PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO. 68
Answered on 19 November, 2026
Third Meeting 2026-2027 Session – Second Sitting

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION
ASKED BY

MR. CHRISTOPHER SAUNDERS,
ELECTED MEMBER FOR THE CONSTITUENCY OF BODDEN TOWN WEST

TO

HON. KATHERINE EBANKS-WILKS
MINISTER OF HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

QUESTION:

How did the Cayman Islands relationship with Oxitec start?

(a) What was the basis for approving an experimental importation programme whereby a genetically modified variant of one of the most dangerous species, the Aedes aegypti mosquito, was brought into the Cayman Islands as an experimental programme?
(b) Was an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study done prior to the importation of this alien invasive species to determine the impact to Cayman's environment?
(c) Who was the applicant for the alien species importation licences? Was it the MRCU? Oxitec? Or both?
(d) Who participated in the approval process?
(e) Were there any conflicts of interest declared by any member of the NCC at that time?

ANSWER:

Mister Speaker,

I thank the Member for Bodden Town West for his questions. I will take them in turn.

How did the relationship with Oxitec start?

The relationship began as a research collaboration between the Mosquito Research and Control Unit (MRCU) and Oxitec, a UK biotechnology company. The then Director of MRCU invited Oxitec to test its technology in Grand Cayman as a possible additional tool to control *Aedes aegypti*, which was becoming increasingly resistant to conventional insecticides.

Initial field trials took place between 2009 and 2010, with a further pilot programme between 2016 and 2017. The Government ultimately decided not to proceed with an island-wide rollout, and its contract with Oxitec ended on 31 December 2018.

What was the basis for approving the programme?

Aedes aegypti mosquito was already established in the Cayman Islands, so the programme did not introduce a new species. It involved genetically modified male *Aedes aegypti*, which do not bite, designed to mate with wild females so that most offspring would not survive to adulthood, thereby reducing the population of this disease-carrying mosquito.

For the 2016 project, the National Conservation Council took account of the available scientific and environmental information, including Oxitec's risk assessment, World Health Organization's 2016 recommendation for pilot use of the technique following the Zika emergency, the assessment by the United States Food and Drug Administration, and reviews by the Department of Agriculture and Department of Environment.

Was an Environmental Impact Assessment carried out?

No full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted prior to the 2016 approval. Part 7 of the National Conservation Act, which establishes the EIA framework, did not come into force until 16 August 2016, several months after the permit was issued in May 2016. As a result, there was no statutory basis for the National Conservation Council to require an EIA when considering the application.

However, environmental and risk information was considered. This included Oxitec's risk assessment and the environmental assessment undertaken in relation to the proposed release of genetically modified mosquitoes in the Florida Keys Mosquito District, an environment very similar to that found in the Cayman Islands, together with peer-reviewed papers and other relevant scientific publications. The Department of Environment and National Conservation Council considered that they had sufficient information with which to decide whether or not to issue the permit being requested.

Who was the applicant?

The MRCU was the applicant, with Oxitec as its project partner. The Department of Agriculture's earlier import permits identified Oxitec as the consignor and MRCU as the consignee. For the later programme, MRCU applied for the relevant permission to import and release the mosquitoes.

Who participated in the approval process?

For the original imports, the Department of Agriculture issued the necessary import permits. For the 2016 programme, the Department of Agriculture and Department of Environment were involved in the review process, with the National Conservation Council responsible for the relevant approval under the National Conservation legislation.

Were any conflicts of interest declared by members of the National Conservation Council?

The minutes of the National Conservation Council meeting of 18 May 2016 record no declarations of conflicts of interest by members.

Mister Speaker, I trust this provides the Member with the information requested.