

THE RESPONSE OF A SMALL ISLAND STATE TO 1.5°C CLIMATE CHANGE – THE EXAMPLE OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS.

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Abstract

Small oceanic islands are particularly vulnerable to climate change given their isolation, biodiversity and self reliance. Climate change predictions for the Falkland Islands (12,000km², 52°S pop 2,800) are for 1.3-2.2°C increase in temperature over the next 100 years. The islands have the highest proportion of peat cover in any of the UK Overseas Territories and given the dry (400-800mm), windy climate and shallow soil cover, are susceptible to erosion and loss of soil carbon. They have a small population density, important biodiversity and a sustainably managed fishery. The Falkland Islands Government (FIG) has supported an EU project to determine the potential impact of and risk associated with a temperature increase in the order of 1.5°C.

Following extensive public consultation, key risks identified were: changes in soil moisture and drying; changes to invasive plants, pests and diseases; plants unable to shift ranges; increased fire risk; changes in soil organic carbon; changes in yield and quality of forage species planted. Scientific evidence was accumulated, reviewed and presented to FIG to inform Government in its willingness to demonstrate a sound evidence base to identify risk and underpin policy. FIG will now consider the evidence base from a risk analysis to formulate policy.

The islands already invest heavily in renewable energy technologies, nationally over 50% of energy is generated from wind and all renewable resources (wind, sun, rainfall) are mapped for incorporation into business plans for individual settlements to select best possible options.

We propose that the Falkland Islands are an exemplar of climate change risk assessment and potential adoption into a government policy which is underpinned by the best scientific evidence available to mitigate impacts across a range of scenarios. Even though it is a small country, the Falklands is recognising its global obligations to climate change mitigation by adopting best evidence-based practice.

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