

## **19. Factors which have contributed to the degradation of the natural environment of the Islands and South Georgia**

‘At the bottom of it all lies the profit motive, and to hell with the rest’<sup>1</sup>

This concluding chapter is divided into three sections: a: Introduction. b: Factors that have contributed to the degradation of the natural environment of the Islands. c: Concluding remarks.

In this section of the dissertation it should be remembered that past generations held different concepts, values and beliefs about nature, and human responsibility towards it, from those generally prevailing today. Some actions deemed appropriate in the past, may reasonably be judged to be at fault according to current values and circumstances.

### § a. Introduction.

In the light of this account of human involvement in the Islands and South Georgia the blunt assessment of a former Manager of the Falkland Islands Company farms is difficult to disagree with: ‘At the bottom of it all lies the profit motive, and to hell with the rest’. Despite the proud claim of the Islands’ Tourist Board that the Islands are ‘The Land where Nature is still in charge’ the evidence of the four cases studied suggests that humans have substantially altered the natural environment of the Islands and South Georgia and that the general effects of these manipulations have been deleterious. With a few notable exceptions, the account outlined demonstrates a general inability to use the natural resources of the Islands in a sustainable manner, and to conserve or to preserve them.

Put at its simplest the facts are stark:

- The effects of a ranching-style farming industry during the past 140 years upon native grasses

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<sup>1</sup> pers. comm. Brook Hardcastle February 2001.

- The reduction of Tussac Grass area of the Islands from an estimated 22,181 ha to approximately 4,159 ha.
- The effects of burning of Whitegrass and Tussac Grass upon bio-diversity and habitat quality.
- The effects of the introduction of exotic species *e.g.* cattle, sheep, pigs, reindeer, rats, cats and many plants <sup>2</sup>
- The killing of at least 20 million seals since the 1780s
- The killing of at least 1.7 million penguins since 1820
- The killing of at least 1.7 million whales during the modern era of Southern Ocean whaling
- The annual catching of 350,000 tonnes of biomass from the waters of the Islands and South Georgia, by the fishing industry
- The persecution of so-called ‘pests’ *e.g.* the Warrah, the Upland Goose and the Striated Caracara

To these major effects should be added the legacy of the 1982 Conflict (*e.g.* minefields), increasing environmental pressures caused by a growing tourist industry, the recent development of a rural roads network and the potential effects of a nascent oil industry.

From the very beginning of human settlement and exploitation there have been those who warned of the dangers of unrestricted and unlimited human activity. John Leard of the *Intrepid* made the earliest recorded proposal for conserving the southern seal fishery. <sup>3</sup> Leard visited the Islands and Tierra del Fuego, and he wrote on 16 July 1788 to Lord Hawkesbury, President of the Board of Trade and Foreign Plantations, concerning conservation of the stocks of seals in Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego, Isla de los Estados, South Georgia and the Islands.

Governor Mackenzie (Governor 1862-1866) wrote to an early colonist thus:

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<sup>2</sup> Broughton reports that 173 native species and 175 non-native species of flora have been recorded in the Islands. Many of the plant introductions have been accidental. See: Broughton D; (2002) *An annotated checklist of the Vascular Flora of the Falkland Islands*; Falklands Conservation; Stanley. See also: Broughton, D and McAdam, J H; (2002) The non-native Vascular Flora of the Falkland Islands; *Bot.J.Scot.* vol 54(2), pp. 153-190.

<sup>3</sup> *Polar Record*; September 1964; No12; Vol. 78 pp 313-316. Also see: BT6/95; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew.

Information has reached me that a scheme has lately been organised for the purpose of destroying the Penguin Rookeries in the neighbourhood of Volunteer Lagoon, and likewise that several small boats are at this moment engaged in indiscriminate slaughter of these animals.

It is well known that the oil procured from the Penguin is of considerable value in the London Markets, and from this fact I have reason to fear that the destruction of these animals will become more general as a commercial speculation, which catastrophe I am anxious to prohibit as far as possible, both on account of the cruelty exercised in killing them, and because their eggs during the proper season form a wholesome and nutritious article of consumption in the settlement, and one much prized by the inhabitants.

For these reasons it is my intention to propose a Bill to the Legislature of the Colony [to protect the penguins] from further molestation.<sup>4</sup>

Governor D'Arcy (Governor 1870-1876) was also concerned about the wholesale slaughter of penguins, and he wrote to a colonist:

I find that the 3<sup>rd</sup> clause of the Penguin Ordinance gives me the power of giving you a licence to kill Penguins on your leased lands - behold it, but take my advice. We are entitled, I conceive, to a share of the productions of the earth, the birds of the air, and the fish of the ocean, but it is our duty at the same time and our interest, to take that share in wisdom, not wantonness, and we can so manage matters that the quantity we take may benefit that which is left, and thus while we use we ameliorate and improve all that grows and lives around us becoming the Harvester of Creation and not the Destroyer - let this sentiment govern you as Proprietor over these fish birds and do not allow them to be exterminated and you will set the example of an enlightened mind which you neighbours will be sure to follow.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Letter Book; 1864; Falkland Islands Government Archive; Stanley. For the history of the penguin oil industry see: Strange, I; (1987) *The Falkland Islands and their natural history*; David & Charles; p75ff.

<sup>5</sup> Letter Book; 1874; Falkland Islands Government Archive; Stanley.

Until relatively recently this wise advice has largely been ignored. A typical example of this can be seen in a letter, written in 1938, by Alexander Pitaluga, of Salvador Farm, to the Colonial Secretary. Pitaluga asks for permission to destroy penguins on the mainland of his farm. Pitaluga writes:

Each year the birds are increasing and coming inland, at present they are a mile from the beach. Therefore as long as the penguins are there the whole coastline is a wasteland.<sup>6</sup>

The Governor gave Pitaluga permission, and the penguins were destroyed.

Much that has happened has been the product of ignorance and the effect of unintended consequences. A good example of unintended consequences in the Islands can be seen in the use of Gamatox sheep dip at Carcass Island in the 1960s. The owners of the farm soon discovered that although the sheep were free of ticks as a result of the use of the dipping chemical, the number of small birds on the island which had an insectivorous diet also declined dramatically.<sup>7</sup> When the requirement to dip sheep was ended they stopped using the chemical and the bird numbers increased.

The conservation struggles of Governor Allardyce and the example of Arthur Felton were, until relatively recently, the exception and not the rule. The next section will ask why this has been so.

§ b. Factors which have contributed to the degradation of the natural environment of the Islands and South Georgia.

It is clear from evidence presented in this dissertation that there is no simple answer to the question why have human beings, in large part, so singularly failed to protect, preserve and conserve the natural environment of the Islands and South Georgia. The

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<sup>6</sup> CS220/38; *Requests permission to destroy Jackass Penguins on mainland of Salvador*; Falkland Islands Government Archive; Letter from Alexander Pitaluga to Colonial Secretary; 12 October 1938.

<sup>7</sup> CS1099/II; (1964) Falkland Islands Government Archive; Letter; 8 March 1964.

repetitive nature of some parts of this dissertation illustrates the scale of the failure, the recurring nature of that failure, and the difficulties human society has had in effecting beneficial change to the environment.

When evaluating the reasons for the degradation of the Islands' natural environment, most commentators tend to select out one particular aspect. In practice, however, there are generally a number of factors involved, and the factors that this dissertation has identified are:

- The difficulty of effecting change in an established pattern of resource exploitation
- The high financial costs of making radical changes
- The ignorance of the consequences of exploitation
- The failure to learn the lessons of history
- The responsibility of London-based Boards of Directors
- The attitudes and behaviour of the Colonial Office
- The impact of dominant individuals in a small community
- The unwillingness to exercise restraint in the exploitation of natural resources
- The human attitudes towards the natural world
- The low priority given to Government Ordinances and Legislation.

Many of the circumstances that have been described in this dissertation are generally the products of a combination of one or more of these factors.

- i. A pattern of resource exploitation, once firmly established, becomes difficult to change and adapt. Governor Moody's original vision for the future development of the Islands was for small-scale 2500 ha. (approx. 6,000 acres) mixed sheep and cattle farms, but the system that quickly emerged was large-scale sheep ranching. In retrospect it can be argued that greater environmental damage has been the result of this pattern of farming than would have been the case had Moody's plan been implemented.

Governor Goldsworthy's defeat by the farmers of West Falkland in his attempts at land reform in the 1890s shows how difficult change can be when opposed by vested interests. For example, the farm owners of West Falkland, when it was suggested that they surrender part of their land when their leases were due for review, promptly resigned as Justices of the Peace, and also threatened to withdraw from farming altogether. The power of vested interests to hamper change and to restrict resource exploitation is also well illustrated by the behaviour of Salvesen Ltd. when challenged in the 1950s about their working practices. This company was not averse to appealing directly to Parliament and thus circumventing the protests of the Colonial Office or the Islands Government (See page 262 <sup>8</sup>).

There has been a history of tension between Governors and the large farming companies - in particular the Falkland Island Company. Governor Allardyce made a tour of West Falkland in 1909. In a confidential despatch he wrote:

Three things have been clearly brought home to me as a result of my short visit to the West Falkland *i.e.* the remunerative nature of the sheep farming industry; the need for an interinsular steam service and more population; the disadvantage of a monopolist company in a small Colony, and more especially when the company is non-progressive.<sup>9</sup>

Governor Henniker-Heaton's reformist suggestions in 1938 were defeated by thinly veiled threats of withdrawal from farming by the Falkland Islands Company. Robert Blake (Jnr.), of Hill Cove Farm (who was also a member of the Board of Directors of the Falkland Islands Company), flatly rejected the work of William Davies, which suggested the vital necessity of sub-division to improve the farming industry:

[he] declined to accept the proposition that the situation was serious. He held that the turning point in deterioration had arrived ... he considered that there were marked signs of progress ... He quoted Port

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<sup>8</sup> CO78/261/8 Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1950.

<sup>9</sup> Allardyce, W; SPRI MSS240/1; 9 September 1909.

Howard as an example of progressive farming ... Mr Blake also said that he had heard the cry of the Colony being a wasting asset when he first came out as a young man many years ago, despite subsequent prosperity ... As regards sub-division Mr Young thought that the Company would rather retire from farming altogether than take part in any scheme in which they had no confidence and might, in his opinion, bring the country to bankruptcy.<sup>10</sup>

Governor Cardinall's post-World War II 'socialist cooperative' remained a 'Utopian dream' because of the unwillingness of the Colonial Office to invest in the long-term future of the Islands. The Colonial Office regarded the proposals as a gamble and minuted that Cardinall's despatch was:

A great deal less impressive than its size would suggest ... something should be done for the Falkland Islands but with their tiny population it is very difficult to do anything without giving them a fantastically disproportionate share of development monies.<sup>11</sup>

ii. The costs of any radical change were generally so prohibitive that all but a few were deterred from making the necessary adjustments. Changes in farming practices, *i.e.* to move from ranching-style farming to an intensive form of farming, required a huge investment *e.g.* fencing, and the recruitment, training and employment of a skilled labour force. Commodity production was subject to market pressures, and wool prices have fluctuated greatly, but when large profits were made, comparatively little of the benefit was felt in the Islands. Absentee landowners and shareholders were unwilling to forgo any of their dividends. (See page 53 above for details of profits made by absentee farming companies<sup>12</sup>). With a few exceptions (*e.g.* The Falkland Islands Company moving its Lafonia operations from Darwin Harbour to Goose Green in the 1920s, and the refurbishing of farm manager's houses and the

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<sup>10</sup> CO/78/212/2; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1939. See also: C/18/38; Falkland Islands Government Archive; 14 December 1938.

<sup>11</sup> CO78/216/8; Colonial Office Records; Public Records Office; Kew; 1942.

<sup>12</sup> C/11/35; *Sheep Farming statistics prepared for Governor Henniker-Heaton*; Falkland Islands Government Archive; 22 July 1935ff.

building of Darwin School in the 1960s with the large profits made during the Korean War period when the demand for wool products was high) there was little significant investment in the Colony after the initial pioneering phase.

Sheep farming has only been profitable spasmodically, and thus Government expenditure has been restricted for much of the Colony's history. The Islands Government has not generally had the finance to make the necessary investment to produce a more sustainable economy. The considerable income provided by whaling licences provided much needed revenue to rescue the Islands' economy from, as Allardyce stated in 1908, 'a parlous state.'<sup>13</sup>

It might have been hoped that revenue from whaling also had the potential to permit significant improvements, but in reality it provided only sufficient to achieve modest change:

I am of the opinion that too much emphasis cannot be laid on the part played by the whaling industry in lifting the Colony out of the rut in which it had remained for decades, in subsequent development, and in the many improvements to be seen on every side; and I feel convinced that the Colony's progress will largely be dependent, for some years to come, on the prosperity of this industry.<sup>14</sup> (William Allardyce; see page 213 above)

Nearly fifty years later the situation remained largely unchanged; the dependency of the Islands on the whaling industry for its general expenditure is seen in the fact that in 1961 the taxes from the whaling industry amounted to approximately one third of ordinary income of the Islands Government. (See page 269 above)

For much of the history of the Colony, and its Dependencies, there has been a 'boom and bust' economy, with periods of high profits followed by financial stagnation. When economic times were difficult one of the first targets for

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<sup>13</sup> Allardyce, W; SPRI MS240/1; 11 July 1908

<sup>14</sup> Allardyce, W; SPRI MS240/2; 17 February 1912.

public criticism was scientific research. It was perceived to be wasteful of slender community assets, and a drain on company profits. Concern about the unhealthy state of the Colony's finances in the 1920s encouraged leading farmers to complain continually about the expense of the Discovery Investigations (see page 224 above). The recent difficulties of the sheep industry have caused many to question the cost of much of the research work done by the Agriculture Department of the Islands Government, and of its value to the sheep farming industry. Despite these understandable sentiments the words of former Agricultural Advisor still remain true:

If you have any faith in the agricultural future of this colony (and I am not sure of this myself) you must insist that a fully staffed and well organised experimental farm is set up and allowed to flourish.<sup>15</sup>

The whaling company Salvesen continually reminded the Islands' Government and the Colonial Office, when they were questioned about their practice and methods which they used when whaling, that whaling was enormously expensive and that entire communities were involved in providing the manpower for the industry. Any diminution in the amount of exploitation would have serious social consequences *i.e.* in Scotland and Norway. Change was perceived as a threat to 'hearth and home' as well as to profits - thus many were unwilling to alter long-established practices.

iii. In the early days of exploitation ignorance was a contributory factor in the degradation of the natural environment. The damage caused by unrestricted grazing *e.g.* pigs and wild cattle in the days before the establishment of a sheep farming industry; the large scale burning of grasslands to 'improve' the quality of pasture; the overstocking of the land with sheep *e.g.* Weddell Island - the third largest island in the Falkland archipelago - grazed 23,518 sheep in 1895, but by 1920 it held only 7,500 sheep as a result of the diminution of the pasture; the introduction of exotic species *e.g.* rabbits, foxes, rats, cats, Yorkshire Fog grass in the Islands and

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<sup>15</sup> Young, C D; (1968); *op.cit.*; p20.

reindeer on South Georgia; the destruction of so-called 'pests' e.g. the Warrah, Upland Goose and the Caracara; the unlimited and uncontrolled sealing and whaling in the early days of these industries - all these led to the degradation of the natural environment. With hindsight it can be seen that much human activity in the past has been disastrous, and that it has greatly reduced both the bio-diversity of the Islands and the total numbers of some indigenous species in the Islands.

iv. Humans have great difficulty in learning the lessons of history, and heeding the warnings of scientific research. William Bruce warned the Interdepartmental Committee, in 1920, that they should: 'Take heed of the lesson, which the fur seal hunters of 1820-22 taught us, and protect the Dependencies' whales.'<sup>16</sup>

Those who exploit the natural resources of the Islands and South Georgia today have no lack of authoritative advice; report after report has been written e.g. Munro (1924) and Davies (1939) concerning the use of the land; Barrett-Hamilton, Sidney Harmer and A G Bennett concerning whale stocks; Ian Strange concerning seal populations and future threats to fish stocks (See page 172 above). For a variety of reasons the history of the management of the natural resources of the Islands has been characterised by the continual commissioning of a long series of reports which were then followed by limited action (See page 301).

Many people have chosen to ignore the advice contained within these reports. This was because of laziness ("Why bother with changing? It worked okay last year; it will work okay next year"), or because of a *laissez-faire* attitude ("as long as the profits keep coming all will be well" or "as long as I get my wages paid and home provided why should I bother?"), or because of greed ("profits before everything"), or because of the natural conservatism of farmers and fishermen ("If it was good enough for my father, then it is good enough for me"), or because of community mistrust of so-called 'experts' and the reports they produce ("What do they know?"). 'Outside' expert knowledge is

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<sup>16</sup> Interdepartmental Committee (1920); *Research and Development in the Dependencies of the Falkland Islands*; Cmd.657; London: HMSO; p36.

sometimes neglected by farmers and fishermen because they tend to value more highly practical knowledge and direct observation rather than theoretical knowledge. Some reports were only desk exercises, and this did little to add to their perceived credibility.

Some reports failed to have the influence which they should have had, because the 'experts' who wrote them came and left the Islands very quickly. Such reports had little sense of local 'ownership', and their investigations and advice were either ignored, or considered too difficult or expensive to implement.

Some reports were commissioned, but never published. This was either because scientific advice was divided or because the advice given was regarded as politically contentious or financially disadvantageous. Hickling's memorandum on the state of the whale stocks after World War II contained the stark phrase 'why don't the business people heed the warnings of the scientist until it is too late?' - but his work was never published because the senior scientist consulted by the Colonial Office was over-cautious about further restrictions, and because of fears about the financial consequences of a reduction in the whale fishery.

We are not yet in a position to assess the strength of the stock of whales after their relative freedom from hunting during the War, and although there is no question about the need for more effective protection than they had before the War, I feel we should not issue a special warning without definite evidence of a further decline.<sup>17</sup>

v. As has already been stated above the London-based boards of directors of the farms, their owners and British-based managers, must bear some of the responsibility for the degradation of the natural environment of the Islands. This tightly knit and small group of people (often related by birth or marriage)

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<sup>17</sup> For Hickling's memorandum see: CO852/637/10; Colonial Office Records; Public Records Office; Kew; 1 March 1945. For the government's Chief Fisheries Scientist's response see: CO852/637/10; Colonial Office Records; Public Records Office; Kew; 14 November 1946.

were generally highly resistant to change or adaptation. A number of the boards consisted of people who had built the farms in the first instance or who had once worked on the farms in the Islands, and particular managers joined the boards of several farming companies on their retirement in Britain. For some board members dividends were their prime concern; for others it was more a matter of 'what worked in my day is still okay today.' Company Secretaries based in London, and also Island-based local managers were often frustrated in their efforts at reform by their board of directors being intransigent and inflexible. Even F E Cobb, the Colonial Manager of the Falkland Islands Company from 1867 until 1891, and the most influential figure in the Islands' farming history, constantly struggled with what he regarded as an uncomprehending Board of Directors. But when Cobb joined the Board of the Falkland Islands Company on his return to Great Britain he too eventually became increasingly unable to adapt or change.

It is easy to blame the so-called 'Absentee Landowners' and to assert that they were solely responsible for what occurred, and this is a widely held perception. But the company treatment of farm staff was generally benign and philanthropic, although somewhat paternalistic in style, and the Falkland Islands Company, in particular, did provide a great deal of the Islands' social infrastructure. Nevertheless it was not until the break-up of the large farming companies, from the late 1970s onwards, that serious changes in farming practices and greater environmental consciousness became practical realities.

vi. The attitude and behaviour of the Colonial Office (latterly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) is probably the one of the most significant contributory factors in the degradation of the natural environment and the failure to conserve and preserve it. The administration of the Islands and South Georgia was only a small part of the vast responsibility of the Colonial Office, and there were real difficulties in exercising oversight over a small colony that was twelve thousand kilometres away.

The Colonial Office representative in the Islands, the Governor, was often restricted in his actions by local intransigence and lack of finance, but

Governors also often found that the Colonial Office gave scant support for their own policies *e.g.* Allardyce's attempts to restrict the number of whale catchers,<sup>18</sup> and Cardinall's post World War II reform proposals.<sup>19</sup> In addition a succession of Governors found that managing the natural resources of South Georgia, and supervising the Southern Ocean, from the Islands, was very difficult because the Colonial Office was unwilling to provide them with the necessary resources required to accomplish this effectively.

Colonies had to be, at the very least, self-sufficient; if at all possible they had to be net contributors to the British exchequer. Colonial profits had to be maximised; grants and subsidies were to be kept to an absolute minimum. Every Colony must play its part in providing useful commodities *e.g.* whale products which produced glycerine for explosives during World War I, edible oils derived from whale oil after World War II, and wool products during the Korean War. Allardyce's early success at control and restraint was soon swept away by the exigencies of a wartime economy, and when the majority of whaling activity went pelagic local control became almost impossible. Governor Middleton wrote to the Colonial Office that 'the control and suppression of pelagic whaling was impossible ... the absence of a patrol boat meant that the Governor has no means of controlling the floating factories.'<sup>20</sup> In the face of the over-riding concern to produce edible oils to meet world demand after World War II the Colonial Office failed to exercise a restraining influence (albeit a limited influence) when 'the world wanted to go whaling.'<sup>21</sup> (See Figure 20) Despite knowing the parlous state of the stocks of whales in the Southern Ocean:

It is clear that the populations of Blue and Humpback Whales have been seriously depleted in recent years, and the stocks of these species reached a critical condition when the war brought an end to large scale

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<sup>18</sup> Heyburn, H (1980) William Lamond Allardyce 1861-1930 – a profile; *Polar Record*; Vol 20. No 124; p41.

<sup>19</sup> CO78/216/8; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1942.

<sup>20</sup> CO78/174/3; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 11 September 1926.

<sup>21</sup> Tønnessen, J N & Johnson, A O; (1982); *op.cit.*; p521.

whaling ... if hunting were to continue on the pre-war scale depletion of the Fin Whales must follow sooner or later.<sup>22</sup>

The Colonial Office too easily gave into the considerable pressure exerted by the Ministry of Fisheries and Food to resume whaling as soon as possible after the end of World War II:

In view of the clear indications of the oils and fats position after the War, it will be important to get moving as quickly as we can.<sup>23</sup>

Powerful financial interests like the whaling company Salvesen or the Falkland Islands Company, were often resented in the Colonial Office, but although there was a great deal of private censure, they were rarely challenged publicly or penalised about their working practices. *e.g.*:

We have long regarded Messrs. Salvesen as the most troublesome of the whaling firms, and they are maintaining this reputation ... We should not allow ourselves to be defied by a British firm ... I am bound to say that this firm has been known to us for years as greedy and grasping.<sup>24</sup>

and:

The Falkland Islands Company is the difficulty, but we must try to carry them with us in reforms. It would be quite impossible to break them except under a system of land nationalisation and that would only replace one monopoly for another, on which it would be just as difficult for us here in Whitehall to exercise sound economic progress as it is for the Falkland Islands Company.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> FO371/32810 Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; November 1942

<sup>23</sup> MAF83/569 Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; April 1943.

<sup>24</sup> CO78/183/3 Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1 October 1929.

<sup>25</sup> CO78/220/8; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1946

There was a marked unwillingness on the part of the British Government to make any long-term investment in the Islands. From the very beginnings of the Colony's history the area was primarily regarded as a base for greater political hegemony and influence, and also a source of commodities and revenue. Conservation, in so far as this was pursued as a policy at all, was always subservient to the greater needs of Empire. Post-World War II restrictions meant that investment fell far short of what was required *e.g.* the lack of response to Governor Cardinall's 1942 Report. Governor Clifford did succeed in attracting greater financial support from the British Government in the 1950s from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund, but the Islands became increasingly regarded as small and insignificant. In the period between 1960 and 1982 the Islands suffered substantial financial hardship, as a result of the decline in revenue from the whaling industry and the increasingly unprofitable sheep farming industry, and any investment supported by the Colonial Office was usually a joint-venture with Argentina. This combination of 'benign neglect' and pro-Argentine policy of the Colonial Office was deeply resented by islanders. In the Colonial Office/Foreign Office the Islands were often seen as a distant backwater; the need for enlightened and far-reaching conservation policies was appreciated by only a few.

The Colonial Office failed to resolve adequately the problems caused by the lack of continuity of leadership in the Islands. The regular succession of Governors sometimes caused significant failures in long-term and beneficial planning. Governor Allardyce was a pioneer conservationist, and it is noteworthy that he was Governor for eleven years, but he was succeeded by a Governor who did not share his vision. Governor Middleton's farsighted policies to promote a more sustainable agricultural system were rapidly dissipated by the ignorance of Governor Hodson. Only in recent years (in the 1980s) has the problem of the lack of continuity in leadership been effectively dealt with by the appointment of a Chief Executive, in addition to the Foreign Office appointee, namely - the Governor. More recently (in 2002) with the election of a Speaker of the Legislative Council - replacing the Governor as Chairman of the Legislative Council - improved continuity of leadership has been secured. The greater involvement of elected Councillors in the

administration/governance of the Islands has also improved the situation - particularly now that individual Councillors have specific responsibilities and portfolios. Some civil servants have served the Islands, and their Dependencies, for considerable lengths of time in the Colonial Office e.g. E R Darnley (See page 223), but generally the Islands have suffered from the lack of stability in policy-making - both locally and in London. A good example of this can be seen in 1965 when Governor Haskard was asked to provide a 'child's guide' to the history of the Islands because:

The recent flurry of telegrams about the proposed quota of whaling from land stations in South Georgia has revealed, among other things, how inadequate the Colonial Office's background knowledge about the whaling industry there is. The territory is remote and subject recondite. It has been assumed locally that the C.O. [Colonial Office] knows a good deal more of the background than, with recent changes in personnel, is at present the case. I wonder whether, [if you would] lighten our darkness.<sup>26</sup>

This failure of continuity in the Colonial Office came at a crucial time in the history of the management of the natural environment of the Islands and South Georgia.

Governor Cardinall expressed clearly the frustration felt by many when he wrote:

But there is one obvious criticism which the past history of these islands has impressed on all in the Colony, and that is - can continuity of policy be assured?<sup>27</sup>

The continuing ambivalence in the Colonial Office concerning the relationship between Argentina and the Islands and South Georgia has been a factor of

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<sup>26</sup> D/4/64; Falkland Islands Government Archive; Letter from Colonial Office to Governor; 12 August 1965; op.cit.

<sup>27</sup> CO78/216/8; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1942; p 99; op.cit.

increasing note through the history of the human settlement of the Islands and exploitation of the natural resources in the area. When Carl Larsen began whaling on South Georgia he was at first unauthorised. Larsen initially flew the Norwegian and Argentine flags over the whaling station, but with the arrival of H.M.S. *Sappho*<sup>28</sup> the offending flags were removed. The incident was handled with great care because both Governor Allardyce and the Colonial Office were unwilling to cause an 'incident' with an Argentine company, with its potential for diplomatic complications.<sup>29</sup> Larsen's company - *Compañía Argentina de Pesca* - also enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the exploitation of Elephant Seals from 1910 onwards. The fact that one of the principal sealing and whaling companies was an Argentine company meant that the Colonial Office was often very reluctant to restrict or restrain their activities. There was marked disinclination to cause offence for both diplomatic and economic reasons. As well as the significant contribution of the whaling industry to the economy of the Islands, Argentina was also a major trading partner with Britain, with a large British expatriate population. At some point towards the end of 1910 Governor Allardyce became alarmed at a discussion that was taking place in the Colonial Office about appeasing Argentine claims to sovereignty over the Islands. In a secret despatch he opposed the transfer of the South Orkneys to the Argentine Republic on the grounds of the financial consequences for the Islands and also because it would be:

Almost certainly misunderstood in South America, and might hereafter form an unfortunate precedent for other demands, and be used to materially weaken our claim to possessing territory in these seas.<sup>30</sup>

When the usually inept Governor Hodson resolved to deny *Compañía Argentina de Pesca* their annual renewal of a sealing licence because of their flagrant abuse of the licence regulations, the Colonial Office overruled him

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<sup>28</sup> Allardyce, W; (1906) Confidential Despatch Book B30; Enclosure 1; Falkland Islands Government Archive; 28 March 1906.

<sup>29</sup> CSO898/21 *Dependencies share cost in cost of administration*; Falkland Islands Government Archive; Despatch 75 to Secretary of State for the Colonies (Enclosure I) 22 May 1912.

<sup>30</sup> Allardyce, W; SPRI MS240/1; 11 November 1910.

because of fear of offending Argentina. The licence was renewed.<sup>31</sup> When thirty years later Governor Arrowsmith tried to curtail the operations of Compañía Argentina de Pesca, the British Embassy in Buenos Aires opposed the proposal on the grounds that ‘the eviction of Pesca would be considered a political move and would be likely to cause an outburst of extreme nationalist indignation.’<sup>32</sup> The proposal to transfer of the assets of Compañía Argentina de Pesca to the British-based company Albion Star in 1958 was vehemently opposed by the Argentine government, and the British government was initially reluctant to accede to the request on the grounds that it would risk ‘poisoning the atmosphere.’<sup>33</sup> When Albion Star applied to the Islands Government to transfer the leases of Grytviken and Husvik to the Ministry of Fisheries of the USSR in 1970 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London strongly opposed the proposal on the grounds that:

To let the Russians into the Dependencies would force Argentina to take note, and sour the favourable developments with regard to Argentina/Falkland Islands relations.<sup>34</sup>

The Islands were useful in wartime *e.g.* a bunkering depot for warships; the location of a powerful radio station during World War I; a strategic base to restrict Japanese expansion around Cape Horn and to deprive German surface raiders of deep water harbours during World War II; but after both the wars ended the Islands were easily forgotten. By the time that the Shackleton Report of 1976 was published, the Foreign Office had come to regard the Islands as a political embarrassment. In a personal conversation, in June 1991, Lord Shackleton told the author that he had been told to come to the Islands to find a way of ‘humanely handing-over the Islands to Argentina.’ In recently released Foreign Office briefing papers (written in 1972 for Lord Chalfont, the Foreign Office Minister) the viewpoint prevalent in the FCO is clearly expressed:

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<sup>31</sup> CO78/180/13; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1928

<sup>32</sup> FO 371/131892; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 18 November 1958.

<sup>33</sup> FO371/131892; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 17 October 1958

<sup>34</sup> CSO (Secret) S/306; Falkland Islands Government Archive; Telegram from Secretary of State to Governor; 26 March 1970.

At present the Islands are something of a liability to Britain; they no longer have a strategic value and they are difficult and expensive to defend, while remaining a constant source of friction in relations with Argentina and with Latin America as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

A significant failure of the Colonial Office/FCO in recent years was the reluctance to endorse a policy of imposing territorial limits during the period of unregulated and uncontrolled fishing in the waters of the Islands and South Georgia, prior to 1986. The origins of this policy go back to the Board of Trade's attitude during the debate about pelagic whaling the 1920s when it stated that 'there should be as little interference as possible with what goes on upon the high seas.'<sup>36</sup> There was political pressure to establish exclusive fishing zones around the Islands and South Georgia during the mid 1970s, but the FCO consistently resisted the proposal. The experience of the so-called 'Cod Wars', and an unwillingness to provoke the Argentine government into retaliatory action, led to "deliberate obstruction"<sup>37</sup> of any policy of imposing territorial limits. Only after the *Chain Der 3* incident (when the Argentine navy sank a Chinese fishing vessel within what had been the Military Exclusion Zone) did the British government finally accede to demands for the imposition of territorial limits. Once the limits were in place, a policy of sustainable use of the resource became a practical reality.

vii. Another contributory factor is the way in which, in a small and remote community, the effect of dominant individuals is accentuated. Throughout the history of the human settlement on the Islands and South Georgia there have been a number of powerful and strong-minded characters. The first settlers were dynamic and resourceful. Colonial expansion in the 19th century encouraged men like Frederick Cobb (the first Colonial Manager of the Falkland Island Company), William Markham Dean (whose company made Stanley a significant trading and ship repair location) Robert Blake Snr. (who

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<sup>35</sup> FCO 7/2115 Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1972.

<sup>36</sup> CO78/175/4; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 15 March 1927; Memo by Grimshaw, C.

<sup>37</sup> pers.comm. Mitchell, F C; June 2001.

more than any other person opened West Falkland Island to large-scale sheep-farming) and Captain C A Larsen (the ‘father’ of the modern era of Southern Ocean whaling) to be callous in their attitude towards the natural environment. These attitudes have become part of the culture of the Islands, and they have been passed on to succeeding generations of islanders.

Until the break up of the large farms a number of farming families *e.g.* the Camerons of Port San Carlos, the Luxtons of Chartres, the Millers of Roy Cove, the Pitalugas of Salvador, held absolute sway over their employees for several generations. These families have exercised a profound influence on the management of the land. Such power sometimes encouraged improvement and modification, and sometimes it did not.

Some Governors have been equally self-assured and strongly opinionated; sometimes this worked to the benefit of the environment *e.g.* Allardyce - who was responsible for the early environmental legislation (‘the pioneer Antarctic conservationist.’<sup>38</sup>) and sometimes to the detriment of the environment *e.g.* Hodson - who was a constant critic of the work of the Discovery Committee and who was responsible for the closure of the Experimental Farm (‘we warned the new Governor that research and other whaling matters were extremely complex and that he should refrain from making proposals until had time to acquaint himself with them fully.’<sup>39</sup>)

As a general rule pioneers and frontiersmen do not take kindly to restrictions and what they regard as Government ‘interference’; the thrill of achievement and satisfaction in a hostile environment (‘the taming of savage nature’<sup>40</sup>) or the excitement of the hunt and chase during whaling is everything. The effect of their actions on the long-term interests of the environment was rarely considered.

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<sup>38</sup> Heyburn, H; (1980) *op.cit.*; p39

<sup>39</sup> CO78/177/13; Colonial Office Records; Public Records Office, Kew; 8 August 1927.

<sup>40</sup> *pers.comm.* Bonner, N; July 1991.

viii. For most of the history of the Islands and their Dependencies there has been an unwillingness to exercise restraint in the exploitation of natural resources. After the discovery of the vast stocks of seals by James Cook, the sealers systematically and ruthlessly exploited the seal populations. (See: Figure 16). Sealers moved from one island to another in quick succession - with the result that the stocks of seals were rapidly depleted generally. After Captain Larsen had demonstrated the profitability of South Ocean whaling, 'operations were unfortunately conducted, in many cases, with reckless extravagance and without regard to the future'.<sup>41</sup> (See: Figures 19 & 20). After World War II, when it was clearly known that the stocks of whales were in a parlous state, the whaling companies indulged in a frenzied 'drive for the line' during the 1950s before the end of whaling came as a result of the remaining stocks becoming uneconomic to hunt. Once a ranching style sheep farming industry, largely owned by British based companies, had been introduced throughout the Islands, most of the farming companies were single-minded in the pursuit of profit, generally with scant regard for the long-term effects of an extractive industry upon the land. The destruction, and eventual extinction, of the Warrah by the early farming community is illustrative of the attitude towards any competitor to the supremacy of farming interests. Before the introduction of territorial limits and a restrictive fishing policy in the 1980s, the fishing grounds of the Islands and South Georgia were grossly over fished by Eastern European and Argentine fishing fleets. This inability to be restrained in the exploitation of natural resources is one of the most significant factors in the failure to preserve the natural environment.

ix. Until very recently, with a few notable exceptions, deep-seated human arrogance towards the natural world has been the underlying attitude of many of those who have settled on the Islands and who have exploited their natural resources of land and sea. The values of natural resources were seen purely in terms of human economic benefit: It was 'the genius of the British Isle ... [to] enrich yourselves ... And stretch Commerce and Conquest as you please;<sup>42</sup> or as a birth right e.g. as seen in the attacks on the Discovery investigations by

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<sup>41</sup> CO78/175/5; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 22 February 1927.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in: Elliot, G; (1998) *A whaling enterprise: Salvesen in the Antarctic*; Norwich.

Islands' farmers and their perception that not enough of the benefits of the whaling industry were being received by the islanders; or as a God-given right to exploit *e.g.* as seen by in the attitude of Sven Foyn towards whale stocks: 'God has let the whale inhabit (those waters) for the benefit and blessing of mankind.'<sup>43</sup> As well as arrogance there was a sense of environmental optimism; the oceans were boundless and natural resources had an infinite capacity to regenerate and renew. C A Larsen told the Interdepartmental Committee: 'I do not believe it is so possible to deplete the stock of the so-called Fin Whales so that posterity may be without them.'<sup>44</sup>

Even the most eminent scientists had an ambivalent attitude towards the natural world. Sidney Harmer shows this most clearly when he commented on the Leopard Seal:

It is a ferocious pest; it preys on penguins as well as fish, and any diminution in its numbers may, perhaps, be viewed with equanimity. Whether it is merely a pest depends on whether the skin and oil have any economic value:<sup>45</sup>

For all the ground-breaking advice contained in Hugh Munro's report to the farmers of the Islands it nevertheless revealed a ruthless attitude towards any potential natural competitor to the farming endeavour: *e.g.* the problems caused by Upland Geese: 'I recommend that experiments be carried out with a view to destroying geese with poisoned grain.'<sup>46</sup> According to Munro birds of prey should fare little better: 'I am of the opinion that Government could substantially increase the royalty for destroying them with great advantage.'<sup>47</sup>

These attitudes are not unique to the Islands; the first settlers and fishermen shared the commonly held views of their day. But the desire to exploit, subdue and subjugate 'savage nature' is a theme that runs through many of the

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<sup>43</sup> Tønnessen, J N & Johnson, A O; (1982); *op.cit.*; p26.

<sup>44</sup> Interdepartmental Committee; (1920); *op.cit.*; p95.

<sup>45</sup> CO78/154; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1920.

<sup>46</sup> Munro, H; (1924); *op.cit.*; p43.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*; p43.

attitudes and activities of the early pioneers, and these attitudes greatly contributed to the harmful effect of human activity on the Islands.

x. Despite the fact that Government Ordinances protecting certain species were enacted from the 1880s onwards, *in practice* environmental and conservation considerations have had a low priority. Allardyce laboured hard to protect seals and whales through legislation but the behaviour of seal poachers and some whaling companies rendered the Ordinances largely ineffective. In the same manner the regulatory system provided by the International Whaling Commission was frequently flouted - to the long-term detriment of the whale stocks. Until very recently the best that can be said for the rôle of Government Ordinance and regulation in protecting the environment, is that it succeeded only in slowing the rate of degradation.

#### § c. Concluding remarks.

There is much to be learnt about what has occurred in the Islands and their Dependencies since human settlement and exploitation began in the 1770s, and there must be a renewed determination to learn from this history, and not to repeat the mistakes of the past. There are no excuses now for ignorance and there is no lack of information. The work of Falklands Conservation is vital in maintaining and expanding environmental knowledge, and the promotion of good practice. Falklands Conservation is an organisation funded jointly by the Islands Government and by a charitable Trust established by Sir Peter Scott in 1979. Under the general auspices of Falklands Conservation much research has been conducted *e.g.* on vascular flora, on terrestrial invertebrates, on penguins, albatross, and Sea Lions. Falklands Conservation and the Darwin Initiative have established a National Herbarium in the Islands.

The current (2004) research of the Islands Agricultural and Fisheries Departments must be enhanced and adequately funded. The educational task of these organisations is vital. A former Director of Agriculture once quoted an appropriate Chinese proverb

to the author: ‘If you plan for a year, plant rice; if you plan for ten years, plant trees; if you plan for a century, educate the people.’<sup>48</sup>

The Islands community has to recognise that serious damage has been done to the natural environment, and that there is much more critical international consciousness today about what has happened. There also needs to be awareness about the practical difficulties in effecting change in the use of natural resources, but a determination not to give in to despair or pessimism in the face of the problems. The natural environment of the Islands is fragile, and it has been spoilt by much human activity, but it is not too late to protect what remains. ‘The land will balance itself out in the end.’<sup>49</sup> Nature has a remarkable capacity to regenerate and given time and opportunity much can be restored. There are signs of hope *e.g.* the recovery of Fur Seal populations in South Georgia, the resurgence of some native grasses on Keppel Island where sheep and cattle have been removed for some years, and the re-planting of Tussac Grass.

A significant ‘sign of hope’ can also be found in the progress being made with various rat eradication programmes. Rats have a serious effect on populations of ground nesting birds, and they probably first came to the Islands and to South Georgia on sealing ships. The New Zealand Government first pioneered work on rat eradication in the 1980s on the peri-Antarctic island of Campbell Island. Falklands Conservation has recently completed its first attempt to clear rats from a number of small offshore islands with the assistance of a team from New Zealand. On small islands with large stands of Tussac Grass the removal of rats provides opportunities for the re-establishment ground nesting birds. The Government of South Georgia and South Shetlands Islands have conducted a rat population density survey on the Greene Peninsula of South Georgia as a feasibility study for a future rat eradication programme on South Georgia. But many problems remain *e.g.* the considerable decline in the populations of Blackbrowed Albatross and Rockhopper and Gentoo Penguins.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> pers. comm. Bob Reid January 2001.

<sup>49</sup> pers. comm. Richard Wagner, February 2001. Wagner was Economic Advisor to the Islands Government 1991-2001.

<sup>50</sup> See: Falklands Conservation; (2003) *Wildlife conservation in the Falkland Islands*: Issue 3.

One of the besetting problems hindering the implementation of beneficial change and sustainable development throughout the history of human settlement and exploitation of the Islands and South Georgia has been the lack of finance. The greatly increased Government income from the sale of fishing licences makes it possible, for the first time in the Islands' history, for major improvements to be made in environmental protection and renewal. The conservation opportunities provided by the revenue from the fishing industry should not be missed. In a noteworthy comment to the author, Dr Mark Belchier, fisheries scientist of British Antarctic Survey, stated that it is only the revenue from the sale of fisheries licences that makes it possible to undertake any research or fisheries protection around South Georgia.<sup>51</sup>

The example of the management of the fish stocks of the Islands and South Georgia, since 1985, serves well as a model of hope for the future. The recent history of fishing in the surrounding waters is the exception in this dissertation; it has been generally well managed and regulated, and conservation of fish stocks has been a central concern. This has occurred for three main reasons: first because of a desire to learn the lessons of history, albeit through self-interest *i.e.* to protect fishing licence revenue; second because of greatly increased scientific knowledge and environmental awareness; and third because the desire to conserve the resource was at the centre of the regulatory system.<sup>52</sup> (See: pages 306-307) The use of catch limitation schemes and closed seasons - and the early closure of the fishing season if stocks fall below a sustainable population - gives cause for encouragement. Fishery protection measures - although expensive - have attempted to transform legislation into practical enforcement.

Continuity of leadership and policy can now be maintained. The appointment of a Government Chief Executive makes good governance of the Islands less dependent on the abilities, and less exposed to the weaknesses, of any individual Governor. Long term appointments ensure that the Islands are less vulnerable to the problems that may occur as a result of too rapid changes of senior office holders. The best environmental decisions are those made locally, but which also act internationally *e.g.* that provided

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<sup>51</sup> pers.comm. January 2003.

<sup>52</sup> Affidavit by the Director of Fisheries of the Falkland Islands Government (Barton, J) in the matter of an application for Judicial Review by HM Queen in the matter of the Director of Fisheries of the Falkland Islands Government *ex parte* Fu Chun Fishing Company Limited; Sworn 10 January 1991; Matter No: SC/CTV/10/1990.

by the RAMSAR Convention and CCAMLR. Locally elected leaders, who are able to take a long-term view and are active in conservation issues, is another vital component of any conservation strategy.

The dangers of the importation exotic species are now well understood, and the importation of further exotic species without rigorous investigation to the Islands should be banned.<sup>53</sup> Importing goats from Britain in the 1990s, and the recent (2003) introduction of reindeer from South Georgia to the Islands, is regrettable; these are examples of bad practice that should not be repeated.

Conservation must be given precedence in Government legislation and planning. The recently published Government Plan 2002/05 does not place the environmental issues high enough on its list of priorities, but the example of the new Mining Bill 2002, which requires environmental impact assessments (EIA) to be made before any planning application is given, is cause for hope. It requires of the Governor:

To balance the needs ... of effective and co-ordinated development ... with the possible economic benefits ... [and] to minimise any adverse effect upon the environment and to refuse to permit an activity that in his opinion would have an unacceptable degree of environmental impact.<sup>54</sup>

Current legislation should be extended or amended to oblige all future major developments to have a full EIA conducted before planning permission is considered. Agriculture and fisheries - which are currently not subject to the requirement for EIAs - must have a full impact assessment made before any new development proceeds.

Legislation will work only if individuals and governments are honest. This dissertation is redolent with examples of falsification *e.g.* inaccurate farm stock returns detailing total numbers of sheep being run on a particular farm; sealing ship masters making false declarations to the Customs and Excise; Aristotle Onassis and his ship *Olympic Challenger* (See: page 263) - which became a by-word for flouting

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<sup>53</sup> For an early example of a warning about the dangers of the importation of exotic species (Upland Goose) into South Georgia see: Bonner, N. (1959) *Memorandum concerning the introduction of Upland Geese into South Georgia*; Falkland Islands Government Archive; 13 March 1959.

<sup>54</sup> Mining Bill 2002; Clauses 14 & 15.

all rules and conventions. Only when nations operate honestly can any international legislation be successful. There is clear evidence that the whaling fleets of the former U.S.S.R. engaged in major falsification. (See: page 190), but the Soviet Union was not the only country where such behaviour was common. In a Colonial Office dated 30 January 1929 it was noted that:

There have been many allegations of rendering incorrect returns made against Messrs. Salvesen and their representatives from 1922 to 1926 ... No doubt most of these allegations were well founded.<sup>55</sup>

Gerald Elliot's assessment of the long-term effectiveness of the International Whaling Convention is noteworthy:

The weakness of the Convention, common to all international treaties between nation states, was that it could only work if there was universal and honest determination behind it. Those qualities were notoriously absent.<sup>56</sup>

The natural environment of the Islands and South Georgia has been seriously damaged, and very little can now be fairly described as 'pristine.' What remains is fragile and can easily be lost. Some of the damage is permanent and irreversible, but some of the destruction, given time and protection, can be repaired or will naturally regenerate. A former Islands Planning Officer<sup>57</sup> complained to the author that 'the pragmatic approach dominates' in all planning matters, and that the majority of Islanders 'simply paid lip service to environmental planning.' A former Chief Executive, commenting about fisheries conservation legislation, stated that 'enlightened self-interest has been the rule.'<sup>58</sup> Pragmatism or enlightened self-interest is not sufficient to protect or conserve the natural environment. Regulation alone will not work, and there has to be both honesty and a willingness to make any regulatory scheme operate successfully.

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<sup>55</sup> CO78/183/3 Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 30 January 1929.

<sup>56</sup> Elliot, G; (1998); op.cit.; p170.

<sup>57</sup> pers. comm. Tom Eggeling. March February 2001.

<sup>58</sup> David Taylor; pers. comm. May 2002.

What this dissertation has shown is that to make any significant improvement in the manner in which the natural resources of the Islands and South Georgia are exploited a number of prerequisites are necessary:

- A determination to learn the lessons of history, and also a personal and corporate commitment to action as a result of that history.
- A judicious use of the increased financial resources available to the governments of the Islands and South Georgia.
- Enhanced and enforced legislation and the precautionary approach in any Environmental Impact Assessment.
- A change in human attitudes towards the natural world.