

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT & HOUSING

2020 BUDGET COMMUNICATION



THE HONOURABLE ROMAULD
FERREIRA, M.P.,
MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT
AND HOUSING

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

MAY, 2020

MR. SPEAKER,

SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED SINCE THE LAST BUDGET DEBATE. OUR NATION, OUR COUNTRY, OUR HOME HAS BEEN CHALLENGED AND STRETCHED IN WAYS BEYOND THE FURTHEST CONTEMPLATION OF ANYONE.

IT CAME AT A TIME WHEN WE WERE ENJOYING RECORD TOURISM NUMBERS, WHEN EVIDENCE OF OUR TRANSFORMATION WAS TAKING ROOT. FREE TUITION AT UB AND BTVI, CLOSING OUR FISCAL GAPS AND INCREASING FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT.

WE AT THE MOE&H ARE DOING OUR PART. TRANSFORMATION AT THE NPSL, INSTALLATION OF OVER 1MW OF RE ENERGY, 30 HOMESITES FOR BAHAMIANS WITH MORE TO COME AND WORKING

WITH MOW & BPL TO STOP THE OIL POLLUTION AT CLIFTON PIER.

WE WERE ON TRACK TO TRANSFORM THE CITY OF NASSAU, OUR NATIONS HEART. A CITY THAT WELCOMED OUR FORBEARS AS THEY CAME TO NASSAU FROM THE ISLANDS, NURSING DREAMS OF THEIR OWN, WITH COURAGE TO MAKE A BETTER LIFE AND COMMITMENT TO GOD AND COUNTRY. THEY ARE THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH WE BULD. SO IT WAS FITTING TO CROWN THIS LONG NEGLECTED JEWEL WITH A NEW CRUISE PORT, A NEW CENTRAL BANK BUILDING, THE DEMOLITION OF THE OLD POST OFFICE AND THE OPENING OF THE NEW HEADQUARTERS FOR THE BMC.

THEN IT HAPPENED. FIRST DORIAN THEN THE COVID -19 PANDEMIC. I CONGRATULATE THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS FOR THE EXCELLENT WORK DONE. THE QUICK AND RAPID CLOSURE OF THE SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC SPACES SAVED LIVES. AT THE END OF THE DAY SAVING LIVES IS THE PRIORITY. I ALSO OFFER SINCERE THANKS AND APPRECIATION TO OUR NATIONS FRONTLINE ESSENTIAL WORKERS WHO RISKED THEIR LIVES, AND THE LIVES OF THEIR FAMILIES, EVERY DAY, TO KEEP US ALL SAFE AND FED. THANK YOU. FINALLY I OFFER SINCERE CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILIES WHO LOST LOVED ONES DUE TO COVID-19.

MR. SPEAKER,

UPON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COVID 19 EMERGENCY LOCKDOWN ORDER ON 16TH MARCH 2020. THE MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING

ACTIVATED ITS PLAN; TO KEEP THE ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE MINISTRY OPERATIONAL AT A TIME WHEN OUR COUNTRY NEEDED US THE MOST. CRITICAL AND ESSENTIAL STAFF WORKED FROM HOME, THE EXECUTIVE TEAM WORKED FROM HOME AND VISITED THE OFFICE PERIODICALLY AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT TEAM REMAINED ALERT AND RESPONSIVE.

THE DEHS WAS DECLARED AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE, AND RIGHTLY SO MAINTAINING THE SUPPORT TO ENSURE THE COLLECTION OF GARBAGE AND OPERATION OF THE LANDFILL ARE ESSENTIAL. THANK YOU. I ALSO CONGRATULATE THE BAHAMAS NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SERVICE CENTRE FOR THEIR MOST EXCELLENT WORK IN GIS MAPPING AND CONTACT TRACING. YOUR WORK SAVED LIVES. THANK YOU.

THE MINISTRY IS REOPENING. SINCE 4TH MAY, ESSENTIAL STAFF REPORT TO WORK ON A SHIFT SYSTEM. AS WITH ALL OTHER MINISTRIES AND

DEPARTMENTS, STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO HAVE FACE MASKS, WASH OR SANITIZE THEIR HANDS FREQUENTLY AND PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING.

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING

MR. SPEAKER, I AM EXTREMELY PROUD OF THE WORK OF MY MINISTRY OVER THE PAST YEAR. WE ACHIEVED MANY LANDMARK GOALS WHICH WILL TRANSFORM, PROTECT AND ENSURE AN ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACY FOR GENERATIONS OF BAHAMIANS TO COME. WE HAVE ONE GOAL, ONE SINGULAR PURPOSE TO PROTECT, CONSERVE AND MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE WELLBEING OF THE BAHAMIAN PEOPLE.

MR. SPEAKER,

IN THE LATE 1950'S SCIENTISTS IN THE ANATARTIC NOTICED WHAT APPEARED TO BE A HOLE IN THE OZONE LAYER. OZONE CRITICAL TO LIFE ON EARTH, PROTECTING US FROM THE SUN AND HELPING TO GIVE US OXYGEN, LIFE ITSELF WAS DISAPPEARING. NATIONS CAME TOGETHER AND ACTED. THE

MONTREAL PROTOCOL WAS SIGNED BANNING THE CHEMICALS CAUSING THE PROBLEM. TODAY THE OZONE LAYER IS HEALING, THE HOLES ARE CLOSING PROVING BIPARTISANSHIP WORKS. DEMONSTRATING CLIMATE ACTION WORKS.

MR SPEAKER

THIS IS PRECISELY WHAT WE DID. AS LONG AS ANYONE CAN REMEMBER, ENVIRONMENTALISTS, ATTORNEYS AND CITIZENS ALIKE, COMPLAINED ABOUT THE ABSENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS. THIS WAS RECOGNIZED BY OUR PARTY AND THE NEED WAS EXPRESSED IN THE FNM MANIFESTO. THIS IS ESPECIALLY POIGNANT, IN THAT MANY BAHAMIANS WERE HORRIFIED TO FIND OUT HOW THE CRUISE LINES, WILLFULLY POLLUTED OUR WATERS. THIS ENVIRONMENTAL SAVAGERY ONLY SERVED TO HIGHLIGHT THE GAPING HOLE IN OUR LEGISLATION.

INDEED MR. SPEAKER,

THIS TASK, TO CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE WAS TAKEN UP BY THE CLIMATE CHANGE UNIT. AT THIS POINT I WISH TO CONGRATULATE THEM FOR THEIR HARD WORK.

MR. SPEAKER,

IN THE MANIFESTO, OUR GOVERNMENT PROMISED TO “TO CREATE A MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT BY ENACTING LEGISLATION TO INCORPORATE, ENCAPSULATE AND BRING TOGETHER THE VARIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION IN GOVERNING VARIOUS MINISTRIES/DEPARTMENTS/AGENCIES TO BRING MORE FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THOSE POLICIES.” WHAT DOES THIS MEAN.

IT MEANS WE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A STATUTORY ENTITY CALLED THE MINISTRY TO ACT, FUNCTION AND MANAGE THE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE BAHAMIAN PEOPLE. I AM HAPPY TO REPORT THAT WE ACHIEVED THIS GOAL WITH THE RECENT BIPARTISAN PASSING OF THE SUITE OF ENVIRONMENTAL

LEGISLATION WHICH INCLUDED - THE MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT ACT, 2019 AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND PROTECTION ACT, 2019.

THESE ARE IMPORTANT PIECES OF LEGISLATION WHICH WILL STRENGTHEN AND IMPROVE THE ADMINISTRATION OF MATTERS RELATED TO THE ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING THE REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COUNTRY.

WE WILL FORGE AHEAD WITH THE CREATION OF THE MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE CREATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT PLANNING & PROTECTION AS OUTLINED IN THE LEGISLATION.. THE BEST COMMISSION WILL BE SUBSUMED BY THE DEPARTMENT AND THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL BE STAFFED BY EMPLOYEES OF BEST..

MR. SPEAKER,

AGAIN, AS STATED IN OUR MANIFESTO, OUR GOVERNMENT PROMISED TO PHASE OUT THE USE OF PLASTIC BAGS BY 2020. I AM HAPPY TO REPORT THAT WE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY PASSED LEGISLATION TO ASSIST IN ACHIEVING THIS GOAL. THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (CONTROL OF PLASTIC POLLUTION) ACT, 2019, WAS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY IN PARLIAMENT IN DECEMBER, 2019 AND CAME INTO EFFECT 1 JANUARY, 2020. SOON WE WILL SEE THE BENEFITS IN THE ENVIRONMENT. REDUCED LITTER ON OUR STREETS AND BEACHES, LESS IMPACT ON WILDLIFE AND REDUCING OUR CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE.

THE FIRST PHASE OF THE BAN SAW THE PROHIBITION OF IMPORTS ON THE FOUR-BIDDEN (PLASTIC BAGS, PLASTIC STRAWS, PLASTIC FOOD UTENSILS AND STYROFOAM CUPS AND FOOD CONTAINERS). IT ALSO INTRODUCED A BAG FEE FOR PLASTIC BAGS AT THE POINT OF SALE AND MADE IT ILLEGAL TO RELEASE BALLOONS INTO THE ATMOSPHERE.

OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS, OVER 25,000 REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS WERE DISTRIBUTED TO BAHAMIANS ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS. MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH ABACO MARKETS LIMITED, NEW PROVIDENCE ECOLOGY PARK, THE INSURANCE COMMISSION OF THE BAHAMAS, ALIV AND REV BAHAMAS.

AS THE PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH CAMPAIGN CONTINUES, THE UNIT WILL CONTINUE TO INTERACT WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC, BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS TO INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVE.

MR SPEAKER

LET ME PUT INTO PROSPECTIVE THE ENORMITY OF THE PROBLEM. THE LARGEST RETAIL CHAIN GOES THROUGH 38 MILLION OF THESE BAGS EVERY YEAR. MY MINISTRY ESTIMATES BETWEEN 80-100 MILLION OF THESE SINGLE USE PLASTIC BAGS ARE USED ANNUALLY. MOST DO NOT END UP IN THE LANDFILL.

THEY END UP IN THE BUSH, THEY LINE OUR STREETS AND ULTIMATELY END UP IN THE OCEAN.

ON 1ST JULY, 2020, THE BAN WILL COMPLETELY COME INTO FORCE; MAKING IT ILLEGAL TO USE, MANUFACTURE OR DISTRIBUTE ANY OF THE FOUR-BIDDEN ITEMS OR TO RELEASE BALLOONS INTO THE ATMOSPHERE. WE ARE WORKING WITH VENDORS, THE DEHS AND THE LANDFILL TO OPEN DROP DOWN-DOWN SITES FOR UNUSED BANNED ITEMS PRIOR TO 1ST JULY 2020. AFTER THIS TIME, VENDORS OR ANY INDIVIDUAL FOUND WITH THESE ITEMS WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FINE OR IMPRISONMENT.

MR SPEAKER

THE SCIENCE IS CONCLUSIVE, THE DATA IS CLEAR, IT POINTS TO THE FACT THAT OUR PLANET IS GETTING HOTTER. WE SAW THIS IN THE WEATHER. SUMMER 2019 WAS THE HOTTEST SUMMER ON RECORD, SETTING OFF NATURAL DISASTERS AND CATAclysmic EVENTS AS A DIRECT RESULT. IN THE BAHAMAS WE WERE NOT SPARED THE EFFECTS.

HURRICANE DORIAN WAS THE STRONGEST STORM ON RECORD FOR THE ATLANTIC OCEAN. IT SLAMMED INTO GRAND BAHAMA AND ABACO, FOREVER CHANGING OUR COUNTRY.

BY NOW ALL BAHAMIANS KNOW THE STORY, SCORES DEAD, HUNDREDS MISSING, LIVELIHOODS LOST. WHAT TOOK GENERATIONS TO BUILD, GONE IN 48 HOURS. MY MINISTRY RECOGNISES THE URGENCY, WE KNOW THAT WE ARE IN A RACE AGAINST TIME AGAINST AN ENEMY FOR WHOM OUR ONLY DEFENSE IS PREPARATION.

AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO TACKLE THIS CHALLENGE IS TO INCREASE THE RENEWABLE ENERGY PENETRATION; PARTICULARLY ON PUBLIC BUILDINGS. THE MINISTRY PLACES SPECIAL ATTENTION ON IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE AND INTRODUCE RENEWALABLE ENERGY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

THE ADOPTION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY GOES HAND IN HAND WITH ENERGY EFFICIENCY, OFFERING A RANGE OF BENEFITS, WELL BEYOND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE POLICIES. THESE BENEFITS, INCLUDE INCREASED DISPOSABLE INCOME, IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY, IMPROVED AIR QUALITY, AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION,

LET ME ADVISE THAT WHILST RENEWABLE ENERGY PENETRATION IN PUBLIC SPACES IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MOEH THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR GENERATING, TRANSMITTING AND DISTRIBUTING ELECTRICITY IS FULLY VESTED WITH BPL.

THAT SAID THE CLIMATE CHANGE UNIT IS VERY EFFECTIVE AT FULFILLING ITS MANDATE TO SECURE DONOR FUNDING TO CONSTRUCT RE PROJECTS ON PUBLIC BUILDINGS, SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC SPACES. FOR INSTANCE, IN MARCH 2019, WITH FUNDING FROM THE UAE, APPROXIMATELY 1MW OF SOLAR PANELS WERE INSTALLED AT THE THOMAS A ROBINSON

NATIONAL STADIUM IN THE FORM OF A SOLAR CAR PARK. THIS WAS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE REGION AND WON THE CARIBBEAN RENEWABLE ENERGY FORUMS AWARD FOR THE BEST DISTRIBUTED GENERATION PROJECT.

A SECOND PROJECT, AT THE ANATOL RODGERS HIGH SCHOOL, WON THE CARIBBEAN RENEWABLE ENERGY FORUMS AWARD FOR BEST ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROJECT. THIS PROJECT WAS FUNDED VIA A GRANT FROM THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT. THE PROJECT WAS COMPLETED IN SEPTEMBER 2019 AND FEATURES 250KW OF ROOF MOUNTED SOLAR PANELS AND IMPROVEMENTS IN ENERGY EFFICIENCY, SUCH AS LIGHT AND VACANT ROOM SENSORS,

THE OTHER PROJECTS ON THE WAY OR IN THE PIPELINE INCLUDE THE INSTALLATION OF 136.2 KW OF SOLAR PANELS WITH A BATTERY BACK UP, ON THE ROOF OF THE T G GLOVER PRIMARY SCHOOL. THIS PROJECT IS EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED BY YEARS END AND

WILL FEATURE THE CONSTRUCTION OF A GREEN HOUSE AND A PILOT RECYCLING PROGRAM. THIS PROJECT IS ALSO FUNDED BY THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT.

WE ALSO INTEND TO CONSTRUCT AND INSTALL AT OPM 475.5KW OF SOLAR PANELS IN THE FORM OF ANOTHER SOLAR CAR PARK.

MR SPEAKER

WE ALSO ACCESS CAPITAL THROUGH THE GREEN CLIMATE FUND (GCF) WHICH IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE FUND. IT HAS THE EQUIVALENT OF 10.3 BILLION US\$ IN PLEDGES FROM 43 GOVERNMENTS. THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING IS THE NATIONAL DESIGNATED AUTHORITY AND FOCAL POINT FOR THE GREEN CLIMATE FUND IN THE BAHAMAS. ALLOWING OUR COUNTRY TO ACCESS CRITICAL RESOURCES TO FUND PROJECTS SUCH AS THE GRID STABILITY STUDY IN NEW PROVIDENCE. WHICH AUGMENTS THE WORK OF THE POWER

COMPANY AND THE IDB TO EVALUATE THE CURRENT CONDITION OF THE NATIONAL ELECTRICITY GRID.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT PROJECT FUNDED BY GCF IS THE STORM SURGE MODELING PROJECT. APPLIED FOR AND APPROVED AFTER DORIAN, THE PROJECT INVOLVES THE DIGITIZATION OF DECADES OF DAILY WEATHER DATA WHICH FEED INTO CLIMATE AND WEATHER MODELS TO HELP PREDICT EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS AND PHENOMENA ACROSS THE BAHAMAS.

THE BEST COMMISSION

THE BEST COMMISSION IS THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ADVISOR. WHEN IT METAMORPHOSES INTO THE DEPP, WE WILL FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR HISTORY, HAVE A LEGISLATIVE REGIME, AN ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATIVE REGIME CAPABLE OF ADAPTING TO FUTURE NEEDS WHILE SATISFYING PRESENT REQUIREMENTS.

THE KEY DRIVER IN THE BAHAMIAN ECONOMY IS FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT. OUR COUNTRY DOES NOT HAVE AN INTERNATIONALLY TRADED DOLLAR OUR DOLLAR IS PEGGED TO THE US DOLLAR AND FOR EVERY DOLLAR IN CIRCULATION IN OUR COUNTRY THERE IS A US DOLLAR IN THE CENTRAL BANK. WELL, HOW DO WE GET THOSE US DOLLARS? THEY DO NOT MAGICALLY APPEAR, THEY ENTER OUR ECONOMY BY WAY OF FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT.

WITH THE ECONOMY HAVING BEEN SHUT DOWN FOR MONTHS ITS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE TO SEND A SIGNAL TO WORLD THAT WE ARE READY FOR BUSINESS. WE ARE READY TO REBOUND. WE ARE READY TO RESTORE THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF BAHAMIANS. PICK UP THE FRAGMENTS TOGETHER AND PRESS ON TO A LOFTIER GOAL.

IT IS BEYOND DOUBT THAT COVID 19 DECIMATED OUR ECONOMY; WE REMAIN WITH HOPE. WHILE EXPERIENCING THE NIGHTMARE OF NO TOURISM, WE

ARE AN INNOVATIVE PEOPLE OF FAITH. OUR ECONOMIC HISTORY IS STAINED WITH THE BOOM AND BUST CYCLE YET WE OVERCOME.

IN THE FACE OF THE GREATEST ECONOMIC CHALLENGE OF OUR TIME, WE ASSURE THE BAHAMIAN PEOPLE THAT IN NO WAY WHATSOEVER, ARE WE WILLING TO COMPROMISE OUR ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY. TO BACK IT UP WE UPGRADED OUR ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS FOREVER CHANGING THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE.

IN THE UPCOMING BUDGET CYCLE, THE BEST COMMISSION WILL BE MANAGING KEY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS THROUGHOUT THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS. IN ISLANDS SUCH AS GRAND BAHAMA, ABACO, ELEUTHERA, EXUMA, BERRY ISLANDS AND NEW PROVIDENCE.

POLICY PRODUCTS

THE COMMISSION CONTINUES AS A PART OF ITS MANDATE TO PROVIDE PUBLIC EDUCATION ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY INPUTS FROM THE VARIOUS NATIONAL COMMITTEES ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:

NAGOYA PROTOCOL

FOR INSTANCE THE NAGOYA PROTOCOL, THE OBJECT OF WHICH IS TO DEVELOP LAWS FOR SOMETHING CALLED ACCESS BENEFIT SHARING. LET ME EXPLAIN FURTHER, WE INTEND TO TABLE IN THE HOA THIS CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION LEGISLATION BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR. THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE LEGISLATION IS TO EXERCISE THE BAHAMAS'S NATIONAL SOVEREIGN RIGHT TO CONTROL ACCESS TO ITS GENETIC RESOURCES AND THE ASSOCIATED TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF ITS COMMUNITIES. BY PROVIDING AN ENABLING DOMESTIC LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ABS IN

THE BAHAMAS. THIS LEGISLATION IS SCHEDULED TO BE TABLED IN NOVEMBER 2020.

I CAN NOT UNDERSCORE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS LEGISLATION. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN REAL TERMS? LET ME ILLUSTRATE BY GIVING TWO SCENARIOS. CONSIDER ALL THE FOLK REMEDIES YOU KNOW. SERASSE, ALOE, STRONG BACK, FIVE FINGER ETC. WE HAD PEOPLE COME INTO OUR COUNTRY AND SPEAK WITH OUR ELDERS NOT TO LEARN OUR HISTORY. BUT TO LEARN OUR USE OF NATURAL REMEDIES, THEREBY FINDING THE BLUEPRINT BIOCHEMICALLY OF MANY A PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS.

CONSIDER SCENARIO 2 WHERE ORGANISMS OF THE BAHAMAS ARE TARGETED. THINK JELLYFISH OR MICROBES OR SOFT CORALS. MANY OF THESE ORGANISMS CONTAIN CHEMICALS WHICH OUR

ESSENTIAL TO THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY. FACT IS THE COSMETIC INDUSTRY HAS BENEFITED FROM OUR GENETIC RESOURCES BEFORE AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO UNLESS LEGISLATION IS ENACTED.

THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT WE INTEND TO DO. WE WILL ENACT THE FRAMEWORK SO OUR COUNTRY GETS THE ROYALTIES FROM TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OR GENETICALLY EXTRACTED MATERIAL OR BIOCHEMICAL DERIVATIVES. IN SHORT WHETHER THE KNOWLEDGE COMES FROM OUR PEOPLE. OR THE KNOWLEDGE COMES FROM OUR FLORA AND FAUNA'S GENETIC RESOURCES. WE WILL REAP THE BENEFIT. THE PILLAGE OF THIS ASPECT OF OUR ENVIRONMENT WILL END. WE WILL END IT. THIS IS YET ANOTHER HISTORIC PIECE OF LEGISLATION.

UNFCCC - THE THIRD NATIONAL COMMUNICATION, INITIAL BIENNIAL UPDATE AND NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTION REPORTS

THE BAHAMAS IS A SIGNATORY TO THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE. WE HAVE AN URGENT NEED, IN A POST DORIAN AGE, TO NOT JUST STRENGTHEN OUR ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCY CAPACITY BUT TO PLAY A ROLE ON THE GLOBAL STAGE, IN THE MOST CRICAL FIGHT OF THIS GENERATION. THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE. THE URGENT NEED TO REDUCE GREEN HOUSE GAS EMISSIONS. TO THIS END, IN ADDITION TO TRANSFORMING THE LANDFILL AND PASSING LANDMARK ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION, THE BAHAMAS EMBARKED ON PRODUCING 3 NATIONAL REPORTS FOR SUBMISSION TO UNFCCC. THE FIRST REPORT IS THE THIRD NATIONAL COMMUNICATION, THE SECOND THE INITIAL BIENNIAL UPDATE REPORT AND THE THIRD AND FINAL REPORT AN UPDATED NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTION.

THE NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE IS ASSISTING TO IDENTIFY TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BAHAMIANS TO BUILD NATIONAL CAPACITY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND VERIFICATION. A

PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE WILL BE FORMULATED WITH THE BAHAMAS TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL INSTITUTE TO OFFER CERTIFICATIONS. THERE ARE AT PRESENT SEVEN CONSULTANT VACANCIES ASSOCIATED WITH THESE WORKS. A REGIONAL TRAINING WORKSHOP WILL BE HELD NEXT

YEAR IN THE BAHAMAS BY THE UNFCCC SECRETARIAT.

THE CARTAGENA AND RELATED PROTOCOLS

THE COMMISSION CONTINUES TO BE ENGAGED IN THE CARTAGENA CONVENTION AND RELATED PROTOCOLS. THE CONVENTION AND RELATED PROTOCOLS GOVERN THE PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT OF THE WIDER CARIBBEAN REGION. THE CONVENTION FOCUSES ON LAND-BASED SOURCES OF POLLUTION, DUMPING OF WASTE AT SEA, POLLUTION FROM SHIPS, BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION, AND AIRBORNE POLLUTION AMONG OTHER THINGS.

CONSISTENT WITH THE PARTIES' OBLIGATIONS UNDER ARTICLE 4 OF THE CONVENTION TO COOPERATE,

ASSIST OTHERS, AND ENDEVOUR TO HARMONIZE THEIR POLICIES, THE COMMISSION SUBMITTED THE NATIONAL REPORT TO THE SECRETARIAT IN APRIL 2019.

THE COMMISSION HAS ALSO SUBMITTED A PROJECT PROPOAL FOR \$5 MILLION DOLLARS TO ASSIST WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE MONITORING AND CONTROL OF BALLAST WATER PROTOCOLS WITHIN THE ARCHIPELAGO.

LET ME TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SOUND A WARNING TO ALL WOULD BE POLLUTERS. WE ARE DETERMINED IN OUR RESOLVE TO STRENGTHEN AND ENFORCE OUR LAWS. WE WILL GUARD AND PROTECT OUR COMMONWEALTH.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

THE BEST COMMISSION RECEIVED \$200,000 FROM THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY (GEF) TO COMPLETE AND SUBMIT THE FIFTH AND SIXTH NATIONAL REPORTS TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD). THE PROJECT WILL ENCAPTURE AND REPORT ON THE COUNTRY'S ADVANCEMENT TOWARDS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL GOALS. THE FINAL DRAFT IS UNDER REVIEW AND UPON COMPLETION WILL BE TABLED IN PARLIAMENT BEFORE SUBMISSION TO CBD.

PURSUANT TO THIS CONVENTION THERE IS ALSO A \$1.7 MILLION GEF FUNDED ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS PROGRAM IN EAST GRAND BAHAMA. THESE ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS ARE BOTH NECESSARY AND DIVERSE AND INCLUDE TRAINING PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO INCREASE THE CAPACITY OF RESIDENTS TO PURSUE CAREERS IN ECO TOURISM. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BAHAMIAN VILLAGE CONCEPT TO ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS. CREEK RESTORATION, WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AND LAND USE PLANNING ARE ALSO INCLUDED. AT PRESENT

THERE ARE 6 VACANCIES FOR CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROJECT AND THE COMMISSION IS DESIROUS OF HAVING APPLICANTS FROM GRAND BAHAMA.

THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY FULL SIZE PROJECT – GEF 2020

THE GEF-FINANCED FULL SIZE PROJECT ‘MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF 2020 IN THE BAHAMAS’ IS A FIVE YEAR, 6.2 MILLION PROJECT, WHICH BUILDS UPON THE COUNTRY’S COMMITMENT TO THE 2013 CARIBBEAN CHALLENGE INITIATIVE.

THE PROJECT WILL ENHANCE PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS, TRAIN PROTECTED AREA MANAGERS, BOLSTER COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND INVOLVEMENT WITH PROTECTED AREAS, AND PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES.

PROJECT PARTNERS INCLUDE THE BEST COMMISSION, DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE, DEPT OF MARINE RESOURCES, BAHAMAS NATIONAL TRUST AND THE INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE.

MR SPEAKER,

I NOW TURN MY ATTENTION TO THE ACTIVITIES COMPLETED UNDER THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

MR SPEAKER,

THE VISION IS FOR A BIFURCATED APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT. THE NEW DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND PROTECTION WILL DEAL WITH GREEN MATTERS AND DEHS WILL CONTINUE TO DEAL WITH BROWN MATTERS.

ONE CRITICAL ASPECT OF THIS IS THE REMOVAL OF DERELICT VEHICLES. WE REMAIN FOCUSED ON

REMOVING THESE ITEMS FROM COMMUNITIES. UNDER THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES DERELICT VEHICLE PROJECT A TOTAL OF 2428 VEHICLES WERE IDENTIFIED AND REMOVED FROM VARIOUS COMMUNITIES IN NEW PROVIDENCE DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE FISCAL YEAR, THE TOTAL CONSISTS OF 35 COMMERCIAL VEHICLES, 482 TRUCKS, 1503 CARS AND 208 VEHICLES FROM ABACO. POST HURRICANE DORIAN.

MR SPEAKER,

DEHS CONTINUES TO COLLECT THE BULK WASTE FROM COMMUNITIES. THOUGH THE TASK IS SOMETIMES DAUNTING, AND SOMETIMES WE FEEL AS FAST AS WE MOVE IT PEOPLE PUT IT BACK, WE REMAIN FOCUSED AND DETERMINED TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OUR BAHAMIAN PEOPL AND IMPROVE AND CLEAN THEIR SURROUNDINGS. TO THIS END CLEAN-UP ACTIVITIES WERE CONDUCTED IN VARIOUS COMMUNITIES INCLUDING FOX HILL, ENGLERSTON,

MARATHON, YAMACRAW AND GARDEN HILLS. APPROXIMATELY 450 CUBIC YARDS OF COMBINED WASTE WAS REMOVED FROM THESE COMMUNITIES.

RESIDENTIAL GARBAGE COLLECTION

MR SPEAKER,

FROM THE ONSET WE BELIEVED IN A TRIPARTITE APPROACH TO WASTE MANAGEMENT. WE FIRST RESOLVED TO BRING THE LANDFILL UNDER CONTROL, SECONDLY WE WANTED TO REMOVE SINGLE USE PLASTICS AND STYROFOAM FROM OUR WASTE STREAM AND FINALLY, FINALLY IN ORDER TO CONTROL FLIES AND RODENTS IN JANUARY OF LAST YEAR OUR GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED TWICE WEEKLY RESIDENTIAL GARBAGE COLLECTION. I AM SURE THAT EVERY SINGLE RESIDENT OF NEW PROVIDENCE APPRECIATES THE CLEANER ENVIRONMENT AND THE REDUCTION IN FLIES AND VERMIN AS A RESULT OF TWICE WEEKLY COLLECTION.

MR SPEAKER,

ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

THE ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AND RISK ASSESSMENT DIVISION MONITORS OIL SPILLS AND FUEL COMPANIES. THE UNIT CONDUCTED A NUMBER OF INVESTIGATIONS RELATED TO INDOOR AIR QUALITY CONCERNS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE BUILDINGS INCLUDING BUILDINGS IN GRAND BAHAMA AND ABACO. IN ADDITION THE EMRAD CONTINUES TO MONITOR THE CLEAN-UP AT EQUINOR WHICH WE ARE PLEASED TO SAY IS PROGRESSING WELL.

MR SPEAKER, YOU WOULD RECALL THAT EQUINOR REVISED ITS VOLUMES OF CRUDE OIL SPILLED FROM 119,000BBLS TO 55,000BBLS. TO DATE 58,774BBLS OF OIL AND WATER WAS RECOVERED. THIS NUMBER WAS VERIFIED INDEPENDENTLY BY AMSPEC, A GLOBAL FIRM HEADQUARTERED IN THE US WHICH SPECIALISES IN SUCH MATTERS. IN ADDITION, 20,886 CONTAMINATED SOIL BAGS, 37,892 YDS³ OF

CONTAMINATED SOIL AND 5,352 YDS³ OF CONTAMINATED WOOD CHIPS HAVE BEEN REMOVED.

TESTING OF THE GROUND WATER WAS CONDUCTED BY EQUINOR AND INDEPENDENTLY BY THE BAHAMAS GOVERNMENT UTILISING AN INDEPENDENT LAB. BOTH TEST REVEAL NO CONTAMINATION OF THE GROUND WATER. GROUND WATER SAMPLING AND COLLECTION FROM THE 27 MONITORING WELLS INSTALLED ON SITE IS ON GOING.

FINALLY, MR SPEAKER IN ADDITION TO THE GOAT AND 3 BIRDS 12 OTHER ANIMALS WERE OILED AS A RESULT OF THE SPILL. REGRETTABLY, 3 WERE RECOVERED AS CARCASSES AND 13 WERE ADMITTED FOR REHABILITATION AND RELEASE INTO THE WILD.

1. MR. SPEAKER,

WE PASSED LANDMARK LEGISLATION TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND AS I FORESHADOWED EARLIER

WE WILL TABLE MORE BY THE END OF YEAR. ALTHOUGH IMPORTANT, LAWS ALONE WILL NOT PREVENT PERSONS AND ENTITIES FROM POLLUTING, ENFORCEMENT IS THE OTHER ESSENTIAL FEATURE. THIS IS WHY FROM DAY 1 WE FOCUSED ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL COURT GETTING THE PROSECUTIONS UNIT OF DEHS UP AND RUNNING FULFILLING ITS MANDATE. THE FIRST CASES WAS HEARD IN FEBRUART 2019 AND TO DATE OVER 85 CASES WERE HEARD WITH FINES TOTALING MORE THAN \$20,000.

FORESTRY UNIT

MR. SPEAKER, WE NOW TURN TO THE FORESTRY UNIT.

THE ROLE OF THE FORESTRY UNIT IS TO *DEVELOP* THE FOREST RESOURCES OF THE BAHAMAS TO THEIR MAXIMUM POTENTIAL BY APPLYING SOUND, SCIENTIFIC, AND SUSTAINED YIELD FOREST MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS.

MR. SPEAKER,

FORESTS ARE NOT ONLY CRITICAL TO LIFE ON OUR PLANET, THEY ARE A RESERVE OF BIODIVERSITY AND GENETIC RESOURCES WHICH HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM OUR COUNTRY. IF YOU WANT TO SEE HOW IMPORTANT FORESTS ARE TRY HOLDING YOUR BREATH FOR 5 MINS. EVERYTHING WE BREATHE OUT FORESTS BREATHE IN. EVERYTHING THE TREES BREATHE OUT WE BREATHE IN. IT'S THE BALANCE OF LIFE. THE FORESTS ARE OUR EXTERNAL LUNGS. THEREFORE THE WORK OF THE FORESTRY UNIT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT. THE UNIT HAS SEVERAL INTERESTING AND EXCITING PROJECTS WHICH WE WILL IMPLEMENT IN THE FISCAL YEAR:

YOU WOULD RECALL THAT THE BAHAMAS PLEDGED TO PLANT 10,000 TREES BY DECEMBER 31ST 2017 IN CONTRIBUTION OF ENVIRONMENT ONLINE'S WORLDWIDE 100 MILLION TREE INITIATIVE. THIS GOAL WAS ACHIEVED, WITH THE PLANTING OF THE 10,000 TREE AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE.

SUBSEQUENTLY IN JANUARY 2020, THE CARIBBEAN PHILANTHROPIC ALLIANCE LAUNCHED A REGIONAL PROJECT TO PLANT 1 MILLION TREES IN THE CARIBBEAN BY JUNE 5, 2021, TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE. THE BAHAMAS HAS PLEDGED 100,000 TREES IN SUPPORT OF THIS REGIONAL PROJECT. THE FORESTRY UNIT IS A MAJOR STAKEHOLDER, AND A PARTNER WITH THE ALLIANCE IN THIS REGARD.

THE FORESTRY UNIT, THROUGH THE MINISTRY, PLANS TO LAUNCH START UP PACKS WITH MUCH NEEDED SOIL, SEEDS AND POTS TO GROW 1,000 FRUIT TREE SEEDLINGS IN THE UPCOMING FISCAL YEAR, FOR DISTRIBUTION TO 12 FAMILY ISLANDS.

KEW GARDENS

A MEMORANDUM OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE FORESTRY UNIT AND KEW GARDENS, UK WAS EXECUTED TO FOSTER COLLABORATION AND TRAINING

OPPORTUNITIES IN SEED BANKING TECHNIQUES AT KEW.

GRANT FUNDING WAS PROVIDED BY KEW AS PART OF A GLOBAL TREE SEED PROJECT, IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEED BANK IN THE BAHAMAS FOR THE IN SITU CONSERVATION OF NATIVE PLANT SEEDS.

DISCUSSIONS CONDUCTED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF THE BAHAMAS (UB) FOR A PERMANENT SEED BANK, TO ACT AS A SOURCE OF PLANTS AND GENETIC MATERIAL IN THE EVENT OF CATAclysmic NATURAL DISASTERS, AND FOR RESEARCH MATERIAL.

UB INDICATED THAT THEY WERE KEEN ON HAVING THE BANK ON THEIR CAMPUS. TALKS WILL CONTINUE TO ADVANCE THE SEED BANK INITIATIVE. WE HAVE A NUMBER OF INTERESTING AND IMPORTANT PLANT SPECIES IN THE BAHAMAS AND WE PLAN TO PRESERVE THIS IMPORATANT HERITAGE BY PARTICATING IN THIS INITIATIVE.

MR SPEAKER

MY MINISTRY CONTINUES TO REACH OUT TO YOUNG PEOPLE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT IN ORDER TO CHANGE OUR COUNTRY, WE HAVE TO IMPACT THE YOUNG. THE FUTURE. OUR GOAL IS TO GET A CRITICAL MASS OF YOUNG PERSONS, INFORMED, COMMITTED AND DETERMINED TO BUILD A BETTER BAHAMAS. THIS IS WHY I LOOK FORWARD TO PARTICIPATING IN THE ANNUAL FORESTY WEEK. WE GO TO VARIOUS SCHOOLS TO TALK TO THE STUDENTS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FORESTS. REGRETABLELY, THIS YEAR THE EVENT WAS POSTPONED DUE TO

CORONA 19.

MR. SPEAKER,

I NOW TURN TO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING.

THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

MR. SPEAKER,

IN 2018, I INSTRUCTED THE DOH TO RECONFIGURE AND REDESIGN THE SUBDIVISION PLAN FOR CARMICHAEL VILLAGE. THIS ADJUSTMENT INCREASED THE NUMBER OF AVAILABLE LOTS TO 365 WITHOUT COMPROMISING OR CHANGING THE SIZE OF THE LOTS. SITUATE ON 60 ACRES IN SW NEW PROVIDENCE, CARMICHAEL VILLAGE OFFERS THE PROMISE OF HOME OWNERSHIP, THE DREAM OF FAMILY LIFE AND THE HOPE OF LEGACY FOR MANY DESERVING BAHAMIANS.

IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE COMMUNITY, INDIGENOUS TREES HAVE BEEN SELECTED FOR PRESERVATION. I AM HAPPY TO REPORT THAT THE CIVIL DESIGNS WERE APPROVED AND THE RFPS FOR THE CIVIL WORKS ISSUED. THE PROJECT WILL COMMENCE BEFORE THE END OF YEAR.

MR SPEAKER,

THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING IS ALSO ACTIVELY WORKING WITH THE MINISTRY OF DISASTER PREPAREDNESS MANAGEMENT AND

RECONSTRUCTION TO PROVIDE HOUSING IN CENTRAL PINES FOR ABACO RESIDENTS IMPACTED BY HURRICANE DORIAN.

MR SPEAKER,

AS AN APPROVED LENDER, THE BAHAMAS MORTGAGE CORPORATION IS AUTHORIZED TO MAKE GOVERNMENT INSURED LOANS PURSUANT TO THE HOUSING ACT, 1967. THE CORPORATION MAY ALSO MAKE PRIVATE MORTGAGE LOANS TO QUALIFIED INDIVIDUALS.

HURRICANE DORIAN

MR SPEAKER,

THE CORPORATION LIKE SO MANY OTHER INSTITUTIONS, WAS SEVERELY IMPACTED BY HURRICANE DORIAN ON SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2019. THE STORM DIRECTLY AFFECTED 510 CLIENTS IN GRAND BAHAMA AND 131 CLIENTS IN THE ABACO'S. MANY OF THE HOMES WERE SEVERELY DAMAGED CAUSING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN REPAIRS AS WELL AS THE DISPLACEMENT OF A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF THE

HOMEOWNERS. THE GOOD NEWS IS ALL THE UNITS WERE INSURED DUE TO THE CORPORATION'S POLICY, TO MAINTAIN HOMEOWNER INSURANCE COVERAGE ON ALL OF ITS UNITS.

.

TO DATE, THE GRAND BAHAMA CLIENTS HAVE ALL BEEN ASSESSED AND THE REPAIR EFFORTS ARE WELL OVER 80% COMPLETED. HOWEVER, ABACO ISLAND ARE STILL EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES IN THE REPAIR EFFORTS. CHARACTERISED BY LACK OF SERVICES AND THE INABILITY TO FIND CONTRACTORS.

MORTGAGE PAYMENT WAIVERS

MR SPEAKER,

FOR THE SIX MONTHS FOLLOWING HURRICANE DORIAN, THE CORPORATION OFFERED PAYMENT WAIVERS TO ALL CLIENTS IN ABACO AND GRAND BAHAMA WHO WISHED TO APPLY FOR THE REPRIEVE.

THE CORPORATION ALSO MADE MOBILIZATION PAYMENTS AVAILABLE TO ALL CUSTOMERS IN BOTH ISLANDS TO FURTHER ASSIST THE CLIENTS IN THEIR REBUILDING PROCESS.

FINALLY THE CORPORATION WILL EXTEND PAYMENT WAIVERS TO CUSTOMERS IN ABACO FOR ANOTHER SIX MONTHS DUE TO THE COMPLETE DEVASTATION AND THE FACT THAT MANY OF OUR CLIENTS ARE STILL RELOCATED IN NASSAU.

OFFICES ACCOMMODATION

AS A RESULT OF HURRICANE DORIAN, BOTH OFFICES LOCATED IN FREEPORT AND ABACO WERE CLOSED AND THE STAFF OF THE ABACO OFFICE RELOCATED TO NASSAU.

THE FREEPORT OFFICE REMAINED CLOSED FOR 3 MONTHS DUE TO MAJOR WATER DAMAGE. DURING THIS TIME, A TEMPORARY LOCATION WAS

ESTABLISHED TO MEET THE NEEDS AND ADDRESS THE CONCERNS OF OUR CLIENTS. FORTUNATELY, THE MAIN OFFICE WAS RENOVATED AND RE-OPENED IN JANUARY 2020,

THE ABACO OFFICE HOWEVER REMAINS CLOSED AS CONDITIONS ARE STILL NOT FAVORABLE FOR OUR STAFF TO RETURN. THE CORPORATION CONTINUES TO MONITOR THE RECOVERY EFFORTS OF THE ISLAND.

LENDING ACTIVITY

ATTRACTING NEW BUSINESS AND MAINTAINING EXISTING MORTGAGES, REMAIN ESSENTIAL TO THE CORPORATION'S CONTINUED FINANCIAL GROWTH AND STABILITY. THE CORPORATION CONTINUES TO EXPLORE THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING ITS OWN PRIVATE HOME CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM THROUGH ACQUIRING AFFORDABLE VACANT LAND AND CONSTRUCTING AFFORDABLE QUALITY HOMES FOR PURCHASE BY BAHAMIANS. AS WAS DONE WHEN WE

SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE QUEEN'S PARK URBAN RE-DEVELOPMENT PROJECT.

OVER THE PAST YEAR, THE CORPORATION EXECUTED 16 MORTGAGES TOTALLING \$1,904,643.00 (ONE MILLION, NINE HUNDRED FOUR THOUSAND, SIX HUNDRED AND FORTY-THREE DOLLARS)

ACCOUNTING & FINANCE ACTIVITY

THE BAHAMAS MORTGAGE CORPORATION REGARDS PROPER FINANCIAL AND FISCAL MANAGEMENT AS ESSENTIAL TO THE LONG TERM STABILITY AND VIABILITY OF THE ORGANIASATION. IN THIS REGARD THE BMC WILL HAVE ALL OUTSTANDING AUDITS, A PERIOD FROM 2014 – 2019; COMPLETED BY THE END OF THE CALENDAR YEAR.

THE BAHAMAS MORTGAGE CORPORATION HEAD OFFICE

THE MOST ANTICIPATED PROJECT FOR CORPORATION IS THE LONG AWAITED COMPLETION OF THE NEW HEAD OFFICE FACILITY. MR SPEAKER YOU WOULD RECALL ONE OF MY FIRST MINISTERIAL ACTS WAS TO TABLE THE CONVEYANCING DOCUMENTS TO ALLOW THE BAHAMAS MORTGAGE CORPORATION TO LEGALLY ACQUIRE THE BUILDING ON EAST HILL STREET,

ONCE'S THE SITE OF THE HISTORIC EAST HILL CLUB, AND FORMERLY THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. THE 200 YEAR OLD BUILDING AND GROUNDS WERE REFURBISHED. THE MOVE TO THE NEW OFFICE, THIS WILL END 37 YEARS OF THE BAHAMAS MORTGAGE CORPORATION OCCUPYING RENTAL PREMISES AND WILL PROVIDE FOR MUCH NEEDED SPACE FOR BMC.

MORTGAGE LOAN ARREARS ACTIVITY

BAHAMIANS THROUGHOUT THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS HAVE ALL BEEN IMPACTED BY WHAT MANY CALL THE DOUBLE WHAMMY. DORIAN AND COVID 19. THE FINANCIAL CHALLENGES ARE GREAT. NEVERTHELESS, THE BAHAMAS MORTGAGE CORPORATION CONTINUES ALL EFFORTS TO COLLECT OUTSTANDING AMOUNTS DUE.

THE ARREARS RATIO STANDS AT 47.20%, (WHICH INCLUDES OUR GRAND BAHAMA PORTFOLIO WHICH STANDS AT A STARTLING 54.08%). WE UNDERSTAND THAT GIVEN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE REDUCING THE ARREARS RATIO WILL BE A CHALLENGE, BUT AT THE VERY LEAST WE DO NOT WANT IT TO INCREASE.

MR SPEAKER

BAHAMAS NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SERVICES (BNGIS) CENTRE

THE WORK AND TECHNICAL SERVICES OF BNGISC CENTRE, IS CROSS CUTTING, AND ESSENTIAL ON A NUMBER OF FRONTS INCLUDING THE PROVISION OF

TECHNICAL SUPPORT, TRAINING, CONDUCT OF SPECIAL PROJECTS, ACCESS TO AVAILABLE GIS ASSETS AND TO AUTHORITATIVE GEOSPATIAL DATA AND IMAGERY IN A WEB MAPPING ENVIRONMENT.

LET ME BREAK THAT DOWN. EVERYTHING IN EXISTENCE HAS A LOCATION. A PHYSICAL PLACE ON THE PLANET. GIS IS CONCERNED WITH MAPPING THAT LOCATION. THIS MEANS NOT ONLY DO YOU GET BETTER MAPS, THE MAPS TELL YOU CRITICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE LOCATION. THAT INFORMATION CAN VARY FROM THE AMOUNT PEOPLE THAT LIVE THERE, TO WEATHER PATTERNS TO GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES

MR SPEAKER

HURRICANES JOAQUIN, MATTHEW, IRMA, MARIA AND, DORIAN REMINDED US OF OUR VULNERABILITY TO DISASTERS. THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC INDICATES THAT EXTERNAL SHOCKS ARE HERE TO STAY.

•

THE BNGISC CONTINUES TO PROVIDES SUPPORT TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN RELATION TO SETTLING THE MARITIME BOUNDARIES WITH THE US AND TCI.

THE CENTER ALSO WORKS WITH BAHAMAS AGRICULTURAL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY TO COLLECT GIS DATA ON THE LOCATION OF WELLS IN ANDROS AND TO MAP AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES INCLUDING ANIMAL, PLANT AND FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS THROUGHOUT THE BAHAMAS.

AS INDICATED INITAILLY, THE CENTER WORKED WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER ON MATTERS RELATED TO ADDRESSING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC. INCLUDING MAPPING AND MAP PRODUCTION OF INFORMATION ON CONFIRMED COVID 19 CASES AND CONTACT TRACING.

AS A PART OF THE BNGIS CLIMATE RESILIENCE STRATEGY THE CENTRE IS IMPLEMENTING THE GEOMATICS CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT FOR DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT PROJECT. THE PROJECT HAS 5 COMPONENTS INCLUDING 1) AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY & TOPOGRAPHIC MAPPING, 2) QUALITY ASSURANCE, 3) FLOOD, STORM SURGE INUNDATION, WIND AND COASTAL EROSION MODELING 4) DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM IN THE GOVERNMENT'S CLOUD ENVIRONMENT AND 5) SPECIALIZED SOFTWARE AND EQUIPMENT.

ALL 5 COMPONENTS HAVE BEEN ACTIONED AND 2 ARE NEAR COMPLETION.

PROJECT DELIVERABLES SO FAR INCLUDE:

- SPECIALIZED SOFTWARE, LARGE FORMAT PLOTTERS/SCANNERS AND JEEPS TO SUPPORT PROJECT FIELD DATA COLLECTION**

- **HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGERY AND TOPOGRAPHIC MAPPING FOR NEW PROVIDENCE, LONG ISLAND, CAT ISLAND, ELEUTHERA, BIMINI AND EXUMA AND ALL SURROUNDING CAYS.**

- **A PHOTO CONTROL SURVEY AND A DETERMINATION OF TRANSFORMATION PARAMETERS REPORT WAS PROVIDED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LANDS AND SURVEYS. THIS REPORT PROVIDES TECHNICAL INFORMATION FOR THE WIDER SURVEY COMMUNITY;**

LAST BUT NOT LEAST THE CENTRE COMMENCED THE RFP PROCESS FOR CONSULTANCY SERVICES TO ADDRESS EXISTING CHALLENGES WITH ITS GIS PORTAL. THIS INTERFACE WILL ALLOW ALL GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES TO ACCESS INFORMATION TO PERFORM THEIR AGENCY SPECIFIC TASKS. THE GENERAL PUBLIC, COMMUNITIES AND ACADEMIA WILL ALSO HAVE ACCESS TO THIS PORTAL, THEREBY EMPOWERING THEM WITH INFORMATION..

TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF THE CENTRE TO MEET ITS NATIONAL MANDATE RECRUITMENT OF QUALIFIED TECHNICAL HUMAN RESOURCES WITH APPROPRIATE SKILLSETS WILL BE REQUIRED. WITHOUT THIS BNGIS CENTRE WILL CONTINUE TO BE CHALLENGED TO PROVIDE AGENCY-WIDE SERVICES THAT WILL PUT US ON PAR WITH JURISDICTIONS IN THE REGION AND AROUND THE WORLD.

MR. SPEAKER,

IN CONCLUDING I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION THE BE A HERO CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED IN 2018. THE PROGRAMME WAS GEARED TOWARDS CHILDREN AND CULMINATED IN OCTOBER WITH AWARDS BEING GIVEN TO ELRINE BONGON (ABACO), TARAN THOMPSON, & DEMARCO DARVILLE FOR THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEACH CLEANUPS. I WISH TO THANK ALL 19 SCHOOLS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE PROGRAM.

MR SPEAKER

WE LAUNCHED THE SECOND PHASE BY INVITING CIVIC CLUBS, NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATIONS, CHURCH CONGREGATIONS, CORPORATE GROUPS OR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO PARTICIPATE. WE OFFERED A \$10,000.00 PRIZE TO THE WINNER. I WISH TO THANK ROYAL CARIBBEAN CRUISES FOR THEIR MOST GENEROUS DONATION OF THE CASH PRIZE. IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE WINNER WAS BAHAMAS HARVEST CHURCH EASTERN BRANCH. I CONGRATULATE ALL THE PARTICIPANTS.

MR SPEAKER

I WOULD LIKE TO BRING CLARITY TO AN ISSUE THAT ARISES IN THIS HONORABLE HOUSE FROM TIME TO TIME. THAT IS THE ISSUE OF ARAGONITE. ARAGONITE OR OOID SAND IS ONE OF TWO TYPES OF SAND FOUND IN THE BAHAMAS. REGULAR SAND OR BIOGENIC SAND IS

FORMED FROM SKELETAL DEBRIS OF ANIMALS AND PLANTS. ARAGONITE PRECIPITATES OUT OF THE WATER CASCADING TO THE OCEAN FLOOR LIKE RAIN,

THRE DEPOSITS ARE HUGE. AN ASSESSMENT OF ARAGONITE RESOURCES IN THE BAHAMAS REVEAL A NUMBER OF CRITICAL SCIENTIFIC TRUTHS THAT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 12,266 – 23,354 MILLION METRIC TONS OF ARAGONITE EXIST IN THE BAHAMAS. STUDIES SHOW THAT DEPENDING ON THE LOCATION THE GRAIN OF ARAGONITE IS OF A DIFFERENT SIZE. THIS HAPPENS BECAUSE EACH GRAIN OF ARAGONITE HAS AN INNER NUCLEAR GRAIN WHICH GETS COATED WITH CALCIUM CARBONATE. THE MORE IT GETS COATED THE HEAVY IT BECOMES EVENTUALLY FALLING TO THE SEAFLOOR. SCIENTIFIC STUDIES INDICATE THAT EACH GRAIN OF ARAGONITE PRODUCED TAKE HUNDREDS TO THOUSANDS OF YEARS TO FORM. FOR EXAMPLE ARAGONITE FROM THE

CAT CAY, BERRY ISLAND, TONGE OF THE OCEAN AND ELEUTHERA TAKE 160 YEARS. ARAGONITE FROM LILLY BANK TAKES 296 YEARS TO FORM, THAT FROM THE BIGHT OF ACKLINS 740 YEARS AND ARAGONITE FROM SCHOONER CAY TAKES 1090 YEARS. JUST TO GET A SINGLE SAND GRAIN.

THIS SUGGESTS EVEN THOUGH THE RESOURCES ARE VAST, ARAGONITE IS NOT PRODUCED CONTINUOUSLY BUT GOES THROUGH STAGES OF GROWTH AND REST. THE MOST IMPORTANT POINT IS MINING ARAGONITE IS NOT SUSTAINABLE OVER HUMAN LIFETIMES BECAUSE IT TAKES SO VERY LONG FOR MINED AREAS TO RECOVER. ANY POTENTIAL MINING AREA, ONCE STRIPPED OF ARAGONITE WILL TAKE HUNDREDS IF NOT THOUSANDS OF YEARS TO RECOVER. OCEAN CAY WHERE MINING OCCURRED FOR 40 YEARS SHOWS NO SIGN OF RECOVERY.

THIS IS WHY THE GOVERNMENT PLACED A MORATORIUM ON ARAGONITE MINING TO BETTER

UNDERSTAND THE PROCESSES. THIS IS WHY MY MINISTRY IN JUNE 2018 SUBMITTED A MINING POLICY AND DRAFT LEGISLATION TO OAG FOR REVIEW.

MR. SPEAKER

IT WAS 47 YEARS AGO THAT THIS HONORABLE HOUSE MET FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AN INDEPENDENT BAHAMAS. THE BUDGET DEBATE WAS AND WILL FOREVER CONTINUE TO BE AN ANNUAL FIXTURE. AT THIS PORTION OF THE DEBATE I COULD EASILY SPEND TIME LAUDING OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OR BASHING THE PART OPPOSITE. I WILL NOT. I COULD ADD MY VOICE TO THOSE ENJOY LISTING THE PROBLEMS WHICH CAUSE ANGER AND FRUSTRATION IN OUR PEOPLE BUT I BELIEVE BAHAMIANS EXPECT MORE.

THE PANDEMIC HAS LAID BARE THE NEED TO BE OUR BROTHERS KEEPER. PARTICULARLY NOW AS MANY BAHAMIANS ARE HAVING A TOUGH TIME OUT THERE PUTTING FOOD ON THE TABLE. DAILY MAKING UNIMAGINABLY DIFFICULT CHOICES.

WE ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF SLAVES AND MIGRANTS, ADVENTURERS AND LOYALISTS,. A DIVERSE COUNTRY. HETERROGENOUS. WE HAVE LIVED TOGETHER FOR 372 YEARS BUILDING ON THE ANVIL OF SACRIFICE, A PEACEFUL DEMOCRACY IN THE PROCESS.

THE REASON FOR OUR STRONG TIES AS A PEOPLE, DOES NOT ONLY DERIVE FROM SHARED LANGUAGE AND CULTURE. NOR DOES IT SINGULARLY DERIVE FROM LIVING IN PROXIMITY TO EACH OTHER. RATHER IT IS ROOTED IN SHARED VALUES AND BELIEFS THAT HAVE UNITED US FOR CENTURIES. THESE VALUSE ARE WHO WE ARE AS PEOPLE AND ULTIMATELY WHAT WILL WE BECOME AS A NATION. DO WE HEAL THE WOUNDS OF THE PASS OR ALLOW OUR VALUES AND CORE BELIEFS TO BE SACRIFICED ON THE ALTER OF SHORT TERM POLITICAL GAIN.

LET US HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE ROAD AHEAD. IT WILL BE CHALLENGING. THINGS WILL BE TOUGH. WE

MAY BE TEMPTED NOT TO STAY THE COURSE. TO SURVIVE BELIEF IN EACH OTHER. IS ESSENTIAL. WE HAVE BEEN DOWN BEFORE. NO MATTER OUR BACKGROUND OUR ELDERS ENDURED MORE THAN CAN BE IMAGINED BUT YET HERE WE ARE TOGETHER ALL IN THE SAME BOAT. OUR SURE AND CERTAIN FUTURE LIES IN US WORKING TOGETHER TO BRING IT TO SAFE HARBOUR.

NEVER BEFORE HAS A GOVERNMENT BEEN CHALLENGED TO DO SO MUCH FOR SO MANY. WE BELIEVE NON THE LESS THAT THIS BUDGET REPRESENTS THE BEST HOPE FOR A WAY FORWARD.