



Strasbourg, 19 November 2003
[files01erev_2003.doc]

T-PVS/Files (2003) 1 revised

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
23rd meeting

Strasbourg, 1-5 December-2003

Document for information

**Installation of a new antenna (Pluto II) in the
Sovereign Base Areas (Cyprus)**

Report by the Government

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and of Cultural and Natural Heritage*

DOCUMENT FOR INFORMATION

UPDATE ON THE CONTINUING ENVIRONMENTAL WORK
ON THE AKROTIRI SALT LAKE IN CYPRUS

1. Project Pluto comprises the construction of two communication antennae on the western edge of the Akrotiri Salt Lake within the Sovereign Base Area (SBA) on the Akrotiri peninsula in Cyprus. The new antennae are part of a project to build a modern replacement for the more extensive system of masts and aerials, which was dismantled on the same site in 1998. The antenna erected in 1999 is 58 meters tall (Pluto I) and the antenna erected this year is 96 meters in height (Pluto II), which is approximately the same height as the masts in the original system. Work commenced on Pluto II in July 2002 and the final phase of construction commenced in May 2003. The project is due for completion in December 2003.
2. The British Government submitted details of the environmental work undertaken in conjunction with the construction of this new antenna to the Bureau of the Bern Convention Standing Committee (T-PVS/Files(2003)1 revised) in March 2003. The best practice environmental work associated with the project has continued since then. This report acts as further information on the work completed to date and the monitoring and mitigation commitments made by the UK Government. It should be read in conjunction with the previous document for full background details of previous work undertaken and the project progress in 2002.
3. An Independent International Panel of experts has audited and advised on the environmental work for the Project. The Panel identified a number of deficiencies in the original environmental impact assessment, which was conducted in 1997, when compared to today's much more demanding best practice standards.
4. In response the MOD has carried out a wide-ranging supplementary environmental study to deal with these deficiencies and provide sufficient information to enable a properly informed decision to be made about the project. The International Panel has confirmed that this additional work satisfactorily addresses the issues raised in its report.
5. The MOD implemented the recommendations of the International Panel for mitigating the environmental impact of the project. Members of the International Panel continue to monitor the mitigation measures; they have conducted site visits to the Salt Lake area and have reported that the *"approach being taken to the environmental assessment and management of the impact of the project is now being organised and carried out with professionalism, in accordance with accepted standards of good practice."*

Environmental Management

6. The additional work recommended by the Panel, which was published in advance of the construction of the Pluto 2 hardstanding and groundwork in June 2002 made further commitments to continue the ornithological studies for a full year. The results of these studies were published in August 2003 and are available on request.

The ornithological studies covered the following areas:

- diurnal bird movements;
 - species-specific surveys of Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* and Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*;
 - autumn and winter nocturnal bird movements;
 - response of nocturnal bird movements to lighting mitigation on Pluto I; and
 - bird mortality monitoring.
7. The data collection phases involved joint working with departments of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus including the Department of Forests and the Game Fund. The detailed reports

produced by the MOD are publicly available and have been reviewed by the Independent International Panel.

8. Based on the information from the surveys the construction of the Pluto II antenna will have a minimal impact on the main species of conservation concern at Akrotiri, namely Demoiselle Crane and Greater Flamingo. No species of global importance were found during the mortality trials. Other species that were found during the studies and identified as being of national and regional conservation importance did not occur in nationally or internationally important numbers. Nevertheless, the reports recognise that there is potential for an increase in mortality compared to current levels.
9. It is important to note that an array of mitigation measures is being introduced. Once these mitigation measures have been installed the impacts of the proposed development will be reduced significantly, potentially to a level below that which currently occurs. These measures include:
 - lighting the antennae at night to prevent bird collisions (due for completion early 2004);
 - investigation of use of markers on guy wires to make them more visible to birds (due for completion Spring 2004); and
 - further studies are also being carried out during the autumn and winter migrations to evaluate the effects of nearby trees on the flight patterns of the birds.
10. A series of post construction surveys are taking place to monitor the impact of the Pluto II antenna, providing further data on bird movements through the area and to evaluate the effectiveness of the mitigation measures, and make modifications as required.
11. Everything possible has also been done to minimise environmental disruption during the final construction phase of the project. The Construction Environmental Management Plan that was successfully implemented in 2002 was used again this year. Additional briefing material has also been prepared for the military and SBA Police to ensure that their patrols respect the sensitivity of the environment as damage can easily be caused by trampling and off track driving.

Akrotiri Ramsar Site

12. The boundaries of the Akrotiri Ramsar site are based on assessments of the scientific or ecological value of the habitats concerned. The SBA Administration has looked at the evidence already available on the Salt Lake, carried out a number of scientific surveys and considered the views of the Environment Service and other stakeholders. This has enabled us to define the boundaries based on the best habitats in the area - the Salt Lake proper and the Phasouri Marsh. Most of the area is Crown land. Relatively small areas of private and Merra land fall within the boundary.
13. Areas developed for communications purposes are not included in the Ramsar site. Although, the area to the eastern edge of the Pluto site has been included in the designation as it was considered to be of the required quality. They have been excluded on scientific grounds, as with other areas of degraded or lower value habitat in the area, such as the Akrotiri Merra.
14. Under the Management Plan, however, British Forces Cyprus have made specific, public commitments to manage the whole of the Akrotiri Peninsula and the communications facilities in the area in an environmentally sensitive way and to avoid as far as possible adverse impacts on the Ramsar site. They will also continue to improve and restore areas of habitat within the communications facilities.
15. We believe that the Akrotiri Ramsar site will enable us to protect the Salt Lake environment in a way that is sensitive to local needs and concerns. It gives this important habitat formal international recognition and creates new obligations for both the SBA Administration and the Republic of Cyprus. The Ramsar site will not be subject to any future military development.
16. We are working closely with the Government of Cyprus and stakeholders on the preparation of the Environmental Management Plan. A number of immediate management actions are being undertaken such as clearance of rubbish and management of access and encroachment. We have

also successfully employed two wardens from the local community to patrol the Ramsar site. Plans are well underway to open a visitor's center within the Akrotiri Village area.

Health and Emissions Studies

17. Independent tests in 2001 by experts from France Telecom, the Republic of Cyprus's Ministry of Communications and Works, and the Cyprus Telecommunications Authority showed that emissions from the existing antennae were at least 76 times smaller than the limits set by the European Union. The levels of emissions from the new antennae will be lower than those they are replacing and will comply fully with the advisory guidelines on emissions set by the UK National Radiological Protection Board and by the European Union.
18. It is worth noting in this context that similar or higher levels of emissions can be found around commercial broadcasting antennae in the Republic (indeed the strongest emissions recorded in Akrotiri village during the 2001 tests came not from a British antenna but from the broadcasts of a Cypriot Radio station). On the basis of this information, we are confident that the new antennae pose no risk to the health of the Akrotiri villagers. There is certainly no evidence to suggest otherwise. However, we have made it clear that in the very unlikely event that a serious adverse causal link between the new antennae and the health of the villagers is proved, then their operation will be modified.
19. We have been involved in a regular dialogue with representatives of Akrotiri village as part of our efforts to allay the villagers' understandable concerns. As part of this effort we have agreed to install equipment in the village to allow further monitoring of emission levels as part of a joint arrangement with the Republic's Ministry of Communications and Works. We hope this equipment will be installed in the very near future. The results of this testing will be made available to the villagers, but we are confident that this new work will corroborate the results of the earlier tests. As a further measure of reassurance, the British and Cypriot governments have also commissioned a major epidemiological study into the potential impact of the antennae on the health of the Akrotiri villagers. The study is being conducted by internationally renowned experts from the Bristol University and is expected to report in about 18 months time.