

Statement from Lee Issa, Chairman of Couples Resorts

### **ERR ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION**

I was surprised and disappointed to hear the news of the approval by NRCA and NEPA of the breakwater project in Negril.

The beach is not static – it is a moving area of sand. Over the past 40 years in Negril we have gained beach and we have lost beach. While there is an overall loss in some areas, today at Swept Away we have the same beach width as when we first built the hotel in 1990. But we obeyed the setback of 150 feet and the density rules. Interestingly today, most properties on Long Bay have naturally regained 20 to 30 feet of beach from where it was two years ago.

In business, as in life, I have always tried to minimize risk and avoid decisions which cannot be easily rectified if they prove to be wrong. Such a precautionary approach is even more important when the risk is to our marine environment, especially the coral reef and the coastline-both of which sustain the livelihoods of many people not only in the local area but also far beyond. The breakwater construction would be substantially irreversible yet as with all new and unproven structures would carry risk not least to the adjacent coral reef within the ‘protected’ marine park but also to unforeseen and unpredicted movements of the sand. Surely it is better to explore low risk solutions which can be adapted through a ‘learning by doing’ process as experience and practical knowledge is gained from implementation?

I believe that we should explore what our neighbors in Cuba are doing to preserve their famous Varadero Beach and that is beach nourishment. We in Negril have identified the source of the sand to do the beach nourishment. Once the boulders area put in, they cannot be removed, their maintenance may be highly problematic and the poor aesthetics threatens the quality of the coastal environment which is such a vital element of Negril’s character and attraction. Most significant is the break waters will not accrete sand on Long Bay Beach.

Beach nourishment will give everyone in Long Bay a wide beach and buy us time to restore the damaged ecosystems. I am asking that NEPA and NRCA rethink their decision and do what is best for the environment as well as the Jamaican economy.

Couples Resorts employ over 1000 people in our Negril properties and support local suppliers – farmers, craftsmen, construction workers, attractions and tours. We are a Jamaican family owned and operated Resort group with significant international recognition.

We see on Trip Advisor, blogs and other social media threads that visitors are worried about this project and some say they will not come back if it goes ahead. Jamaica cannot afford to lose visitors and with

Cuba about to open their doors to the USA, I think it would be best not to proceed with this project in its present form and to take account of the voices advocating a more serious consideration of alternative solutions to the problems identified.