DPLR3\1002

Darwin Plus Local - Final Report (1)

Officer: Linzi Ogden

Section 1 - Darwin Plus Local Project Information (Essential)

Project Reference Number

DPL00062

Project Title

No Response

Overseas Territory(ies)

☑ Gibraltar

Lead Organisation or Individual

Lewis Stagnetto

Partner Organisation(s)

The Nautilus Project

Value of Darwin Plus Local Grant Award

£50,000.00

Project Start Date

01 April 2024

Project End Date

30 June 2025

Project Leader Name

Lewis Stagnetto

Project Website/Twitter/Blog etc.

No Response

Report Author(s)

Lewis Stagnetto

Report Date

23 May 2025

Project Summary

No Response

Project Outcomes

Checked	**Biodiversity: improving and conserving biodiversity, and slowing or reversing biodiversity loss and degradation;**
Unchecked	**Climate Change: responding to, mitigating and adapting to climate change and its effects on the natural environment and local communities;**
Unchecked	**Environmental quality: improving the condition and protection of the natural environment;**
Unchecked	**Capability and capacity building: enhancing the capacity within OTs, including through community engagement and awareness, to support the environment in the short- and long-term.**

Section 2 - Project Outcomes (Essential)

On a scale of 1 (high – outcome substantially exceeded) to 5 (low – outcome substantially did not meet expectation), how successful do you think your project has been?

⦿ 3 - Outcome met expectation

Project outcomes and justification for rating above

The Gibraltar Seagrass Restoration Project has seen remarkable progress over the past year, marking significant advancements in marine conservation and environmental sustainability. This ambitious initiative has not only strengthened Gibraltar's ecological resilience but also fostered new partnerships and educational opportunities. One of the major milestones achieved has been the employment of a new member of staff dedicated to overseeing the restoration efforts. This addition to the team has been instrumental in coordinating activities, liaising with stakeholders, and ensuring the project stays on track. Their expertise and commitment have provided essential support in establishing the framework needed for successful seagrass restoration.
Another transformative development has been the construction and completion of a seagrass nursery. This purpose-built facility stands as a testament to Gibraltar's commitment to marine preservation, serving as the foundation for future restoration efforts. The nursery is equipped to nurture and sustain seagrass before its transplantation into marine environments, ensuring optimal growth conditions and increasing the chances of successful habitat revival. As the project moves forward, the nursery will play a central role in fostering healthy ecosystems and biodiversity.

The educational engagement during the 2024/25 academic year has also been a resounding success. Schools and community groups have actively participated in awareness campaigns, workshops, and hands-on activities related to seagrass conservation. Students have been introduced to the ecological importance of seagrass meadows, their role in carbon sequestration, and their contribution to marine biodiversity. Through this initiative, future generations are being equipped with the knowledge and passion necessary to champion environmental sustainability.
A pivotal relationship has also been forged with the Maltese Government, a key partner in the restoration project. This collaboration has enabled the procurement of Posidonia oceanica, one of the species that will be cultivated in Gibraltar's newly completed nursery.
The expertise and support provided by the Mediterranean Posidonia Network have been invaluable, facilitating knowledge exchange and best practices in marine restoration. Strengthening international cooperation in environmental initiatives like this underscores the shared responsibility of coastal nations in safeguarding marine habitats.
While the project has yet to receive the Posidonia oceanica, anticipation is building as the team eagerly awaits its arrival this summer. These seagrasses will mark the next major phase in the restoration process, allowing Gibraltar to begin cultivating and expanding its marine vegetation. The controlled nursery environment will ensure the young seagrasses have the best possible start before they are introduced to local waters.

Supporting Evidence - file(s) upload

No Response

Supporting Evidence - links to published document/online materials

Off the back of the Darwin funding we have had a strong commercial backing by Peninsula 360 to continue this work going forward. This would not have been possible without the initial Darwin backing and funding.

https://www.peninsula360.com/news/peninsula-backs-marine-conservation-project-to-restore-gibraltars-underwater-ecosystem/

https://www.gbc.gi/news/long-term-project-aims-reintroduce-sea-grass-gibraltar-waters/

Project Challenges

The Gibraltar Seagrass Restoration Project has encountered its fair share of challenges, testing the resilience and adaptability of the team. One of the most significant setbacks came when official permission was not granted for the original donor site. This unforeseen obstacle required swift problem-solving to ensure the continuation of the project.
Determined to find an alternative, the team explored donor sites in Portugal and Morocco, investigating their suitability for sourcing Posidonia oceanica. Each location presented unique hurdles, from logistical complexities to environmental concerns, making the selection process both time-consuming and intricate. After exhaustive research and negotiations, Malta emerged as the most viable solution, providing the necessary expertise and resources to supply the vital seagrasses.
While this unexpected detour delayed the delivery timeline, the team remained steadfast in their commitment, overcoming bureaucratic and logistical challenges to keep the project moving forward. Now, with a confirmed source in Malta, expectations are high as preparations are underway to receive the seagrasses this summer. This marks a pivotal step in the restoration process, ensuring that the newly completed nursery can begin cultivating marine vegetation as planned.
Despite the delays, the Gibraltar Seagrass Restoration Project is firmly back on track. The resilience demonstrated throughout this journey showcases the unwavering dedication of all involved. Every challenge has reinforced the importance of adaptability in conservation work, and with the next phase on the horizon, the future of Gibraltar's marine ecosystem looks increasingly promising.

Lessons Learned

What worked well?
A strong interdisciplinary approach proved essential, combining environmental science with effective project coordination. The employment of dedicated staff ensured streamlined operations, and the construction of the nursery provided a tangible foundation for the project. The educational engagement during the 2024/25 academic year also played a vital role in fostering community involvement, creating awareness and long-term advocacy for marine conservation.

What did not work well?
Initial setbacks regarding the donor site revealed the importance of securing official permissions early in the process. The unexpected delay in acquiring Posidonia oceanica created logistical challenges, impacting the timeline. Establishing international partnerships proved more complex than anticipated, emphasizing the need for proactive diplomatic engagement from the outset.

What would we do differently?
A more thorough feasibility assessment at the beginning could have mitigated delays, ensuring alternative donor sites were identified sooner. Strengthening early stakeholder involvement, including policymakers, might have streamlined approvals and expedited seagrass delivery.

Recommendations for others doing similar projects:
• Prioritize legal permissions and logistics planning early.
• Build strong international networks with reliable ecological sources.
• Invest in local community education to enhance long-term conservation efforts.
• Implement rigorous monitoring frameworks to ensure sustained success.

Despite the challenges, the project is back on track and progressing toward its ultimate goal: restoring Gibraltar's marine ecosystems while fostering regional collaboration and environmental stewardship.

Section 3 - Project Finance (Essential)

Project Expenditure

Project Spend (indicative)	Total Grant (£)	Total actual Darwin Plus Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff Costs	[redacted]			[redacted]

Consultancy Costs	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Overhead Costs	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Travel and Subsistence	[redacted]	[redacted]	
Operating Costs	[redacted]		
Capital Items	[redacted]		
Others	[redacted]		
Total	50,000.00	47,162.55	-6

Please provide a short narrative summary on project finances.

The Gibraltar Seagrass Restoration Project has faced financial challenges due to the broader economic slowdown, resulting in increased costs compared to initial projections. Rising prices in logistics, materials, and labor have impacted planned budgets, necessitating adjustments to ensure the project continues to progress despite financial pressures. These unforeseen expenses, largely driven by inflation and supply chain disruptions, temporarily slowed certain phases of development but did not derail the overarching mission.

To counter these economic difficulties, co-financing from Peninsula 360 has played a crucial role in sustaining momentum. Their invaluable financial support has been specifically allocated to the expansion of nursery facilities, enabling the project to prepare for the arrival and cultivation of Posidonia oceanica. With these funds, the nursery infrastructure has been enhanced to accommodate greater capacity, ensuring optimal conditions for nurturing the seagrasses before they are transplanted into Gibraltar's waters.

Despite the financial hurdles posed by the economic climate, the project remains on track, thanks to strategic financial planning and the backing of partners like Peninsula 360. By securing additional funding and refining budgeting strategies, Gibraltar's commitment to marine restoration has remained unwavering. As the initiative moves forward, these strengthened nursery facilities will ensure the successful establishment of healthy seagrass meadows, reinforcing the long-term environmental sustainability of Gibraltar's marine ecosystems.

Section 4 - Contribution of Project to Darwin Plus Programme Objectives

Please select up to **one** indicator that applies within **each group/indicator list (A, B, C, D)** and report your results for that indicator in the text box underneath. If you do not have relevant results to report for any of the indicators in a particular group, you can leave them blank.

Please also submit some form of evidence (above) to demonstrate any results you list below, where possible.

Group A: Capability and Capacity - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Unchecked	**DPLUS-A01: Number of people from key national and local stakeholder groups completing structured and relevant training.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-A02: Number of secondments or placements completed by individuals of key local and national stakeholders.**
Checked	**DPLUS-A03: Number of local/national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of project.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-A04: Number of people reporting that they are applying new capabilities (skills and knowledge) 6 (or more) months after training.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-A05: Number of trainers trained reporting to have delivered further training by the end of the project.**

Group A Indicator Results

We are working with Amjent Malta and will collaborate with them to help their seagrass restoration project learn from our acquired knowledge.

Group B: Policies, Practices and Management- Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Checked	**DPLUS-B01: Number of new/improved habitat management plans available and endorsed.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-B02: Number of new/improved species management plans available and endorsed.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-B03: Number of new/improved community management plans available and endorsed.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-B04: Number of new/improved sustainable enterprises/ community benefits management plans available and endorsed.**

Unchecked	**DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement).**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-B06: Number of Local Stakeholders and Local Communities (people) with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights.**

Group B Indicator Results

Government of Gibraltar are going to declare a new MPA on the Eastside of Gibraltar. The Seagrass will grow within this area.

Group C: Evidence and Best Practices - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Checked	**DPLUS-C01: Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-C02: Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-C03: New assessments of habitat conservation action needs published.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-C04: New assessments of community use of biodiversity resources published.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-C05: Number of projects contributing data, insights, and case studies to national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) related reporting processes and calls for evidence.**

Group C Indicator Results

Seagrass harvesting best practice protocol produced

Group D: Sustainable Benefits to People, Biodiversity and Climate - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Unchecked	**DPLUS-D01 Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices.**
Unchecked	**DPLUS-D02: Number of people whose disaster/climate resilience has been improved.**
Checked	**DPLUS-D03: Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended.**

Group D Indicator Results

Seagrasses are protected within British Gibraltar Territorial waters

Section 5 - Project Partnerships, Wider Impacts and Contributions

Project Partnerships

The Nautilus Project has been instrumental in shaping the scientific and strategic direction of the initiative. Their expertise in marine ecology and restoration techniques has guided crucial decision-making, from selecting optimal nursery conditions to determining suitable sites for transplantation. Their research-driven approach has ensured that the project follows best practices, maximizing the chances of successful seagrass regeneration while maintaining ecological balance.

The Government of Gibraltar has also played a pivotal role by declaring a Marine Protected Area within 'Site A.' This designation provides critical legal protection for the restoration site, ensuring that seagrass meadows can flourish without human interference. By safeguarding this area, Gibraltar is reinforcing its commitment to marine biodiversity and strengthening conservation policies. This move has positioned Gibraltar as a leader in environmental stewardship, recognizing the long-term ecological and economic benefits of preserving marine habitats.

Financial stability has been another cornerstone of the project's success, with Peninsula 360 stepping in to address funding shortfalls. Their support has been vital in maintaining project momentum, funding key infrastructure expansions, and reinforcing the nursery's capacity. Thanks to Peninsula 360's contribution, Gibraltar's seagrass restoration work has not only progressed but has also gained international recognition, showcasing the power of cross-border environmental collaboration.

Wider Impacts and Decision Making

The Gibraltar Seagrass Restoration Project has played a crucial role in the establishment of a new Marine Protected Area (MPA) on Gibraltar's eastern coast. Recognizing the ecological significance of seagrass meadows, conservationists, researchers, and policymakers have come together to ensure long-term habitat protection.

The Nautilus Project has been instrumental in driving this initiative, providing the scientific expertise needed to demonstrate the importance of seagrass ecosystems. Through extensive research and ecological assessments, The Nautilus Project highlighted the vital role that seagrass plays in marine biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and coastal resilience. Their findings helped shape conservation strategies, advocating for legal protections that would safeguard Gibraltar's marine environment.

Engagement with the Government of Gibraltar has been essential in transforming research into action. Collaborative discussions led to the implementation of a designated protection zone spanning 2 square kilometers, ensuring that marine habitats within this area remain undisturbed. This MPA serves as a strong commitment to environmental sustainability, securing a refuge for seagrass meadows while fostering marine life recovery.

Thanks to the Gibraltar Seagrass Restoration Project and its key partners, Gibraltar has taken a significant step in preserving its coastal ecosystems, setting a precedent for future marine conservation efforts.

Sustainability and Legacy

Thanks to the financial support of Peninsula 360, the Gibraltar Seagrass Restoration Project is guaranteed to continue for at least the next four years, ensuring long-term sustainability and conservation impact. This funding has provided crucial stability, allowing for extensive planning and growth beyond initial expectations.
A key development made possible by this support is the planned expansion of the project team. Additional personnel will be recruited to oversee various aspects of research, restoration, and monitoring, ensuring that

efforts remain efficient and scientifically robust. The growth in expertise will strengthen Gibraltar's ability to nurture seagrass habitats and refine conservation strategies.
Beyond Gibraltar's shores, Peninsula 360 is eager to amplify the project's success throughout the Mediterranean. Their vision includes supporting The Nautilus Project in expanding restoration efforts to other regions, fostering collaboration among environmental organizations and governments. By establishing a wider network of marine conservation initiatives, the project's impact will be multiplied, contributing to the preservation of critical seagrass ecosystems across the Mediterranean.
With Peninsula 360's backing, the Gibraltar Seagrass Restoration Project is evolving into a cornerstone of regional marine restoration, paving the way for future conservation advancements while setting a global example of environmental commitment.

Section 6 - Communications & Publicity

Exceptional Outcomes and Achievements

No Response

Photo, video or graphic to be used for publicity and communications.

Please upload at least one relevant and engaging image, video or graphic that you consent to be used alongside the above text in Defra, JNCC or NIRAS communications material.

No Response

Photo, video, and/or graphic captions and credits.

No Response

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat, Administrator, and/or JNCC to publish the content of this section.

- ○ Yes, I agree for the BCFs Secretariat and/or JNCC to publish the content of this section.
- ○ No, I have no project photos for reasons of sensitivity.

Please list any accounts that you would like tagged in online posts here. This can include project pages, partners' pages or individuals' accounts for any of the following platforms: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

No Response

Section 7 - Darwin Plus Contacts

Please tick here to confirm that you have read and acknowledge the BCF's Privacy Notice on how contact details will be used and stored and that you have sought agreement from anyone that you are sharing personal details with us on their behalf.

- ⊙ I confirm I have read the Privacy Notice and have consent to share the following contact details

Project Contact Details

Project Contact Name	Lewis Stagnetto
Role within Darwin Plus Project	Marine Biologist
Email	[redacted]
Phone	[redacted]
Do you need further sections to provide additional contact details?	⦿ No