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STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT
UPDATE ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
SCOPING OF THE PORTLAND BIGHT AREA,
INCLUSIVE OF THE GOAT ISLANDS

Tuesday, October 29, 2013

By

Dr the Hon Omar Davies, MP

Minister of Transport, Works & Housing

A INTRODUCTION

1. Mr Speaker, you will recall that when I last addressed this Honourable House on September 10th of this year, I indicated that China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) had submitted an investment proposal to the Port Authority of Jamaica (PAJ) for the development of a transshipment port and an industrial and commercial economic zone. CHEC's preferred site for this investment was the Goat Islands and the lands to the North of the islands on the mainland in the Old Harbour Bay area.
2. The preliminary value placed on the investment is US \$1.5 Billion, and represents a key milestone that would have significant positive impacts on the country's developmental agenda. In summary, Mr Speaker, this investment would be a concrete manifestation of Jamaica becoming a logistics hub for this region.

3. Mr Speaker, you will recall that I addressed the concerns which had been raised publicly regarding the potential environmental risks to the Goat Islands and greater Portland Bight Protected Area (PBPA). I indicated then that the Administration and the Port Authority were giving consideration to the issues raised and would be engaging stakeholders accordingly.
4. I further indicated that the Port Authority was instructed to continue its assessment and monitoring of the proposed project area, to undertake detailed environmental and feasibility studies, and to offer effective guidance to the Chinese investors about the required development processes. The Port Authority was given their instructions by Cabinet because the environmental sensitivities of the preferred site identified by China Harbour had resulted in adverse reactions from some quarters.
5. Consequently, the Port Authority commissioned an Environmental Management Scoping Study to identify the legal and regulatory environment, the natural heritage resources, the industrial and commercial interest and the principal bio-physical and socio-cultural characteristics of the Portland Bight Protected Area.

The specific objectives of the study included:

- Determining the geographic boundaries of the Portland Bight Protected Area
- Conducting archival research on the historical use of the area
- Identifying applicable international and national environmental policies, legislation, regulations and standards for the area

- Identifying the biologically sensitive features of the marine and terrestrial environment
 - Determining the location of rare, threatened and endangered species and their spatial distribution in the Portland Bight and Ridge Area and the Goat Islands.
6. Mr Speaker, let us be clear that this “Scoping Study” is not an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). It is a preliminary study which provides us with information on the present situation in the area of interest and will be a useful guide in determining the appropriate issues to be addressed in an Environmental Impact Assessment.
7. The firm selected by the Port Authority to conduct the Scoping Study is Conrad Douglas and Associates. The firm has more than 25 years’ experience in various aspects of project development, environmental engineering and environmental management. Importantly, it has a distinguished record both locally and internationally. More specifically the firm has carried out several detailed analyses of the Portland Bight Area.
8. Mr Speaker, the Environmental Management Scoping Study is now before us and I am pleased to share the major findings with this Honourable House.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

9. The Portland Bight and Ridge was declared a protected area in 1999 under the Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act of 1991. The PBPA is not exclusively an environmental conservatory and is intended to facilitate multiple activities in a sustainable manner.

10. The Portland Bight Protected Area hosts important natural heritage resources along with a number of major industrial, commercial, residential and agricultural activities. Current Industrial activities in the area include the Jamalco Rocky Point Port, the Jamaica Public Service Old Harbour Power Station and Transmission Sub-Station, the Wallenford Coffee Processing Plant, the Chemical Lime Quarry, the Doctor Bird Power Barges, the Jamaica Broilers Ethanol Plant and several commercial fish, shrimp and chicken farms.
11. It is also home to a number of rare, threatened and endangered animal and plant species and the Portland Ridge and Hellshire Hills are critical conservation zones.
12. There are three (3) areas zoned as Fish Sanctuaries – Three Bays, Galleon Harbour and Salt Harbour. The PBPA is, however, in a degraded condition as a result of dynamiting and over fishing and as a result the fishermen make their catch from Pedro Cays. The only sanctuary likely to be impacted by the proposed project is the Galleon Bay which is experiencing naturally degraded performance.
13. Strategies to address the potential environmental impacts and to possibly enhance the existing environmental condition could include the creation of an alternative fish sanctuary, relocation and replanting of disturbed areas of mangrove and sea grass and the development of a habitat within the PBPA for the species that may need to be relocated.
14. The project development phase, to carefully design these and other compensatory strategies, should commence concurrently with the development of the project to facilitate environmental policy and regulatory compliance between the proposed infrastructure development and environmental conservation.

15. The Scoping Study has recommended that a plan for institutional strengthening of the Protected Area Trust be developed. This plan would aim at improving the management of the natural resources of the declared protected areas of the PBPA. This is expected to be an important feature of the efforts to improve the sustainable development of this multi-use national park.

C **NEXT STEPS**

16. Having regard for the sensitive area in which the proposed development is to take place, the following important steps will be undertaken before a final recommendation is presented to Cabinet for consideration:
- (i) The PAJ will continue liaising with CHEC, to clarify the details of the project, to define the stages in which the project will be implemented and the phases of construction including particulars of the areas to be affected during each phase.
 - (ii) Taking into consideration the essential details to be provided, a Framework Agreement is expected to be finalized before the expiration date of the amended MOU at the end of April 2014. In fact, Mr Speaker, it is our plan to have the Framework Agreement in place by the end of January 2014. During the negotiation of the Framework Agreement, issues identified in the environmental scoping will be addressed in the preliminary designs.
 - (iii) Upon completion of the Framework Agreement the project will then be submitted for consideration by Cabinet.

- (iv) Assuming that the project meets with the approval of Cabinet, it will be submitted to the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) for the determination of the Terms of Reference of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Mr Speaker, the PAJ has been instructed to summarize the key points of the Environmental Management Scoping Study and this will be available on the Port Authority's website by noon tomorrow. The website is www.portjam.com. In addition they have been instructed to meet with the environmental groups to discuss the full report as soon as possible. Thereafter the full information will be available to the wider public.

I will continue to brief this Honourable House on a timely basis as the process unfolds.