenance for owners of private residences.

Desroches provides a good example of integrated development of an Outer Island.

iii. Recommendations

Tourism: Desroches should keep its tourism development and villas as its main activities.

There is, however, room to open up to greater local tourism.

More Seychellois businesses should be encouraged to venture into the leisure-boat business on the island.

The fly-fishing activity is a high-end foreign exchange earner. Given that the island is surrounded by rich fishing grounds and shallow waters, the setting is perfect.

Rental Homes: The construction of rental homes for Seychellois is a necessary development.

The island is only 30 minutes by plane and, with the hotel, the frequency of flights is higher.

This would open up the island for Seychellois who wish to live on an Outer Island for a longer period than that of a hotel guest and enjoy a quiet life, perhaps in retirement.

Agriculture and Fishing: The size of Desroches allows for the possibility of some agriculture. Livestock production on a small scale to cater for the island's needs should be considered. Similar to Farquhar, a number of crops could be planted, including fruits. The island also has the potential for the production of honey.

Conservation: The island has a big colony of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. Turtles nest there. For the present, the whole of the north portion of the island is designated a conservation area and is protected from development. This needs to be maintained.

In common with many of the coralline islands, erosion is also affecting Desroches. Urgent consideration is required in order to preserve the island.

C. Poivre Atoll

i. Quick Info:

Type: Atoll

Distance: 268 km south of Victoria, Seychelles

Airstrip: Poivre North Island is bisected by a 1,100 metre (3,600 ft) unpaved airfield.

Number of Islands: 4

Land area: 2.78 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview

Poivre lies 15 minutes by air from Desroches. Never having been mined for guano, Poivre is, along with Alphonse, probably the most fertile island in the Amirantes.

The lush vegetation is a clear demonstration of its ability to produce vegetables and other food crops for the area. Poivre is an island that is full of potential.



However, the island's infrastructure requires substantial upgrading as the island is littered with old machinery and metal. The old settlement should also be restored to provide visitors with an idea of island administration in days gone by.

iii. Recommendations

Tourism: North Island has excellent potential for a tourist development, applying the Alphonse concept. This can be

developed alongside a local tourism facility.

Rental Homes: A few retirement homes could be built.

Agriculture and Fishing: The island has great potential for intense agricultural development, including crops such as lemon, pumpkin, tomatoes, egg plants, etc. Poivre could become the vegetable basket of the Amirantes.

Additionally, Poivre has the capacity for the construction of a protected mooring basin for vessels touring the Amirantes and it could easily form the base for boats to explore the islands of the Amirantes Group.

Conservation: South Island should not be disturbed except for construction of a nature trail for visitors. The population of Blue Crabs is apparently significant. An assessment for exploitation should be made, but the principle should be total conservation.

D. Marie-Louise Island

i. Quick Info:

Type: coralline island

Distance: 308 km south of Victoria, Seychelles

Airstrip: The island has a 550 metre (1,800 ft) unpaved airstrip (ICAO code FSMA) that follows the north–south axis.

Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 0.556 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview:



The island is home to large colonies of sea birds and has been declared an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Bird Life International. The island supports breeding colonies of brown noddies (2000 pairs), lesser noddies (3500 pairs) and white terns (3000 pairs). Green and hawksbill sea turtles also nest there.

The island is known for its rich fish life.

In its recent history it also housed a maximum-security prison. The Islands Committee intervened when the government declared that the island had been designated as a new military training centre.

The Committee, through a letter, advised the President to close down the prison and turn it into an island consecrated to bird conservation.



This was achieved in 2018. Since the closure of the prison, we have not been informed of what has happened to the prison. It is worthy to note that Marie-Louise is situated a mere 12 kilometers from Desnoeuvs Island, an island where hundreds of thousands of pairs of sooty terns come to nest annually.



iii. Recommendation.

The Committee fully supports the designation of Marie-Louise as a bird sanctuary.

We would however wish to know government's plan for the former prison.

E. Alphonse Group

i. Quick Info:

Type: atoll

Distance: The island of Alphonse lies 400 km south west of Victoria, Seychelles.

Airstrip: The island is bisected by a 1,220 metre (4,000 ft) Alphonse Airport (ICAO code:FSAL).

Number of Islands: The atoll of Alphonse, the atoll of St Francois and Bijoutier Island.

Land area: 1.71 km²

Owner: GOS

ii. Manager: IDC

iii. Overview:

Alphonse Atoll is one of two atolls of the Alphonse Group, the other being St. François Atoll. It has an area of 171 hectares. Life on Alphonse centres around the hotel built several years ago. Fly fishing is the main activity and a major attraction to tourists. There are two bungalows for local tourism. However, these were being used to house workers and were therefore unavailable for residents. Given the size of the island, it would not be really possible to develop it to house activities other than small-scale agriculture.

During the visit to Alphonse, a presentation given by an ecologist who had carried out beach profiling on Alphonse and had monitored the waters around the Atoll was made to the Committee.



iv. Environmental Degradation

The effect of global warming is harsh and the bleaching of corals is happening at an alarming pace, apart from the harm being caused by FADs laid by the commercial tuna fleets.

The FAD watch programme recorded a number of 1000 to 3000 devices per vessel. These serve to increase the vessel's catch by some 20%. However, the environmental damage caused by these FADs outbalances this increase by far.

The presentation also showed that 2 tons of plastic were collected on Alphonse beach alone in one year. Fish feed on the algae that cover the tiny plastic parts, hence plastic enters our food chain.

The Committee met with the staff of the resort. The members were very vocal concerning their working conditions. Some of these concerns include the following: no overtime/days; no tips; service charge confusion; no representation of Seychellois workers; dissatisfaction with the then South African Head of Human Resources; no insurance policies; no indication of public holidays on pay slip; compulsory drugs tests upon hiring; compulsory termination etc.

v. Recommendations

The Committee's main recommendation is for the erection of more bungalows for local tourism and to ensure that more Seychellois are employed in the resort's higher management.

F. Cosmoledo Atoll

i. Quick Info:

Type: Atoll

Distance: 1,045 km (564 nm) southwest of the capital Victoria.

Airstrip: None

Number of Islands: 23

Land area: 5.13 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview:

Cosmoledo Atoll is an atoll of the Aldabra Group and is located 1,029 km southwest of the capital, Victoria. It has an area of 5.13 square kilometers with a total of 23 islands, among which the main ones are Menai, Wizard, South, Grande Polyte, and North-east.

Previously the island was inhabited, but this has since ceased and the homestead abandoned.



The atoll was a major centre for turtle and green snail harvesting in the past.

This atoll is a treasure for poachers since it is one of the main turtle-breeding grounds in the area. When we visited, evidence of poaching was apparent.

The plan to build an airstrip was cancelled, leaving access to the atoll via Astove Atoll. A small controversial tourism project, using modified cyclone-proof containers, was started by Blue Safari, the same company that runs the Alphonse Resort.

This project is to enable fly-fishing as a tourism venture on the Atoll.

Criticism has revealed the lack of a transparent procedure which could have allowed Seychellois to participate in the tourism project, but the operator had been hand-picked.

iii. Recommendations

Conservation: The Islands Committee believes that Cosmoledo should be dedicated to conservation, and this for various reasons.



It is a place of outstanding beauty with a healthy lagoon teeming with turtles and most shell types. The surrounding islands are home to thousands of birds.

Cosmoledo Atoll has Seychelles' largest populations of Red-footed Booby, Masked Booby and Sooty Tern in the country.

It is also the last breeding site for the Brown Booby, exterminated elsewhere on the islands.

It is home to three endemic birds, namely the Souimanga Sunbird, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Madagascar White-eye. BirdLife International has recognised it as an Important Bird Area.

Furthermore, diving is excellent and the marine life is very rich.

G. Assomption Island

i. Quick Info:

Type: Coralline Island

Distance: 1,135 km (613 nm) southwest of the capital, Victoria.

Airstrip: The island is bisected by a 1,210 metre (3,970 ft) concrete airfield (ICAO: FSAS) running between the two sand dunes on the southeast point to the village on the western coast.



Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 11.6 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview:

Captain Nicolas Morphey discovered the island on 14 August 1756. He named it Assomption, in honour of the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary which falls on the 15th August.

It is bigger than La Digue island and was very fertile given the guano deposits there. However, the island was a centre for guano mining and this has had a negative effect on the landscape of the island.

The island today is dominated by expanses of bare limestone and caves, and is sparsely covered with low-growing vegetation. The vestiges of guano mining are everywhere, even the rail tracks and the storage area remaining.



The pier from which over 160,000 tons of guano were exported lies in ruins today. It is reported that some of the guano deposits were as deep as 15 metres.

Thousands of butterflies, including endemic species, roam the island. A striking feature of the island is the two sand dunes, one rising to 32 metres.

The island is accessed mainly by air. A village for the workers and an old traditional house lie at the centre of all activities. On the island there are also two telecommunication towers installed by India.

An interesting building known as 'Mr. René's Bunker', which was to be a hotel, but was never completed, is the only other construction on the island.

The island, which was once a place where turtles were slaughtered in their thousands and parts exported to England

to produce the famous Calipee Soup, is now one of the most prolific breeding grounds for both the Green and the Hawksbill turtles.

iii. Recommendations

Tourism: Lying so close to Aldabra Atoll, a World Heritage Site, automatically gives Assomption a specific mission to protect Aldabra, but also to act as a facilitator to enable guests to visit it.

Therefore, we recommend that Assomption plays both a tourism role and acts as a stepping-stone to Aldabra. Additionally, Assomption has a big conservation role to play.

A small tourism establishment should be built to cater either as a transit hotel to Aldabra, or as a holiday establishment for anyone, including Seychellois, to visit.



Tourists will be able to enjoy what has been described as the most beautiful beach in the world - 6,000 metres in length that spans most of the west coast of Assomption.

Furthermore, Assomption has a rich fauna and the best diving sites are close to shore. Those interested in nature conservation will have the joy of watching turtles during the breeding season.

Given the rich fishing grounds, deep sea fishing could be encouraged.

Coast Guards Base: Given the size of our EEZ, much thought has been given to the idea of developing some form of military base on one of the Outer Islands. Assomption Island has been

found to be the most appropriate, given its location and also its geography.

It is for this very reason that India proposed building a military base there.

The Islands Committee is of the view that there is a need for some form of a Coast Guards Base to be located on Assomption Island in order to fight drug trafficking and poaching on the one hand, but also to defend Aldabra, in case of an oil spill, given that there is a major shipping route between Aldabra and the African continent.

We must also not forget that the area around Assomption and Aldabra lies close to the centre of piracy in the area.

Fishing: Given the rich fishing grounds around the island, the development of a fishing village should be seriously considered. As is mentioned elsewhere in this report, this idea would also apply to a some other islands. The principle would be that fishermen would have the possibility to rent out accommodation, but also hire cold storage facilities for the exportation of fresh fish to Mahé or facilities to salt fish. We recommend this as a possibility when looking at the potential of our islands, and here, Assomption, in particular.

H. Astove Atoll

i. Quick Info:

Type: Large atoll

Distance: 1,041 km (562 nm) southwest of the capital, Victoria, on Mahé Island.

Airstrip: The island has a 640 metre (2,100 ft) unpaved grass airfield (ICAO: FSSA) on the north east point of the island.

Number of Islands: 15



Land area: 7.9 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview:

Astove Atoll is part of the Aldabra Group and is located 1,041 km southwest of Victoria, close to Cosmoledo.

As noted above, the quickest access to Cosmoledo is by aircraft to Astove and then by boat to Cosmoledo. Guano deposits on Astove have been heavily extracted.

This activity has left numerous cavities which accumulate with stagnant water and provide breeding ground for mosquitoes. For long, Astove has been synonymous with swarms of mosquitoes.

The atoll is very fertile and one instantly notices that the land tortoises on Astove are much bigger than those on the other islands, especially Aldabra, directly related to the abundance of the food supply.



There are wild goats and pigs roaming the islands freely. Some pigs have been captured and there is a small farm producing some vegetables and livestock.

The atoll remains an important turtle-breeding ground. Similar to Cosmoledo, the lagoon teems with turtles. Astove is principally used as a centre for fly-fishing.



The main house has been restored into a tourism establishment rented by various companies. Special attractions of the island are the large numbers of butterflies on land and the wall of coral which is one of the country's finest diving sites, featured in one of Jacques

Cousteau's underwater films.

iii. Recommendations

Agriculture and Fishing: There is the possibility for some livestock production, using mainly the breed of pigs found on the island.

The meat has been found to be of excellent quality, as a likely result of the fact that the diet is overwhelmingly made up of coconut.

The area around Astove and Cosmoledo constitutes rich fishing ground. Developing a fishing industry must be a top priority.

Tourism: Astove has a clear tourism vocation, given its proximity to Cosmoledo and its own characteristics, comprising an almost enclosed lagoon.

As the island with an airstrip used by clients going to Cosmoledo, the possibility of further developing its own tourism amenities is good.

Astove can be a destination for local tourism and this will give Seychellois the possibility of visiting both Astove and Cosmoledo, and explore their beauty and unique bird life. More Seychellois should be encouraged to take up employment on Astove as it was obvious from our visit that some foreigners there were doing jobs young Seychellois could perform.

Conservation: From Astove, the conservation of Cosmoledo can be directed and managed.

There is the possibility to study the butterfly population that is unique to the atoll, serious study of the land tortoises, the breeding of the same, as well as other activities.

I. Platte Atoll

i. Quick Info:

Type: Coral island

Distance: Platte Island is 161 kilometres (87 nm) from the capital Victoria.

Airstrip: Platte is bisected by a 1000 m airfield that follows the long north-south axis, 23 m wide east-west, and 3 m above the sea level.



Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 0.578 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview

The island is 130 km from Mahe and, at 54 hectares, it is half the size of Bird Island and double the size of Rémire.

The Islands Committee was on the first flight that landed on the new runway, then still under construction.

It was apparently to be the first of its kind, priding itself on having applied EU standards in Seychelles. It is designed to serve 6 to 7 flights a day.

The island had in the past built facilities for local tourism, but unfortunately these have now closed because there were no workers on the island.

We visited the facilities on the island and later visited the tents that had been installed for those involved in the project to build a 5-star hotel.

As our visit coincided with a high spring tide, we could observe for ourselves the erosion that was affecting the island

and its precariousness in the face of rising sea levels. Platte - as



its name suggests – is definitely going to be one of the first islands to be the casualty of climate change.

Small-scale farming and fishing activities are performed by the few inhabitants on Platte Island, mainly for self-supply.

iii. Recommendations

Tourism: Given the size of the island, it is obvious that not much can be done on it. The hotel project is probably the best one can hope for. However, there is space for local tourism too.

J. Rémire Island

i. Quick Info:

Type: Coral Island

Distance: Remire Island is 245 kilometres (132 nm) south west from the capital Victoria.

Airstrip: The island is bisected by a 460 metre (1,510 ft) paved airstrip (ICAO code FSSR) that follows the west-east axis.

Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 0.3 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC

ii. Overview

Everyone had heard a lot about Rémire Island, the getaway of former President Rene during his time in office, so the visit was one of great interest.

The houses used by the former President were in a dilapidated state with some of the family's belongings still scattered around the house.



The villas for local residents were very well-appointed and the service given by the local staff was excellent. The coast showed signs of heavy erosion.

Given the size of the island, it is obvious that, like Platte, it will be badly affected with the rise in sea level.

iii. Recommendations

Tourism: Rémire has the potential for a small tourism villa that will accommodate two or three families for a real private get away. Local tourism should be encouraged.

Agriculture: Peacocks seem to be thriving on the islands. It would be worthwhile to explore the possibility of breeding these birds for sale on the local market.

Many Seychellois would surely love to keep peacocks, as is evident in certain homes in the country.

Fishing: Remire lies close to Remire Reef, a rich fishing area. This could provide the nucleus for a fishing venture based on, and operating from, the island.

K. Coëtivy Island

i. Quick Info:

Type: Coral Island

Distance: 290 km (157 nm) south of Mahé

Airstrip: The island has a 1,400 metre (4,600 ft) airfield that follows the long east–west axis.

Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 9.33 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: GOS

ii. Overview

The visit to Coëtivy was the most depressing visit carried out by the Islands Committee. The landing was excellent and one could straight away observe that standard of the airstrip was higher than those of the other islands we had visited.

It was also fitted with lights for night landing. A huge hangar was another indication that the island once had a very important industry. Unhappily, this had ceased production and, instead of properly disposing of the plant and equipment which had been brought to the island, the Government simply walked away and left everything in place to rot.

The trip to the village revealed the waste that had taken place over numerous years. Rusty cranes, rotting vehicles and dilapidated buildings lay in front of us. The tour exposed even more terrible wastage and irresponsible acts of vandalism.



Top class cold stores, stainless steel processing facilities had simply been abandoned and left to the mercy of plunderers who grabbed what they could.



Yet this was a government prawn project under the management of the Seychelles Marketing Board, that started with a loan in excess of \$100 million from the ABN AMRO Bank. The prawn ponds still had their expensive lining, but instead of prawns now grow casuarina and albizia trees.

The island has a vast potential for diverse agriculture. The soil is excellent for tomatoes, pumpkin, aubergine, onions, garlic, ginger. In 1982-1983 IDC had 200 cows, 150 sows, 40,000 chicken and a large-scale onion and garlic growing project

supported by Taiwan. This project was quite successful; it lasted around 3 years and then had to close to make way for prawn production. Investors took a loan for prawn production. Prawn harvesting was around 1x every 4 months with a 1-month sterilisation period; i.e. around 2.5 crops per annum at 3 tons per crop.

Touted as a financially viable pillar of the economy, the project turned out to be a massive failure.

There was no rescue plan from Government and the plant closed in 2008.

As stated above, the island was abandoned and uncontrolled looting of products, materials and equipment took place; 3-mm-thick plastic used in prawn ponds were stolen and exported. Approximately 300m USD worth of equipment disappeared.

Following the failed project, government paid the remaining loan of around 40-50 m USD.

There are 5 generators on the island, 3 of which are in operation with a capacity of 2.5 MW each.

Coëtivy represents 60% of output of all outer islands together. It is approximately 1000 hectares; Assomption Island is slightly larger but less fertile.

The island, we learned, was under direct government supervision, with IDC operating the utilities.

The prison department had some prisoners serving time on the island and the Agency for Protection against Drug and Alcohol Abuse and Rehabilitation (APDAR) had stationed a counsellor to guard the former rehabilitation centre.

At the time of the visit of the Islands Committee, there were 6 prisoners on the island under the supervision of Prison Warden Mrs Agatine.

A detox project that was carried out under the aegis of APDAR had not proved successful. They had 3 Mauritian counsellors with very low performance, i.e. around 3 hours/day only. This

project was then abandoned.

During 2019, there was a fatal accident in which a landing craft carrying cargo to the island caught fire, resulting in the disappearance of the master and three crew members. One member of the crew was rescued by prisoners.

Following the accident, the Islands Committee met with the IDC and received first-hand information on the accident. We also offered our condolences to the distressed families and attended their memorial service.

The IDC management also had a meeting with the Committee to discuss the intention of government to hand over the island to the IDC. While most members felt that this would be a positive move, some members expressed concern with a lease which government had granted to Mr Siva Sivasankaran for a tourism development which had never materialised.

We were not informed of any final decision.

The Committee presented a report after the visit to Coëtivy to the Assembly.

The interim report is attached to this one.

iii. Recommendations

Agriculture and Fishing: It is obvious that Coëtivy is a very fertile island that has huge agricultural potential in terms of both crops and livestock. This has been tried and tested in the past. With the question of food security very much on the agenda, especially following the COVID-19



pandemic, we recommend that first of all government urgently designates proper legal management for the island.

Following that, agricultural activities should be initiated immediately.

The aim should be self-sufficiency within a period of two years for the country.

Furthermore, it is recommended that a cash crop, such as vanilla, be introduced on a large scale for cultivation. Another industry that could be exploited is the production of virgin coconut oil, with special attention to on-site production of specific elements for the production of animal feed (e.g. maize and copra).

Another element to consider seriously is the production of honey as a new business, for both local consumption and export.

In 1982 Minister Belmont, then CEO of IDC, made a trial, growing 100 different coconut types from all over the world; the conclusion was that the Seychelles Coëtivy coconut was the best. Unlike other species, a Coëtivy palm tree of 20 to 25 metres in height can sway 10m without breaking – something important if the high winds in the area are taken into account.

Fishermen report that the fishing grounds around Coëtivy are rich. Therefore, commercial fishing should also be given importance.

The island is also an important nesting site for green turtles and hawksbills. Pelagic seabirds feed in the rich waters around the island.

The Committee wishes to propose that small-scale prawn production for the local market, utilizing the facilities already constructed on the island, be ventured into. Another industry that is worth looking into is aquaculture for the production of fresh water tropical fish for both the local and export markets.

Tourism: Coëtivy is a big island, in fact considered the biggest coral island in the archipelago.

There is space for a tourism project. However, this has to be properly planned so as to cohabit with livestock production.

Rental Homes: The island is big enough to offer such facilities.

With more air transport between the island and Mahé as a result of numerous island activities, some residents might find this offer attractive and might even find employment and be able to put their skills to good use.

Unlike many of the smaller or poorer outer islands, Coëtivy is an example of a multi-use island where numerous activities can co-exist.

The Committee urges an integrated development of different sectors which can depend on each other and achieve an example of the holistic use of an island.

L. Silhouette Island

i. Quick Info:

Type: Granitic Island

Distance: Silhouette Island lies 20 km (11 nm) northwest of Mahé in the Seychelles.

Airstrip: None, but can be accessed by helicopter or by boat.

Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 20.1 km²

Owner: GOS

Manager: IDC



ii. Overview

Silhouette is the third largest granitic, fourth overall largest, and second highest island in our archipelago and the only granitic island that is under the supervision of the IDC. The main activity currently is tourism, based around the Hilton Labriz Resort and a private guesthouse located at La Passe. Silhouette



used to have a flourishing village of long-term residents, but this is no more, and the school is no longer operational. A government health facility is run in collaboration with the hotel and has a special arrangement to provide basic, but high-standard, health facilities to the guests and locals. A decompression chamber lies at the centre of the health service offered there.

Silhouette has a safe harbour from which regular ferries serving the hotel run to and from Bel Ombre on Mahe. The old Dauban house is one of the finest examples of the plantation houses still in good condition.

A large part of Silhouette is devoted to conservation and the island contains one of the only remaining endemic forests of the country, as well as one of the few colonies of sheath-tailed bats.

The other location that has potential for development is Grand Barbe; a large flat plateau and marsh can provide sufficient space for agricultural production or for a niche tourism facility.

The disadvantage of Grand Barbe is that access is difficult – from the sea, the landing is hazardous whilst overland a path is a 2-3 hour walk to La Passe.

Previously Silhouette also had one of the biggest poultry farms in the country.

iii. Recommendations

Conservation: By reason of its fragility, its mountains, and since it already possesses areas of unique biodiversity, Silhouette must remain as a conservation island of note.

Close to Mahe, more visitors to the unique forests of the island should be encouraged.

This will give employment to residents of the island wishing to become tour guides.

Tourism: Silhouette already has a tourism vocation. Given the topography and uniqueness of the island, there is the potential to further develop eco-tourism projects.

However, any development in this area has to take into consideration the presence of the rarest bat in the world. Its natural habitat has already been threatened by the development of the hotel and the constant spraying against pests.

Any tourism development at Grand Barbe will obviously bring with it lights at night and this may have a negative effect on any colony of the bats in that area.

The local villas for residents are always fully booked. More should be built. Silhouette should eventually become an island of fun for both locals and foreigners.

Rental Homes: Due consideration should first and foremost be given to former residents of Silhouette. Many were born there and it appears that they were treated in the same way as the Chagossians were when the Chagos archipelago was depopulated.

Those born on Silhouette or their descendants should be encouraged to return to the island to rebuild the village and make a contribution in the tourism industry and the conservation of the island.

Retirement homes could also be built for Seychellois who wish to go into retirement on Silhouette. Given its proximity to Mahé and ease of transportation, this could surely be an attraction.

Agriculture and fishing: The steep topography of the island may constitute an impediment to agriculture on a large scale. However, this option has to be explored carefully. The island is large, with plentiful water.

Dedicating some hectares to agriculture and for livestock production can be explored.

Other Activities: Another business opportunity that could be considered is mineral water exploitation.

The mountains of Silhouette, second highest in Seychelles, have not yet been tested for this.

Given that most of the sea around Silhouette is a marine reserve, we recommend that certain areas be re-designated as fishing areas, especially given that some species found in the area, such as octopus, bludger (karang balo) and pickhandle barracuda (bekin) are much enjoyed by locals.

M. D'Arros Island and St. Joseph's Atoll

i. Quick Info:

Type: D'Arros is a coralline island on its own but the St Joseph islands are part of an Atoll within the Amirante Islands group.

Distance: they are located 248 km (134 nm) south west of Victoria.

Airstrip: a 975 metres (3,199 ft) unpaved airstrip (ICAO: FSDA) bisects the d'Arros island in the southwest.

Number of Islands: 1 for d'Arros and 13 for St Joseph Atoll

Land area: 1.71 km² for d'Arros and 1.63 km² for St Joseph Atoll

Owner: Abdul Mohsen Abdulmalik Al-Sheikh

Manager: Save Our Seas Foundation

ii. Overview

D'Arros Island and St. Joseph's Atoll are privately owned. In the mid-1970's the group was sold to a nephew of the then Shah of Iran who had the airstrip and a magnificent house, as well as the normal infrastructure of workers' village and landing area,



built. As a result, D'Arros has all the facilities of an Outer Island, such as landing stage, workers village and roads. The island was sold to Mrs Betancourt, the L'Oréal heiress, and thence to a Saudi Sheikh, the current owner. The conservation group 'Save Our Seas' is basically responsible for the administration of both islands and the surrounding seas.

On the short trip from D'Arros to St. Joseph's Atoll we could observe Manta Rays, sailfish, sharks and others, showing that the conservation work in the area was effective. St. Joseph's Atoll (known as the 'Aldabra of the Amirantes') is traditionally a breeding ground for sharks.

The island of St. Joseph is again well known for the giant Blue Crab. There was controversy expressed in terms of whether there was shark feeding carried out in the surrounding seas, thus the prominence of that species, and also whether exportation of certain species to big aquariums was being carried out.



These issues need to be addressed. D'Arros Island has a huge colony of Frigate birds and brown boobies that come to roost. D'Arros is also a nesting island for the wedged tail shearwater.

Both islands can indeed be termed nature reserves.

The main issue that was addressed by the workers on the island was the treatment they received as Seychellois, stating that they were treated as second class citizens.

They also stated that more foreigners were being employed on the island, with Seychellois losing their jobs. Furthermore, they stated that many of these workers, even the scientists, did not have a GOP.

These issues were taken up with the management of the islands.

iii. Recommendations

Tourism: It is obvious that the owners themselves want to develop the islands as eco-tourism sites. D'Arros has a splendid

owner's villa and two bungalows, but it is not clear whether access is reserved for the owners and their friends.

We recommend that publicity be given to ensure that locals are given access to these pristine areas.

Conservation: We recommend that D'Arros and St Joseph Atoll remain strict conservation areas. Further research should be carried out to see how St. Joseph can either be exploited in a sustainable manner or left untouched.

N. Bird Island

i. Quick Info:

Type: Coralline island

Distance: located 100 km (54 nm) north of Victoria.

Airstrip: it has a grass airstrip of 920 m (3,018 ft)

Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 0.94 km²

Owner: Guy Savy

ii. Manager: Owner-managed

iii. Overview

The island is privately owned and houses a tourist establishment comprising a of several chalets that welcome local and foreign visitors.

The villas are aimed to give the visitor a real sense of island life. One meets the birds the moment one steps off the plane and even sleeps with the birds at night.



The island is involved in environment conservation projects. Nearly one million pairs of sooty terns nest annually on the island, making this the principal attraction for visitors.

A large population of Frigate birds is now nesting on the island, which is also a breeding ground for turtles. Esmeralda, once the biggest land tortoise in the world, has his home on Bird Island (for, despite his name, Esmeralda is a male tortoise).

The island also has a small garden that provides for the establishment. In common with other sand cays, Bird is also experiencing heavy erosion and the rise in sea level is a real threat for the owners.

The staff on Bird Island is 100% Seychellois. Bird is the most northern island of the archipelago.

iv. Recommendations

Tourism: Bird Island has a well-established tourism facility which must be sustained in its current form.

Conservation: In line with discouraging the use of fossil fuel and rather encouraging the shift to sustainable energy sources, the Committee wishes to recommend that Bird Island considers seriously the installation of photovoltaic panels in order to produce solar electricity.

O. Denis Island

i. Quick Info:

Type: Denis Island is a coralline island.

Distance: located 92 km (50 nm) north east of Victoria.

Airstrip: it has an airstrip of 775 m (2,543 ft)

Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 1.4 km²

Owner: Private



Manager: Private

ii. Overview

Denis Island is another privately-owned island. Its activities are more diverse than Bird island. The owners are engaged in tourism, agriculture, including large-scale livestock production, and environment protection. There has been a resort on the island since the early days of tourism. In fact, at one point, the resort was managed by the Oberoi chain.

The island produces most of the vegetables, meat and fish that are consumed by the guests. Livestock production includes over 200 head of cattle and pigs, ducks, geese, chicken and quails. The farm even produced 5 different types of cheese. The excess production is exported to Mahé to be sold to the public.



As part of its environment programme, Denis welcomed five different endemic birds. This has proved a success story, to the extent that some birds are now being transferred from Denis to other islands.

The Island is also involved in the protection of turtles. A breeding ground and nursery on the island has a natural bay that is well protected by a reef that provides a natural protective habitat for the young hatchlings to grow.

Tourists wishing to do deep-sea fishing engage in the catch and release principle.

iii. Recommendation

The Islands Committee was particularly impressed with the activities on Denis Island.

We highly commend the owners for the model they have opted for. It is a living model of the interdependence of numerous economic activities which can be achieved on some of our outer islands.

P. Aldabra

i. Quick Info:

Type: Coral Atoll

Distance: located 1,120 km (605 nm) south west of Victoria.

Airstrip: it has no airstrip and the only access is by boat. The nearest airstrip is on Assomption island, some 58 km (32 nm) away by boat.

Number of Islands: 46

Land area: 155.4 km²

Owner: GOS (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

Manager: Seychelles Islands Foundation



ii. Overview

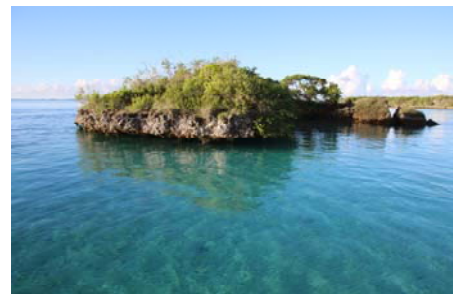
As we approached Aldabra, there was a giant blue umbrella hanging over the atoll. This was the reflection of the lagoon in the clouds, a mesmerising picture.

One would need around 4 hours by boat to circle Aldabra.

The atoll is home to a Giant tortoise population of around 100,000, pink flamingos and frigates and boobies that live together. Frigates can fly as fast as 70km/h, at which speed they snatch food from the boobies. There are 307 species in the flora and fauna world on Aldabra.

Our 2-day stay on Aldabra with planned excursions and close communication with Dr Dogley, the CEO of Seychelles Islands Foundation which manages Aldabra, provided a good insight of the situation and activities on the island.

The general statement about Aldabra was “It has all to do with the tides.” Tides can rise well over 3m creating channel currents. The main channel



can draw up to 60% inflow into the lagoon.

iii. Recommendations

SIF: The Committee was generally impressed by the work SIF is delivering.

Tourism: Tourism on Aldabra is strictly controlled with guided tours holding prior permission of the authorities.

The Islands Committee recommends that selected and controlled visits on Aldabra be continued.

Given the relatively short distance between Aldabra and Assomption, and bearing in mind the need to protect the Atoll from invasive plants, birds and animals, it is recommended that a study is carried out to see how the two can co-ordinate tourism development in the area.

We recommend, for example, that proper tourist-reception and overnighting facilities be built on Assomption.

Activities there could include the traditional sea and sand, but also include diving as the Assomption reefs are some of the best diving sites as expressed by Captain Cousteau and many others.

Deep-sea fishing would be an additional activity for tourists, not forgetting whale viewing.

From Assomption, day trips to Aldabra could be organised. Liveboards, of which a few already exist, could also be another possible area to consider.

Given the importance of Aldabra as a World Heritage site, more publicity should be given to it.

We believe that this jewel should be able to raise enough funds to sustain nature projects and the general upkeep of the place. An aggressive innovative marketing plan should be developed.

The Nekton project gave it a lot of publicity, but we are yet to see how this has been converted in making it a greater attraction financially.

The Committee identified a small isolated chapel on the island that could be renovated at fairly low cost. Life on Aldabra is one of isolation and it would serve the staff well to have a designated place for reflection.



Q. Aride Island

i. Quick Info:

Type: Granitic Island

Distance: located 50 km (27 nm) north east of Victoria.

Airstrip: it has no airstrip and the only access is by boat.

Number of Islands: 1

Land area: 0.71 km²

Owner: Island Conservation Society UK

Manager: Island Conservation Society of Seychelles



ii. Overview:

Aride is the northernmost granitic island of Seychelles, the last solid terrestrial rock before the Indian Subcontinent. Aride has survived to the modern era relatively intact because of its isolation. This isolation is both a blessing and a curse – a blessing because it is the largest Seychelles island that has never had rats and a curse because the distance from Praslin and the fact that the only landing beach faces south means that it cannot be easily accessed by visitors during the southeast monsoon. As a result, tourism barely covers half the cost of running the island.

Aride was purchased and donated to the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) of UK with funds from Christopher Cadbury (of the chocolate fame) in 1973. To this day the Cadbury family continues to be generous donors to Aride but

today, management responsibility for the island has been passed by RSWT to the Island Conservation Society of Seychelles (ICS), a non-profit charitable organisation.

The island was transformed from a coconut plantation and vegetable producer into a habitat for wildlife.

Aride hosts one of the most important seabird populations in the Indian Ocean, including:

- More breeding species than any other island in Seychelles (only Aldabra is comparable with one more species in total, but spread over many islands), and more than the other 40 granitic islands combined.
- The world's largest populations of two species: Lesser Noddy (Kordonnyen) and Tropical Shearwater (Riga).
- The largest population of the western Indian Ocean race of Roseate Tern which has the scientific name *aridensis* (after the island).
- The largest frigate bird roost of the granitic islands.
- The only breeding site east of the Aldabra group for Red-tailed Tropicbird (Payanke Lake Rouz).



In addition, there are five endemic landbirds: Seychelles Magpie-robin (Pisantez), Seychelles Warbler (Timerl-de-Zil), Seychelles Fody (Toktok), Seychelles Blue Pigeon (Pizon Olande) and Seychelles Sunbird (Kolibri). There were none in 1973. Three were introduced to the island and two arrived by natural means.

Aride has the largest roost of frigate birds (Fregat) of the inner islands.

The flowering shrub Wright's Gardenia (Bwa Sitron) has its only natural home on Aride, there is a huge concentration of endemic lizards and there is a thriving population of turtles, thanks to effective protection.

Scientists on Aride have gathered data on weather, seabird and other populations stretching over several decades. This is a treasure trove of science, one of the longest continuous scientific monitoring for any tropical island in the world.

The information gathered can be of global importance, indicating trends that tell us what is happening in our oceans.

The data gathered on Aride shows that populations of several seabird species are declining despite protection. This may be due to climate change, over-fishing, natural causes or a combination of factors.

It is important for society to understand what is happening, as inevitably in the long run, this will impact upon not just seabirds but human life too.

iii. Recommendations

Tourism: Aride Island should market its achievements and status more proactively with a view to attracting more visitors, especially from Mahé.

As a means of raising more funds towards its work, that ICS (Island Conservation Society) considers offering overnight accommodation (perhaps in the renovated gran kaz) for interested visitors at a fee.

Nature Reserves: The conservation staff on Aride report that during the seabird breeding season they sometimes feel under siege from poachers. Many of the poachers are known on Praslin including to the police. Yet there has not been one successful prosecution of a poacher in the history of Aride.

The Birds' Eggs (Collection) Regulations sets quota for the legal collection of eggs at just 3 islands, Desnoeufs, Bird Island and L'Ilot Fregat. Everywhere else it is illegal.

The Committee recommends setting up a sustainable system to provide protection against poachers and that nature reserves are respected.

Rangers of islands with protective status should be given the power to arrest.

All environment and conservation laws nationally should be reviewed systematically, with a focus on their effective enforcement.

5. Consultation on the Islands

The Committee also met with a number of different individuals and groups who had interest in our islands or who were historically involved with these islands so that their views could also be incorporated as part of wider consultation. These are summarised below:

A. Allen Cedras

- i. He stated how important Curieuse was from an economic viewpoint, receiving over 29% of visitors coming to Seychelles.
- ii. There were 12-14 hotels close to such similar protected areas.
- iii. He proposed that we need to preserve what exists today for future generations whilst finding ways to gain economic benefits from protected areas.
- iv. Aldabra was special in that it was a breeding area for larvae providing nutrition for bottom-fish.
- v. He felt there was scope to benefit more from Aldabra and that live-aboard trips should be encouraged to Picard Island where small sustainable facilities could be built making use of desalination and solar or PV energy. A kayak-trail could be

initiated.

- vi. He suggested Silhouette could develop a few tourist trails with guides for tourists and thus earn extra income.

B. Gaston Morin

- i. He felt Coëtivy was under-exploited.
- ii. It is well suited to produce palmiste, coconut oil for cooking or therapeutic purposes, takamaka seed oil and vanilla.
- iii. He felt such production would be economically viable:
 - Palmiste can sell at \$250 per unit
 - Vanilla can sell up to €1,000/kg.
- iv. Farquhar is equally suited to produce vanilla; so is Curieuse.
- v. Cinnamon exploitation is also possible; Seychelles cinnamon happens to be more concentrated than that produced in many other countries.

C. Victorin Laboudallon

- i. Seychelles needs funds to document research done on conservation; Bois De Natte is effective for use in restoration works due to its resilience.
- ii. Assomption should be used as a base to promote tourism on Aldabra.
- iii. Grand Zil on Cosmoledo should be protected.
- iv. Farquhar was once a major producer of maize. Agriculture is still possible on the island.
- v. Coëtivy had indigenous species killed by the prawns project and excavation works.

D. Antonio Constance (Mazaren)

- i. Fishing may be a good source of income from the outer islands. There is still plenty of fish but it would need to be exploited in a controlled and sustainable manner.

- ii. Islands such as Cosmoledo have been largely cleaned of sea cucumbers and other marine species by Malagasy or other poachers nearby.
- iii. A surveillance point on Assomption would be of great benefit to deter poachers in and around Aldabra and Cosmoledo.

E. Dr Jeanne Mortimer

- i. Turtles in the islands are the most poached and the green turtle happens to be the most endangered species.
- ii. Assomption should be used as a base for tourism excursions to Aldabra.
- iii. Cosmoledo would do well with good surveillance to protect the turtle and bird populations, as well as fish on the plateau.
- iv. Maritime surveillance should be stepped-up to prevent illegal fishing around Farquhar.
- v. Priority must be given to introduce laws that promote sustainable tourism
- vi. Stray dogs (on the Mahe plateau islands especially) are now a threat to turtles especially when females come to lay and are chased by dogs.

F. Michel Rocamora

- i. Regulations must apply to how domesticated animals are treated, including tortoises, to deter mistreatment.
- ii. The Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA) office has been moved several times and lately dumped at Orion Mall, far away from its closest area of operations such as the St Anne Marine Park and Round Island.
- iii. SNPA must regain its rightful importance within the civil service.

G. Fred Moinee

- i. D'arros should remain an important ecological group within the overall conservation effort in Seychelles; it is a breeding ground for small sharks.
- ii. There is clear evidence of shark-feeding at D'arros and St Joseph atoll. This needs to stop as such adaptation by sharks can be detrimental, especially to swimmers.
- iii. There is no evidence to suggest that fly-fishing has any serious impact on the bone fish population.

H. Helena Simms

- i. A presentation was made our marine spatial areas of the Seychelles.
- ii. This basically allows for different areas of our marine territory to be demarcated and different uses assigned thereto.
- iii. This allows for a modern way of optimising our marine resources in the interest of sustained economic development.
- iv. It is clear that these relatively large areas present the Seychelles with some difficulty in being able to exercise effective control on account of the size involved and logistical or financial considerations connected thereto.

6. Conclusion

The coralline islands of the Seychelles can be classified as follows:

- a. Those under private ownership, eg. Denis, Bird and D'Arros
- b. Those leased to the Islands Development Company, a parastatal of the State, eg. Desroches, Alphonse, Assomption, Farquhar Group.
- c. Those belonging to the State but under the supervision of an NGO, eg. Aldabra Atoll supervised by Seychelles Islands Foundation
- d. Those still under the direct supervision of the State, where private individuals have a lease, e.g. Coëtivy and Poivre

One of the questions that we have tried to answer is which model is the

best to adopt for the future. Many people believe that the IDC should be dissolved and private individuals should have the possibility of leasing the islands or even buying them. This will be going back to the model that existed before 1977.

Others believe that the current model should be maintained, but that there should be greater flexibility, especially where it concerns giving Seychellois entrepreneurs more opportunities of investment. They argue that the present model is unacceptable as it appears that foreigners are the only ones occupying and investing in these islands. The common remark is that preference is given to either Arabs or South Africans.

The other remark that is worth noting in this report is that the privately-owned islands seem to be doing well because the owners protect the enormous investments they have made. It is in their interest to ensure that their islands remain sustainable and attractive in order for them to derive a higher income and profit. The question is whether a lease would attract the same interest. Or whether, it would be a question of making the maximum for the duration of the lease, knowing that it would then be handed back.

The Islands Committee is of the view that there needs to be a supervisory body overseeing the government-owned islands. That body should also have the mandate to oversee the privately-owned islands so that government support can be forthcoming where necessary, but also where government can intervene, where required.

The Committee also feels strongly that IDC should do its best to make the islands more accessible to Seychellois wishing to visit the islands. The Committee notes that the number of Seychellois visiting the islands and staying in IDC owned 'houses' is on the increase. This should be encouraged. The Committee accepts that IDC has over the years gained valuable experience in providing infrastructure on the islands, yet it is essential that more is done to inform the wider population of what the company is doing.

Seychellois investors and others should be afforded the possibility of investing in the islands. There should be no limits in the investment as long as they are in line with the law and policies, especially where the sustainable development of the islands and nature conservation are concerned. The penalties for illegal exploitation of species and poaching have to be enhanced in order to act as a deterrent.

The role of the Coast Guard must also be reviewed since they have to participate directly in the development of our islands. A firm decision regarding strategically-placed out-stations has to be made, so that they the Coast Guard can be nearer to areas of illegal activity. With such a porous border as Seychelles has, their role, coupled with the appropriate resources, including equipment, have to be properly assessed.

The potential of our islands is real. As a nation, not only should we have a proper plan for the sustainable exploitation of these resources, but we also have the greater responsibility of protecting the beauty that has been placed in our care.

Investing on the outer islands is a costly endeavour and the committee hopes that through its work people have come to understand what it entails to run and manage our islands even those that are privately owned. The next step is to set up a transparent structure to allow those that can invest to do so with a clear understanding of what will be asked of them.

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing us. As we plan the way forward, we should surely make our voice heard on the world platform. Already the work done by so many has been recognised. Seychelles should remain an environment giant and champion.

Finally, we call on the people of Seychelles to understand that we have all been called to play a role in the conservation of our country. When we carefully plan the development of our country, including the EEZ, we will prosper as a nation and we will be playing our full role in the conservation of the planet. When we leave, our children and generations to come must also enjoy what we enjoyed.