Hon. Daryl Vaz, MP
Minister Without Portfolio with responsibility for Land, Environment, Climate Change, Investment in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation

Looking Ahead –
Sustainable Growth in the “New Normal”

Gordon House • June 23, 2020
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Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my sectoral contribution to this Honourable House with a feeling of optimism, in spite of all that we have endured recently as a nation and a people due to the Novel Coronavirus, COVID 19. I am cognizant that Jamaica and indeed the entire world are operating in a “New Normal”, where lives, livelihoods, markets and economies have been adversely affected.

However, Mr. Speaker, out of adversity, there are also opportunities. Examples can be seen all over, people are repurposing their businesses to make face masks, and vendors are diversifying their offerings to include sanitizers. Where there is a need, Jamaicans are rising to meet it and to overcome the challenges. We are down, but not out.

There is no doubt that we will have to make serious adjustments to our policies, plans and programmes given this new normal. But I have every confidence in the resilience, creativity, and work ethic of the Jamaican people, and pledge my support for any and all initiatives that will propel sustainable growth for our beloved country.

With all of this in mind Mr. Speaker, I have chosen the theme “Looking Ahead – Sustainable Growth in the New Normal”, for my presentation. Despite the setbacks, we are moving full steam ahead on several projects that will realize our goals, as I will highlight throughout my speech.

Acknowledgements and Thanks

Before I do so however, I would like to thank the Jamaican people for all their support, during this challenging time, as we continue to work together to flatten the curve and arrest the spread of Covid-19.

I would especially like to thank our health care workers, who have given yeoman service during this period, as well as those individuals and organizations who gave support through such gestures as the provision of buses to transport our health workers on the frontlines, the donation of hand sanitizers, and through various other types of donations. Indeed, this pandemic has demonstrated the power of “we” over “I”, community over self, and has epitomized the meaning of the words “my brother’s keeper”.

I would also like to thank my family for their enduring love and support, Prime Minister, The Most Hon. Andrew Holness, ON, MP for his continued faith in my abilities, and the hardworking members of the staff at the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation led by Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Audrey Sewell, CD, JP and Director General, Dr. Sharon Crooks.

Special thanks also to my colleagues in Cabinet, my staff at Jamaica House, Pat, Diana, Cheryl, Gavin, Sherell and Locksley, my security detail, Corporals Chong and Hamilton, as well as the Members across the aisle whose robust opposition has added to the discourse on several topics and pieces of Legislation.

I wish also to extend gratitude on behalf of the Government and People of Jamaica to our several international partners who have seen the vision of the Jamaica we are trying to create, and who have provided support through grant funding, and technical expertise on many of our plans, projects and programmes.
Last but by no means least, Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my constituents of West Portland who continue to place their trust in me as I perform my duties as their Member of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, as you can well imagine, our growth projects have been significantly impacted by the Coronavirus. It is critical that actions that can lead to faster growth in the short and longer term, must be given priority.

Infrastructure/Construction Task Force

Mr. Speaker, I begin my presentation with the Infrastructure/Construction Economic Recovery Task Force. Members will remember that as part of the GOJ's plans to restore the economy of Jamaica following the COVID pandemic, Cabinet established the COVID-19 Recovery Economic Task Force with the objective to devise plans for the gradual re-opening of the economy which has been hard hit by the pandemic.

As a subset of this Task Force, a sub-committee was formed, which I was asked to chair, to focus on Infrastructure and Construction with the following broad objectives:

- Assess how the GOJ can assist in ensuring that the current projects being implemented by the private sector can be completed as planned.
- Identify the Major Infrastructure Projects which can have the greatest impact on both short and long term economic growth and job creation and,
- Identify how these projects can be financed and how they can be implemented including Public-Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements.

In order to review the existing projects and determine what issues were being faced by the various groups, meetings were convened with Developers, Contractors, Other Stakeholders and GOJ agencies.

Mr. Speaker, the first meeting of the Task Force was held on May 7, 2020, at which I explained the rationale, operational framework and the objectives to be met.

The views of members were canvassed as to the policy decisions and measures which could be implemented in the short and medium term, to improve efficiencies, increase productivity and drive economic growth and development post-COVID, to resuscitate the economy.

While there was concern from the stakeholders, most of the industries seemed optimistic about the future and the continuing demand for products.

There were however, some common issues which were identified, in a comprehensive report, some of which were not new, and were already under consideration by the GOJ.

Some of the recommendations were, inter alia:-
1. The need for a one-stop-shop [OSS] to handle major investment projects and developments thereby speeding up approvals.
2. Expediting the implementation of development-related reforms that have been in the government’s plans for over a decade, to allow for easier facilitation of permits and licenses as well as to reduce the inconsistencies across various agencies which give rise to corruption.
3. Reviewing the timeliness of dealing with large transaction [sale agreement stamping] at the tax office. At present, it takes up to seven weeks to conclude the stamping of Sales Agreements for Development projects. Developers should be allowed to calculate payments based on the value of the property being sold, and prepay on the TAJ platform.

4. Establishing a diaspora-investment support window to protect diaspora members who have been hard hit over the years. This support window would offer facilitation, guidance, and direction in engaging contractors. It would also explain the approval processes and the requirements, and assist in tracking the progress of developments.

5. The availability of Foreign Exchange. There was an increasing problem with the unavailability of Foreign Exchange to meet the needs of the stakeholders.
Mr. Speaker, each of these recommendations are being further assessed with a view to presenting them to Cabinet, and some were already under consideration.

In this regard, I wish to publicly express my thanks, and that of the GOJ to Mr. Ivan Anderson and his team for the work carried out with such diligence and speed, on the substance of the report which has been prepared for the sub-committee.

Mr. Speaker, for each of these recommendations, an assessment has already been included in the report, with possible timelines for implementation.

I want to give the assurance that this report will not be filed away, but will be used to form the basis of major future reforms.

**The “New Normal” for BPO operations**

Mr. Speaker, the Business Process Outsourcing sector, like others, has been adversely affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. The sector lost approximately US$42million in revenue due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Members will recall that following the increase in cases due to the Alorica call centre, a decision was taken to close all call centres on April 22, 2020. Despite this, we managed to retain more than 33,000 workers in the sector, and are moving to see how best to retrieve approximately 7,000 jobs due to the measures imposed to curb the spread of the virus.

We had extended the work-from-home arrangements for approximately 40 percent of the call centre agents for three months which will end on August 31, 2020.
In the meantime, the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) task force which I chair, approved new protocols developed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness that will govern operations within the sector going forward.

They include measures related to sanitary and hygiene practices, which must be adhered to at all facilities; furnishings and equipment; social distancing, risk reduction, transportation, ventilation, the handling of persons who are ill, the wearing of masks, among others.

Inspections are undertaken by the public health inspectors using the BPO Inspection Tool and the Public Health Institutional Health Inspection Form that have been developed with a view to minimizing the risk of transmission.

**BPO Growth Trajectory**

The growth trajectory for the sector pre-COVID was 5,000 to 6,000 jobs per year. **Mr. Speaker**, it has been highlighted that we can experience a return to this trajectory if the conditions such as training, promotion, policy and health guidelines are adhered to, and if we work to secure new business and/or scale up existing business. All being equal, we expect to see a rebound in the sector by the end of the 2021 fiscal year, with a move towards the original projection of 50,000 jobs by March 2022.

**Mr. Speaker**, the Global Services Association of Jamaica (GSAJ) has noted however, that growth will be contingent upon the recovery or the United States, which is our main market.

**Mr. Speaker**, there is a proposal for about 20 to 30 percent of the Global Services Sector (GSS) workforce to be supported in a virtual Special Economic Zone. A specific proposal is expected to be advanced by the GSAJ for this development.

**INVESTMENT**

**Enhancing Business and Investment**

**Mr. Speaker**, I now turn to the investment portfolio. As I mentioned, there is an urgent need for us to fast-track our transition towards a more resource-efficient and inclusive economy that will foster sustainable development.

Now, more than ever, **Mr. Speaker**, it is essential that we create the necessary enabling environment for the Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (MSME) sector, which is a critical source of wealth creation and income generation.

**Credit Enhancement Facility (CEF)**

**Mr. Speaker**, the Development Bank of Jamaica has revamped the Credit Enhancement Facility (CEF), which is a partial loan guarantee that aids micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) that do not have sufficient collateral to access loans from financial institutions.
The primary objective of the Revamped Credit Enhancement Facility (CEF), is to minimize the risk exposure associated with small business lending.

The CEF acts as an incentive to the financial institutions to increase MSME lending, enables qualified MSMEs with viable projects to get additional collateral support, and facilitates the acceptance of non-traditional collateral by financial institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the revamping of the CEF includes a revision of the business model, moving from an Individual Scheme in which individual guarantees are processed by the DBJ, to a Portfolio Scheme in which the processing of guarantees is delegated to each approved financial institution based on an annual portfolio allocation.

This new portfolio scheme provides an increase in the guarantee coverage ratio and the value of the guarantee for MSMEs, allows each lender a pre-approved annual portfolio limit, and utilizes a customized Management Information System which fully automates the procedures and processes to significantly reduce the processing time.

Since the full implementation of the revamped CEF in January of this year, Mr. Speaker, twelve (12) financial institutions have signed on to the new programme and have committed to support MSMEs with loans backed by over J$10 billion in guarantees during the 2020/21 fiscal year.

These include all the commercial banks, some credit unions and microfinance institutions.

Other Initiatives
The DBJ has also increased the volume of micro loans to the sector totaling J$2,421 Million, and successfully implemented the Jamaica Business Fund (JBF) which facilitated $427 million in investments in 18 supply chains, benefitting 308 MSMEs.

Looking ahead Mr. Speaker, for this fiscal year, the DBJ is prioritizing the implementation of the Boosting Innovation, Growth, and Entrepreneurship Ecosystems (BIGEE) programme. The programme will support and strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship by providing financial and technical support for Micro, Small and Medium-size Enterprises (MSMEs).

With regard to privatization, the DBJ will also roll out the Jamaica Public Service Initial Public Offering (IPO) following the tremendous success of the Wigton IPO last year. Other projects slated under the Privatization and Public-Private Partnership programme are Silver Sands, the sale of 672 acres of Block A Montpelier Land, the Rio Cobre Water Treatment Plant, and the Jamaica Mortgage Bank.

Build out of Physical Space
Mr. Speaker, the support for MSMEs also includes the build-out of physical space. For the first time in over ten (10) years, the Factories Corporation of Jamaica (FCJ) Limited has begun construction on Phase 1 of the Garmex Redevelopment and Expansion project, where 126,000 square feet of space is being built for MSMEs.
The Project is ongoing, with construction time scheduled for 12 to 14 months. In Phase 1, the FCJ will construct 90,000 square feet of warehousing space at a cost of $629 million to facilitate companies in manufacturing, warehousing and agro-processing. Another 36,000 square feet of space is being developed under Phase 1 to facilitate small businesses. This is estimated to cost $270 million.

The Project will also see the upgrading of the road, parking lots, sewage, drainage and the electrical system on the zone, and will include design requirements for power standby systems, water storage, wells, water harvesting and photovoltaic systems.

Mr. Speaker, during the period under review, the FCJ also undertook the renovation and upgrading of 141,504 square feet of space at a cost of over $44.06 million in Small Industrial Complexes, at the Montego Bay Free Zone in an effort to modernize FCJ’s Warehousing Stock.

Looking ahead Mr. Speaker, this financial year, the FCJ will undertake the design and construction of 365,000 square feet of space at the Morant Bay Urban Centre in St. Thomas as well as the construction of 100,000 square feet of space at Boundbrook in Port Antonio, Portland.

Both developments will operate as “one stop shops”, offering services provided by the government and private sector. They are expected to fulfil the demand for space, which will lead to an expansion of the towns and boost the employment prospects for the people of St Thomas and Portland.

Work is also ongoing on the design and construction at Naggo Head Technology Park of 850,000 square feet of space, to provide much needed space for the Business Processing Outsourcing
Industry, while providing warehousing space to support the productive sector and employment for residents. The FCJ will also undertake the redevelopment and renovation of its stand-alone and Small Industrial Complexes.

**Portmore Informatics Park**

*Mr. Speaker,* the Portmore Informatics Park is expected to be completed during this financial year at a cost of $600.9 million. The project, which is being overseen by the Port Authority of Jamaica, entails the addition of 4 buildings (B, C, D, E), which will provide 157,000 sq. ft. of purpose-built BPO space.

The soon to be completed project is expected to create 4,000 jobs in the Global Services Sector when fully occupied. The building will be equipped with the necessary infrastructure and technology to meet changes in the industry.

Intense marketing is currently underway to increase occupancy at the site.

**Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Regime**

*Mr. Speaker,* the progress that has been made in the development of a modern special economic zone (SEZ) regime to replace the previous free zone arrangement demonstrates the government’s commitment to build a competitive business environment and support growth-inducing economic activities that stimulate sustainable economic growth and development.

The Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA) reports that there are approximately 168 entities operating in the country’s Special Economic Zones (SEZs), with a total investment of more than US$1.4 billion.

Since the Special Economic Zone Act was passed in 2016, it has successfully transitioned more than 106 entities from free zones to SEZs, and to date, the JSEZA has received and processed 62 applications for new investments in the SEZ regime. The Authority continues the push to heighten stakeholder interest in the SEZ to catalyze further diversification in the sector.

During the last financial year, the JSEZA successfully grandfathered 95 FZ locations to the SEZ Regime. Of these, 77 locations have received their full SEZ status and 18 are currently finalizing their license Agreement.

FZ investments grandfathered in the SEZ regime are estimated to total US$463m, with employment for transitioned FZ entities exceeding 25,000.

Looking ahead Mr. Speaker, new investments in Jamaica through the SEZ regime are projected to exceed US$3.1b, and new and expanded SEZ space is projected to increase to 1,500,00 square feet.

The impact of the regime on FX export is expected to garner a 5% increase in earnings.
Enabling Legislation for Business and Investment

Mr. Speaker, the provision of an enabling environment for business and investment must be supported by the necessary legislation.

Although the Minister of Finance has spoken to this issue in the Jamaica Gleaner, dated Sunday, May 31, 2020, it is very important to repeat that the reason Jamaica fell short of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) requirements, was as a result of the country being re-classified because its assets had surpassed the FATF’s US$5 billion threshold.

Our greatest challenge is having an effective framework for regulation and collection of data within the designated non-financial business and professions sector. The Jamaica International Financial Services Authority (JIFSA), like other stakeholders has a vested interest in having Jamaica removed from the blacklist and has put forward recommendations to efficiently and expeditiously achieve such a goal.

During the last fiscal year, some amount of progress was made in getting certain pieces of legislation passed by JIFSA.

The Trusts Act

The Trusts Act was passed in mid-2019, and replaced the outdated Trustee Act, bringing Jamaica into the modern era, where the use of Trusts plays a central role in wealth creation and preservation, as well as succession planning.

Among the innovations are the creation of Protectors and Enforcers of Trusts, as well as the facilitation of the establishment of blind Trusts.

Limited Liability Companies (LLC) Act

The Limited Liabilities Companies Act was completed during the last quarter of 2019/20 and is now ready for tabling in Parliament by the end of the first quarter of 2020/21.

Segregated Accounts Companies Bill

The Segregated Accounts Companies Bill was completed during the last quarter of 2019/20 and is to be considered at the Legislation Committee in the first quarter of 2020/21.

Partnership Regulations

The Partnership Regulations for both the General and Limited Partnership Acts are now ready to be tabled.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, JIFSA will continue to ensure that modern, comprehensive legislation is in place to support job creation and economic growth, and will continue to amend existing legislation to keep Jamaica compliant with international standards and guidelines.

Development Application Review Process (DARP)

Mr. Speaker, the government continued to focus on getting greater efficiencies in the Development Application Review Process (DARP). The DARP is identified by the Doing Business Report as
critical to the construction sector, as well as the development of an economy. Improvements to the DARP are one of the many initiatives being undertaken by the GOJ to improve its economic performance, whilst protecting the nation’s interest.

An integral component of gaining greater efficiencies will see the government implementation of the Jamaica Development Application Portal [JDAP]. The Portal is already established and is live on "internet-jadap.gov.jm"

The pilot was launched on February 3 with NEPA as administrator of the Amanda back office platform. The select users during the pilot are a group of four entities, NEPA, the Kingston and St. Andrew Municipal Corporation (KSAMC), the St. James Municipal Corporation and the St. Ann Municipal Corporation. Once the “stress test” is done and the final tweak is completed, the GOJ will launch the JDAP.

This, Mr. Speaker, will surely lead to greater efficiency.

**LAND**

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the land portfolio which is immensely important to economic development, as well as wealth creation and transfer which are essential during the economic recovery period. I begin with the Greater Bernard Lodge Development because of its potential social and economic impact on the parish of St. Catherine.

**Greater Bernard Lodge Development**

Mr. Speaker, my colleague Minister Shaw, has already spoken briefly about the Greater Bernard Lodge Development Project, in terms of the agricultural component, but it is important that the project be put in a larger context as a game changer for that area, and one that is consistent with the Vision 2030 National Development Plan.

Because of the wide impact of the project, the GOJ through its Enterprise Team has had many meetings in the communities, to allay fears, and speak to the concerns of affected citizens.

Mr. Speaker, there have been revisions to the original Master Plan, including an increase in the amount of land dedicated to agricultural use. The original Master Plan was 3,948 acres of land with 1717 acres or 43% being agricultural and 2231 acres or 57% being non-agricultural. However, the revised Master Plan has 5,384.48 acres, of which:-

- 56% will be devoted to agricultural use
- 28% for residential use and
- The remaining 16% for utilities, open spaces and commercial use.
Mr. Speaker, the increase in the allocation for agricultural use, coupled with agro-investments to come, will secure and expand food security and production.

The project as you are aware, will also address several housing, agricultural and infrastructural issues simultaneously. Importantly, the plan is consistent with the growth, employment and poverty reduction strategy of the government.

This includes accommodating future population growth for the Kingston Metropolitan Region in collaboration with several key stakeholders from both the private and public sectors.

Mr. Speaker, the project will transform the area from a dormitory community to a modern city to live and work.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the Special Purpose Vehicle contemplated in the Master Plan, was incorporated on the 2nd April 2020, with the name Greater Bernard Lodge Development Ltd.

The Development Bank of Jamaica has been contacted to prepare for a first public offering of a limited number of residential and light industrial blocks. The success or otherwise of this early offering will determine the timing and pricing of the sale of the remaining blocks of land in the Master Plan area.

**Land Ownership and Titling**

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the fundamental importance of land ownership and titling. The National Land Agency is working assiduously to improve its services and create the enabling framework for Jamaicans to own a “piece of the rock”.

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To this end, it has sought to improve the ease of doing business with the agency for investors and Jamaicans in general during the past year, through the introduction of new services including customer service kiosks at the Land Titles Division in November last year. These kiosks are designed to further reduce the waiting time for customers by enabling walk in customers to conduct their own searches and browse the Agency’s website to view land information.

The NLA’s performance for F/Y 2019/20 was successful in terms to the GOJ’s development agenda when compared to the targets set.

Regarding the registering of transfers and mortgages on Certificates of Title- the target was for 95% of transactions received to be registered in 5 days. The performance was 96.2%.

For the three (3) day turnaround for certificates for applications for sub-division approval to be completed, the target set was for 90% of transactions. The NLA’s performance was 97%.

To issue new certificates of title for new development schemes, with plan attached, for completion in 28 days- the performance was 96.1%.

To issue new certificates of Title for new development schemes with no plan attached, the target set was 89%, the performance was 96%.

The NLA also prepared a master plan for the town of Mandeville, which is available in soft and hard copy.

Looking ahead Mr. Speaker, now that the Registration of Titles Act and the Registration of Titles Cadastral Mapping and Tenure Clarification [Special Provisions] Act have become law, emphasis is now placed on the titling of lands under the voluntary registration system.

This will encourage persons to register their unregistered lands using the benefits of legislation, including a grant to assist with the costs of titling and systematic registration, where the GOJ goes into a particular community and carries out surveying and titling operations, or persons can apply to update existing titles.

Certificates of Title will be issued using the provisions of the amended Registration of Titles, Cadastral Mapping and Tenure Clarification [Special Provisions] Act for:

- Commissioner of Lands properties, to improve the titling of land settlement schemes, to facilitate the transfer of lots to the allottees of schemes
- Privately owned unregistered properties through systematic adjudication
- Privately owned unregistered properties through voluntary registration of properties by landowners

In addition, landowners with existing Certificates of Title can apply to have them updated under the Registration of Titles, Cadastral Mapping and Tenure Clarification [Special Provisions] Act, to make for example, notation of deaths and marriages, transfers of ownership on the title and lost title applications.
Land Divestment

Mr. Speaker, we are working to put more lands in the hands of Jamaicans. As such, the programme of divestment of Government owned land to facilitate equitable, broad based land ownership in order to promote economic development is ongoing.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, there will be performance clauses requiring time limits for the utilization of land, as well as the demonstration of ability to finance the project, along with a comprehensive business plan. If the performance clauses are not met, the land will revert to the GOJ at the original price.

Mr. Speaker, the lack of these measures in the past, contributed somewhat to informal settlements around the island.

The total value of land recommended for divestment was over J$268.9million comprising 22 leases with expected earnings of $19,810,000, and 56 applications approved for sale valued at $249,153,530.

National Land Policy

Mr. Speaker, the revised National Land Policy is being finalized for submission to Cabinet for approval as a Green Paper in the 2nd quarter of the 2020/21FY. Once Cabinet gives approval, it is anticipated that public consultations on the Green Paper can commence before the end of the 2nd quarter of the 20/21 financial year.
DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to development and planning and begin by noting that sustainable development must include the recognition and integration of natural hazard risk into development planning, especially given the increasing impacts of climate change, unplanned urbanization, rapid population growth and environmental degradation. The allocation and use of land are essential to this process.

National Spatial Plan

Under the National Spatial Plan and National Spatial Plan Information Technology Platform, the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation and other relevant stakeholders are currently undertaking a final review of the National Spatial Plan (NSP) which will provide the basis, guidelines and framework for the optimal use and management of Jamaica’s land resources.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry intends to submit the NSP to Cabinet for approval in the 2nd quarter of the 2020/21FY.

Additionally, the Ministry is also developing the National Spatial Plan Information Technology Platform (NSPIT) to provide hardware, software, services and supporting infrastructure to manage information contained in the NSP. It is anticipated that the NSPIT will be completed by the end of the 2020/21FY.

Development and Investment Manual

The Ministry has commenced the updating of the Development and Investment Manual. The current Manual was prepared in 2005 and is still being used as a comprehensive guide for investors undertaking various types of developments in Jamaica. Mr. Speaker, while this Manual continues to serve a useful purpose, it is imperative that it is updated to include new procedures, methodologies, guidelines and standards since it was first published.

Amendment of the Restrictive Covenants Act

In this current financial year, the Government, through the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, will commence the amendment of The Restrictive Covenants Act to establish more clear-cut guidelines to govern how these legally binding agreements (covenants) imposed on the titles of properties to determine how they can be used by the occupants, can be modified or discharged. This would involve a broad-based participatory approach involving all stakeholders, including landowners, developers, land surveyors, planners, the planning authorities and the legal profession. Mr. Speaker, this is especially important considering the many incidences of nonconforming land uses and court battles relating to these restrictions.
Mr. Speaker, I now move on to the Environment and Climate Change portfolios, which are two of the most critical areas to this country because many of our economic and social gains up to this point can be reversed in the blink of an eye. Indeed, the Climate Change phenomenon has long transitioned from being an environmental issue to a development and an economic one.

Coupled with the effects of COVID-19, we see a golden opportunity to create a “new normal”, and a more sustainable future that is cleaner and greener, and contributes to the health and well-being of every Jamaican.

Ban on Single-Use Plastics

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, I presented an update on Phase One of the ban on single use plastic bags, and plastic straws and which came into effect on January 1, 2019, and introduced Phase two of the ban pertaining to polystyrene (Styrofoam) material used in the food and beverage industry which came into effect on January 1, 2020.

The Government is pleased with the overwhelming positive response to the policy announcement. The decision has had tremendous benefit to both the terrestrial and marine environment with NEPA reporting a drastic reduction in the amount of plastics in the environment.

The rapid disappearance of single-use plastic bags and plastic straws from the trade and the pronounced behavior change and attitude coming from the Jamaican people are clear evidence of the success of the ban.
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Looking ahead **Mr. Speaker**, phase three (3) of the ban, which comes into effect on January 1, 2021, will include single use plastic bags, with dimensions above 24” x 24” and thickness of 2.5mils. A ban will also be placed on single use drinking straws made wholly or in part of polyethylene or polypropylene, attached to juice boxes or drink pouches.

The government will also focus on the full implementation of the Deposit Refund Scheme (DRS), to reduce the impact of PET bottles on the environment.

**Environmental Policies**

**Mr. Speaker**, during the last financial year and early in this current year, a number of environmental-related policies were finalized or advanced, including:

**The National Policy for the Environmentally Sound Management of Hazardous Wastes.**

In the 2019/2020 financial year, the Ministry conducted stakeholder consultations to the National Policy for the Environmentally Sound Management of Hazardous Wastes (Green Paper). This will be submitted to Cabinet for approval as a White Paper in the 2nd quarter of this financial year.

**The Biosafety Policy for Jamaica**

Another timely development during the 2019/2020 FY was the Cabinet’s approval, in March 2020, for the tabling of The Biosafety Policy for Jamaica as a Green Paper in The Houses of Parliament. The promulgation of this Policy is aimed at (1) managing the risks to human health, agriculture and biodiversity from the development, transboundary movement, handling and use of living modified organisms; and (2) facilitating the development of a national modern biotechnology sector in a safe and regulatory environment. This Policy will be tabled in the Parliament in the 2020/2021 financial year and thereafter the Ministry will commence public consultations on the Green Paper.

**The Beach Access and Management Policy for Jamaica**

As we look towards the reopening of our beaches, Cabinet as recently as May 2020, approved the Beach Access and Management Policy for Jamaica and its tabling in The Houses of Parliament as a Green Paper.

The Policy will be tabled in the Parliament by the 2nd quarter of this financial year. Thereafter, public consultations will be carried out on the Green Paper.

The Policy will govern all beaches in Jamaica whether owned by the State or by private interests. The principal objectives of the Policy are to: (1) increase access to the foreshore by the public, and (2) generally improve the standard of beaches that are accessible to the public.
Mr. Speaker, we look forward to the public’s inputs and comments on this very important policy instrument.

Emissions Policy Framework for Jamaica

Jamaica’s extended drought conditions and continued reliance on fossil fuels as the primary source of energy, continue to be a concern for the country’s air quality as well as the attendant health issues that this may result from poor air quality.

To respond to these air quality challenges, the Ministry finalized the Emission Policy Framework for Jamaica in the 2019/2020 FY and will be submitting this Policy for approval as a Green Paper in this financial year.

This Policy provides the framework for effective and co-ordinated systems for the reduction of emissions from key pollutant sources and maintenance of good air quality throughout the island.

Legislation

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry will be continuing its work towards the amendment of key pieces of environmental legislation, including The Wild Life Protection Act, The Endangered Species Act and The Forest Act.

These amendments will assist in affording greater protection to the country’s biological resources.

Black River Protected Area

The Ministry, in collaboration with the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), will pursue the declaration of the Black River Lower and Upper Morass as a protected area under the Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act in the 2020/21FY. The declaration of Black River as a protected area is part of the voluntary commitment made by Jamaica at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference to increase our marine protected area by 2 percent by 2019.
Cockpit Country

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the Cockpit Country. For the period April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020, 77.09 km of the area proposed for protection as the Cockpit Country was ground-truthed, with 65.54 km of that amount permanently marked with 335 custom monuments.

Mr. Speaker, the boundary delineation runs along the road in the following communities:

- Northern section – Kinloss to Duanvale, and Dromily, Trelawny
- South-eastern section – Craighead, Good Intent, Kenwood, Oxford, Wallingford, Balaclava, Mexico, Williamsfield
- Southern section – Waterloo to Accompong through Aberdeen and Appleton

Since the activity began in 2017, a total of 106 km has been ground-truthed and verified and monuments planted. The first permanent boundary monument, delineating the area, was installed by the Most Honourable Prime Minister Holness on June 5, 2019.
**Bogue 2 Forest Reserve**

Mr. Speaker, the Forestry Department executed its first pilot Carbon assessment in the Bogue 2 Forest Reserve in St. Ann, calculating a total of 32,584.048 tonnes of carbon per hectare. This is a significant achievement for the Agency and the country towards our capacity to become ‘REDD+ Ready’.

The Agency likewise identified JMD$240 million to support alternate livelihood activities for local communities.

During the FY twenty-seven (27) proposals identified and valued at over J$133million were awarded. The remaining amounts/projects will be identified and awarded in the 20/21 FY.

One hundred and nine hectares of denuded lands were reforested across the island, surpassing the target of 100 hectares. (Forest footage)

Additionally, for the FY, a total of 671 employment opportunities were provided for six hundred and sixty-seven (667) casual workers from rural areas/communities close to forests, in the areas of plantation maintenance, reforestation, Biophysical Inventory and Volume Assessments. This represents an 18% increase over the five hundred and sixty-nine (569) casual employment opportunities provided last FY.

Mr. Speaker, looking ahead, it is anticipated that for the 2020/2021 financial year, the Forestry Department will be embarking on the reforestation of 150 hectares and maintenance of 588 hectares as well as the verification of 1000 parcels of privately-owned Closed Broadleaf forest lands.

It will also assess 2500 hectares of Mangrove forest and complete the Bill to amend the Forest Act (1996). There will also be ongoing implementation of the National Forest Management & Conservation Plan 2016-2026 and the continued implementation of the 2-year US$613,000 project to assist the country in its National REDD+ Readiness Management arrangements.
The Forestry Department will also assist with initiatives geared towards conserving biodiversity and reducing land degradation by undertaking a Natural Resource Valuation Pilot in one of Jamaica’s largest forest estates.

Mr. Speaker, this is a component of a project funded through the Global Environment Facility (GEF6) and will seek to enhance conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services through the mainstreaming of biodiversity into policies and practices into Jamaica’s productive landscapes and key sectors.

3 Million Trees in 3 years

Mr. Speaker, the Forestry Department will continue to provide support to the tree planting programme to meet the targeted three million trees over three years. Under the Initiative the Agency will be co-ordinating the provision of seedlings to meet the needs of the GoJ-led planting programme as well as general distribution to the public. There will also be some training for HOPE interns over the period.

Climate Change

Mr. Speaker, this year signals the 25th anniversary of Jamaica’s full commitment to advance Climate action after ratifying the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in January 1995.

We have finalized Jamaica’s Country Programme for engagement with the Green Climate Fund with a pipeline of projects totaling over US$200 million. This will help to improve access for funding climate investments in both adaptation and mitigation actions.

We have also updated our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) with increased national targets for emission reductions in line with our global commitments on climate change response and towards a low carbon development future.

The result of policy decisions made Mr. Speaker has led to the absolute level of ambition in Jamaica’s unconditional commitment increasing by more than 60% compared to the previous NDC.

Additionally Mr. Speaker, an agreement has been reached for Jamaica to explore the bond market as a source of debt capital to finance innovative and new business opportunities for resilience building with the approval of a grant of US$583,000.00 to facilitate an enabling environment for a green bond listing on the Jamaica Stock Exchange.

We have also initiated actions to strengthen Jamaica’s capacity to enhance the transparency framework necessary to fulfill our obligations under the Paris Agreement with a US$1.3 Million grant received from the Global Environment Facility.
We continue to also participate actively in international platforms to cement our leadership in these areas while increasing awareness to the unique needs of Jamaica as a small and highly vulnerable island state.

The cumulative effect of these actions and strategies Mr. Speaker, will not only enhance our green recovery efforts, but also create the ideal market conditions to attract more private and public capital, support local climate innovation, unlock investment opportunities in sustainable development, and improve the lives of our citizens.

As we look ahead this 2020/2021 fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, this Administration is hoping to advance plans to develop a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for Jamaica.

We are now undertaking an adaptation stocktake to compile and validate a comprehensive picture of adaptation initiatives across state and non-state entities and to further understand progress and identify where gaps exists.

The stocktake Mr. Speaker, will inform the proposal to prepare the National Adaptation Plan (NAP). The NAP will identify priority sectors and actions for advancing climate change in the post COVID-19 era and will be useful for national budgets and aligning-seeking external funding.

Additionally, we will commence preparation of our 4th National Communications and our 2nd Biennial Update Report with a grant from the Global Environment Facility, as well as participate in a nine country Euro19.5 million regional project, to be funded by the Government of Germany, which will advance efforts to improve the existing regulatory framework for transition to more sustainable transport.

Mr. Speaker, Jamaica as one of two flagship countries in this project will increase the fleet of electric vehicles in the public transportation system.
Meteorological Services

Mr. Speaker, given the impacts of climate change, the Meteorological Service has taken steps to improve its forecasting and related weather services. These include the signing of a contract for the design and installation of Doppler Radar and the establishment of a Radar Station in the last financial year.

For this financial year, the Met Service will establish the Comprehensive Bush Fire Warning Index, and replace the Doppler radar by December 2020. It will also implement impact-based weather forecast products and install a ground based satellite reception system during this financial year.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, we urge everyone to prepare for an extended dry period, as the Meteorological Service is predicting continued dry conditions for the island, from June to August 2020. The island experienced an average of 40% of normal rainfall last month.

At the same time, the Met Services is reporting that based on its models, temperatures will be above-normal and this will undoubtedly contribute to the drying trend across the island.

CLOSING

In closing my presentation to this Honourable House Mr. Speaker, I am feeling confident that despite the setbacks due to the Coronavirus, this Administration is steering the country in the right direction.

The opportunities are there for us to explore, but it cannot be ‘business as usual’. Full and sustainable recovery of our economy, our social structures and our environment will require a fundamental shift in mindsets, and attitudes, as well as critical changes in how we socialize, work, educate, and interact with our natural and built environments.

But Mr. Speaker, I have seen firsthand and am heartened by the resilience of Jamaicans.

The government is doing its part to ensure the enabling business environment for the MSME Sector, by leveraging opportunities in the digital economy, the green economy and expanding access to technology. We are working to make Jamaica even more business friendly for investors, while at the same time protecting our natural resources and our environment and moving to minimize the impacts of natural and man-made shocks.

We are working to transition to climate-resilient growth, create green jobs and ensure clean and sustainable consumption and production. I am confident that working together, we will get through this crisis, and build back better.

Mr. Speaker, as this may well be the last sectoral presentation for this term in office, I look forward to returning to Parliament on behalf of the people of West Portland, along with my wife, to continue the unfinished work for the betterment of the people of Portland, and by extension the entire island. I close my presentation with a quote from Indian Author Arundhati Roy who said, “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next”.

Let us make use of the opportunities presented to us in Looking Ahead to Sustainable Growth in the “New Normal”.

God bless you and God Bless Jamaica, Land we Love.