

**STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON**

**THE CURRENT WATER SHORTAGE**

**BY**

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**AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to the attention of this honourable House and the public, a serious situation with regard to our water supplies. The fact is that inflows into a number of water supply systems are now well below normal, resulting in many sections of the country being faced with water supply challenges.

**The reason for this Mr. Speaker, is that the amount of rainfall that we had expected during May and June, which traditionally are our rainy months, did not materialize. Indeed, the amount of rainfall we received islandwide, fell below the 30 year average for what is normal at this time of year, and was not enough to make up the deficit of the dry season between December 2013 and April 2014.**

For example Mr. Speaker, in May, the parish of Clarendon received only 27% of the 30 year normal rainfall while the parishes of Manchester, St. Mary, Portland and St. Thomas all received significantly less than the 30 year normal rainfall.

This has significantly reduced the inflows from rivers into several of our facilities islandwide.

Based on the most recent figures from the National Water Commission, storage levels at the two largest reservoirs, the Hermitage Dam and the Mona Reservoir are at 83% and 37%, respectively, and are falling daily. I should note here Mr. Speaker, that the Hermitage Dam is heavily silted, and only about 30% of its design capacity is usable.

Mr. Speaker, inflows from the Yallahs River are now at 5.5 Million Gallons per Day (MGD) down from its peak of 18 MGD, while the Hope River is at 2.6 MGD from a high of 30 MGD. This has affected production at the Mona Treatment Plant which has limited its output from 16 MGD during the wet season to 10 MGD.

Inflows from the Hope River into the Hope Filter Plant have also fallen off significantly with average inflows currently at 2.3 MGD, and average production of 4.2 MGD.

Inflows into the Hermitage Dam from the Wag Water River currently stand at 9.6 MGD, down from 18 MGD during the wet season.

With the Constant Spring Supply Zone being extended to augment the supply from Mona and Hope, the projected drop in levels for the Hermitage Dam is 3 Million Gallons per Day.

Many rural water supply systems especially in eastern and southern parishes are also being faced with below normal inflows. Affected water supply systems include:

- 2 systems in Hanover
- 5 systems in St. James
- 3 systems in Trelawny
- 6 systems in St. Elizabeth
- 5 systems in Manchester
- 24 systems in Clarendon
- 5 systems in St. Catherine
- 21 systems in Kingston and St. Andrew
- 19 systems in St. Thomas

- 4 systems in Portland
- 5 systems in St. Mary
- 11 systems in St. Ann

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, it is an islandwide challenge bordering on a crisis.

What is even more troubling are the meteorological projections. We are now in a dry period and the next rainy season is from October to November with September being a transitional month. Even if the situation were to change, Mr. Speaker, and we received the expected rainfall during the next rainy period which is October to November, it perhaps would not be enough to make up for the shortfall in the May-June rainy season.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the global prediction is for 2014 to be the hottest year on record. This prediction is based on a weather phenomenon known as El Nino, as well as climate change.

Mr. Speaker, the El Nino phenomenon is characterized by unusually warm ocean temperatures in the central eastern pacific regions, which have a major impact on the climate around the world.

During El Nino, the Caribbean, including Jamaica, is predicted to be warmer and drier. The drought we experienced in 2009-2010 resulted from an El Nino phenomenon.

Scientists have predicted that there is an 80 –percent chance that we will continue to experience the effects of El Nino during the months September – December and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, what this means is that the already serious water supply situation we are experiencing will most likely worsen.

We therefore have to be proactive and prepare for the worsening impact of the El Nino phenomenon and the consequent below average rainfall predicted across most of the island.

Mr. Speaker, given the current situation a major part of our response must be the imposition of water restrictions and regulations in affected urban and rural communities served by the National Water Commission.

## **Water Restrictions**

**As a result of the unseasonably low yields and the dire forecasts, the National Water Commission is forced to implement new restrictions to customers served by the affected water supply systems in an attempt to best share the limited supplies among its customers and, at the same time, stretch the available supplies.**

Mr Speaker, I want to emphasize that all steps will be taken to ensure that customers receive water during the stipulated supply periods.

In addition Mr. Speaker, we will be trucking water to the most affected areas through the Rapid Response Programme. As of tomorrow, we will be making available two (2) eight thousand gallon trucks from the Rapid Response Unit to truck water to persons in Clarendon. In South St. Elizabeth, in addition to allocation of funds for the trucking of water, we will also be dispatchng three (3) eight thousand gallon trucks for the trucking of water.

Mr Speaker, I saw a news item last night in which persons in St. Elizabeth were complaining that they had to travel to Mandeville to pay for water. But as of tomorrow, they can go to any commercial bank and request a Manager's cheque payable to the National Water Commission to purchase water.

Mr Speaker I would also like to point out to the members of this House that during the last financial year, we spent approximately J\$300million on the trucking of water, and for this financial year to date, we have expended J\$80 million on the trucking of water.

Mr Speaker, we will also be continuing our programme of upgrading and rehabilitating the existing storage tanks of which there are 445 islandwide. Already we have completed just over 70 of the 282 catchment tanks islandwide. In addition Mr. Speaker, as I have noted, it is our intention to repair 100 systems under the Tank and Pump Programme.

The National Drought Management Committee will plan, co-ordinate and execute all actions. A joint Public Education Programme will also be immediately implemented by my ministry and the National Water Commission.

### **HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

Mr Speaker, while my Ministry and the Government deal with the immediate situation we are pleading with all Jamaicans to conserve on their use of water at all times, but especially during this dry period until the next expected rainfall period **EVERY DROP COUNTS!!!**

We therefore urge everyone to :-

- Turn off all taps when not in use
- Turn off the water when soaping up while showering
- Refrain from washing your cars with a running hose or watering your lawns while supplies are low
- Fix leaks around the home
- Reuse and recycle water around the home wherever practical
- Where possible, install water saving technology for the home which includes:
  - o Low-flow shower heads (sometimes called energy-efficient shower heads)
  - o Low-flush toilets, composting toilets and waterless urinals
  - o Faucet aerators, which break water flow into fine droplets to maintain "wetting effectiveness" while using less water.

**Mr Speaker, although we are appealing to persons to conserve on their use of water during this critical period, we will be adopting a zero tolerance approach to certain activities, and so I have instructed the National Water Commission to issue a prohibition notice by this weekend, on the washing of vehicles, the watering of lawns, and filling swimming pools among other activities.**

**Persons who are found to be in breach of the prohibition will be taken before the Resident Magistrates' Court and may be directed to pay a fine.**

Mr Speaker, we must also re-embrace rainwater harvesting as an integral part of our water security efforts now and for the future. In the not-too-distant past, it was commonplace to find a backyard concrete tank in almost every rural household, where water would be stored for domestic and agricultural use.

Rainwater harvesting systems for developments will be enshrined within the building regulations. To that end, Rainwater Harvesting Policy guidelines are being prepared which will be an integral consideration in the planning approval process.

I firmly believe that this is the route we must take, in order to ensure our water security, particularly in the face of climate change impacts which will intensify drought conditions. In fact, Mr Speaker, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) on June 19, 2014, issued a statement that May 2014 was globally the hottest month on record, since **1880** when records began, and earlier Mr. Speaker I mentioned that this will be the hottest year on record.

Locally, the predictions are for higher temperatures and Kingston has been singled out as one of the first cities that are likely to experience climate change, with significant increases in temperature from as early as 2023.

These high temperatures lead to increased evaporation and transpiration, as well as the increased demand for water and reduced rainfall.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry and our agencies are fully aware of the magnitude of the water situation, and the measures I have outlined are intended to mitigate some of the challenges that we are facing due to water scarcity.

I am appealing to my colleagues in this honourable house that when we leave here, it must be with the intent to sensitize our constituents and to encourage them to conserve on their use of water.

The water situation facing all of us is real, it is current, and it will continue to be a challenge which we must meet through the sustainable development of our water resources. If we fail to do so, we could be facing a real crisis. I thank you Mr. Speaker.