

PRESS RELEASE

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NEGRIL UNDER SERIOUS THREAT

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has for about one year now, expressed deep concerns about the government's planned breakwater project in Negril. Negril is one of the region's leading resort destinations accounting for thousands of jobs and a big chunk of tax revenue for the government of Jamaica. The recent vote by Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA) Negril Chapter members against the development of the breakwater only adds to mounting opposition from the Negril Chamber of Commerce, the Negril Cluster, the Negril Entertainment Association, the Westmoreland Hemp and Ganja Farmers Association, and numerous other local and international stakeholders against the project.

Mr. Speaker, I am also absolutely disturbed by the gross level of negligence and arrogance being displayed by the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ), the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Authority's (NRCA), which approved the project despite a mountain of legitimate objections by stakeholders and experts. The situation is even more appalling given the fact that the Tourism Minister, Dr. Wykeham McNeill is the MP for much of the Negril area.

Mr. Speaker I want to draw the House's attention to a breakwater development in Sri Lanka that went terribly wrong. The Unawatuna Beach in Sri Lanka, named the World's Best Beach in 2004, is fast disappearing today. The once flawless crescent of sand that swept along a palm-lined shore with turquoise waters, is now blanketed with jagged rocks. The Unawatuna beach spans nearly 1 1/2 kilometres and has attracted both the local and foreign tourists for over half a century.

Mr. Speaker, the reason for the destruction of the Unawatuna Beach is the breakwater that was built by Sri Lanka's Coast Conservation Department. The breakwater, which stretches nearly a kilometre into the ocean has disturbed the natural balance of the eco-system, and is washing away the sand from one half of the beach, and depositing it on the other half. The structure is similar to the US multi-million dollar project near year long project being proposed by the Jamaican government for Negril.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Sri Lanka is now engaged in an expensive exercise to partially remove the breakwater in order to rectify the situation. Additionally, they have resorted to

beach nourishment with 300,000 metric cubic metres being pumped from the middle of the ocean in order to recreate the beach as the best and environmentally friendly solution to the problem.

Mr. Speaker, other regions with breakwaters are still trying to figure out how to get rid of them, including California, New Jersey and North Carolina.

Mr. Speaker, in line with expert opinion beach nourishment is the preferred approach to rehabilitating the Negril shoreline. I really have to question the true motives behind this mad dash to pursue a very risky, expensive and potentially economically and environmentally damaging project.

Mr. Speaker, the intervention of the Tourism Minister and Western Westmoreland MP, is long overdue and I again warn that the prolonged dispute could bring serious harm to the tourism sector.

NEGRIL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Mr. Speaker, on top of the breakwater issues in Negril, controversy is now mounting over a new development order for the Negril/Green Island region of Westmoreland and Hanover. The matter adds to Opposition's strong belief that the area's development is very poorly handed.

Mr. Speaker, it is our understanding that under the new Development Order, developers will be allowed to construct commercial buildings of up to four floors high. There are also reports that new developments will be allowed to build closer to the sea. The law currently states that buildings must be set back from the high water mark by at least 150 feet. Mr. Speaker, we need clarification on these matters.

Mr. Speaker I again call on the Tourism Minister and MP for the area to break his silence on the issue given mounting concerns that the planned move will upset Negril's famed coastline, cause irreparable environmental damage and as such permanently damage Negril image as the laidback '*capital of casual*'.