

**REMARKS FOR HON. ROBERT D. PICKERSGILL
MINISTER OF WATER, LAND, ENVIRONMENT
AND CLIMATE CHANGE,
AT
NEPA'S 11TH ANNIVERSARY
OPEN DAY & INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
TUESDAY, MAY 22, 2012,
@ 10:00 A.M.
AT THE OFFICES OF NEPA
CALEDONIA AVENUE**

SALUTATIONS

- **Members of the political directorate**
Members of the Diplomatic Corp
- **Representatives from International Donor Partners**
- **Chairman and Members of the Natural Resources
Conservation Authority and the Town & Country
Planning Authority**
- **Former CEOs**
- **Members of the Scientific Authority**
- **Representatives of MDA;s**

- **Representatives from the private sector and academia, members of the NGO community, members of the NEPA family, partners for the environment**

I am happy to have this opportunity to be celebrating here today two significant milestones: the occasion of the 11th anniversary of the National Environment and Planning Agency (and Open Day) and the International Day for Biological Diversity. My remarks will therefore be in the context of the NEPA's celebration and International Day for Biological Diversity.

As Minister with portfolio responsibility for the Environment, and under whose purview NEPA falls, I take this opportunity to thank all present here and indeed the wider public and various '*communities of interest*' who have helped in one way or another, to foster the achievement of environmental requirements for our country.

I wish to single out the Non-Governmental Organizations, Community-Based Organizations and civil society groups who work tirelessly, often on a purely voluntary basis, to help in the maintenance of environmental integrity. Although NEPA bears principal responsibility for the environment, environmental stewardship is the corporate responsibility of all Jamaicans.

In 1991, the Political Administration of which I am a part, conceptualized and passed the Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act. The Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA) was instituted under that Act in 1992, which was the year of the inaugural United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil.

The Administration was visionary and strategic and took the unprecedented decision that the Act “Binds the Crown”. We thought that the legislation should be critical and pivotal, with priority given to the environment and sustainable development.

It also meant that no entity, enterprise, organization or even Government-owned facilities would be exempt from the provisions of the NRCA Act.

In 2001, NEPA was formed by an amalgamation of three entities; the NRCA, the then Town Planning Department and the Land Development & Utilization Commission (LDUC). The thinking behind the merger was to have all environment and land use or planning issues managed by a single agency to ensure that all critical issues related to the environment were taken into consideration in a holistic way, when decisions on development options are taken.

This merger provided an opportunity to apply planning policies and appropriate environmental management systems to meet our environmental and developmental needs in a manner that is efficient and cost-effective.

If we compare NEPA's age with that of independent Jamaica, now 50, you will agree that the Agency is relatively young.

But in that short time in our nation's history, it has made a sterling contribution towards sustainable development through the protection and conservation of Jamaica's natural resources. The Agency has made significant strides in discharging its responsibilities under the various statutes that guide its work.

Natural resources have long been recognized as critical to social well-being, spiritual health and economic prosperity. In recognition of this principle, the NRCA Act mandates the Agency to educate the public on these issues. This has been an area of great success through excellent support from international donor partners and local partnerships for action; and through educational institutions and many NGOs.

Over the years, education and awareness activities by NEPA have engaged the judiciary, environmental groups, the police (both the JCF and ISCF), school principals, colleges, teachers and students at various levels and the wider citizenry.

Most of you would have been aware of the government's policy position and my Ministry's thrust in respect to climate change. The climate is changing and we have to change!

With this in mind I have established a Climate Change Advisory Committee chaired by Dr. Conrad Douglas. It is my intention to establish a Climate Change Department to coordinate all aspects of climate change, adaptation and/or mitigation measures.

Correspondingly, NEPA through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process and development control, using development orders and plans, has taken an adaptive management approach as it seeks to ensure that new developments are as climate-proof as much as is feasible, while also striving to remain efficient, cutting-edge and relevant in the face of shrinking financial resources. Additionally, stakeholder partnerships in all areas of endeavour have been a part of NEPA's mantra.

The United Nations has proclaimed May 22 the International Day for Biological Diversity, to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. This year the theme is Marine Biodiversity.

The National Environment and Planning Agency is embracing this opportunity to raise awareness about the issues related to Jamaica's coastal and marine biodiversity and to increase practical action to protect and conserve these resources.

Jamaica's coastal resources include beaches, mangrove forests, seagrass beds, coral reefs and the myriad of organisms which call these coastal communities home for part or all of their lifecycle.

The island boasts a rich marine biodiversity that includes:-

- Over 572 fish species**
- 64 hard coral species**
- 43 soft coral species**
- 32 species of rays and sharks**

- **4 species of sea turtles**
- **455 species of crustaceans**
- **825 species of mollusk**
- **386 species of algae**
- **4 species of seagrass and**
- **Many marine mammals including whales, dolphins and manatees.**

For many coastal communities, these ecosystems provide several critical ecological functions on which the livelihood of humans is dependent. Functions include coastal protection, recreation, and source of food as well as economic and social development.

There is, however, a very clear and present danger for a severe reduction of the goods and services that these ecosystems provide that will be costly to Jamaica, if we do not take steps to arrest the deleterious trends from unplanned developments, nutrient run-off, sediment run-off, solid waste pollution, overfishing, and the effects of climate change .

The National Environment and Planning Agency has embarked on a sustained programme to reverse these alarming trends by adopting an integrated approach to the management of our coastal and marine biodiversity. These interventions include:

- Routine monitoring of coral reefs**
- Revision of existing coastal policies and**
- Actions and plans, as well as specific interventions to reverse the effects of climate change at risk-prone communities across the island.**

Through these programmes, it is anticipated that over the long-term, there will be increased recovery of our valued coastal ecosystems for this generation and future generations.

In going forward, the Agency is overhauling its system of key performance indicators and targets, mindful of its mission and I quote..... *'to promote Sustainable Development by ensuring protection of the environment and orderly development in Jamaica through a highly motivated staff performing at the highest standard'*....end of quote

NEPA has recognized that the planning framework for our country is imperfect and requires much to reduce urban blight and curtail urban sprawl. Urban renewal, in the context of a green economy, is critical, as it would help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thus contributing to the reduction of climate change impacts.

This type of action, however, requires partnerships and co-operation at various levels of the society, as we seek to achieve the overarching goal of Vision 2030 *'to make Jamaica the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business'*.

The government is actively seeking to further define the legal bases for the operation of NEPA, an activity which I have prioritized and will lend support in resolving during my tenure as Minister. I am committed to sound planning, environmental protection and to the work of the National Environment and Planning Agency.

As the Agency embarks on its second decade, I urge us to reflect on the past while planning for the future. I take this opportunity to congratulate the CEO and staff, past and present, and thank the Authorities and Advisory Boards, past and present, for their contribution to the achievements of the Agency.

So let us be good stewards and support NEPA towards its vision *‘for a Jamaica where natural resources are used in a sustainable way and that there is a broad understanding of environment, planning and development issues with extensive participation amongst citizens and a high level of compliance with relevant legislation’.*

Please use this Open Day to interact with the staff and learn as much as possible by visiting the display booths.

I wish for NEPA a Happy Anniversary and many more successful years! Happy International Day for Biological Diversity to all.

**Let us resolve to protect the environment and our rich
biodiversity!**

Thank you!