

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

5th Floor, Sir Stanislaus James Building
Castries, Saint Lucia



Communications on this subject
should be addressed to:
THE PERMANENT SECRETARY
and the following Number
quoted:

January 14, 2002

Mr Bernard Cornibert
Chief Executive Officer
WIBDECO
Manoel Street
CASTRIES

Dear Mr Cornibert

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is extremely concerned over an article appearing in the Mirror Newspaper of 11 January, 2002 which suggested that WIBDECO was holding the Ministry responsible for a "delay" in the commencement of single port loading. The article suggested that the commissioning of the Inland Reception and Distribution Centres (IRDCs) was somehow part of a plan to facilitate single port loading.


As WIBDECO is aware, the conceptualization of the IRDCs came out of discussions four years ago between the then St Lucia Banana Growers Association, the Ministry and the European Commission delegation. After a series of discussions, it was agreed that these centers would be constructed with EU grant funds and would be multipurpose in their orientation. The IRDCs were seen as elements of an overall strategy geared towards better post-harvest handling of fruit and a precursor for a shift towards the containerization of St Lucia's bananas. I am not aware that the issue of single port loading featured in the rationale for these centers or in the subsequent development of the project proposal that was approved by the European Union. Recently, the IRDC at Odsan was completed, following a series of construction delays. Whereas the center in La Caye was completed some months ago, the centers are part of one integrated project, and it would not have been possible to commission one while the other was incomplete. Additionally, the Ministry had to go through the process of inviting tenders for the management of these centers and of the input supply depot at La Caye. In fact, as a result of the unanticipated announcement by WIBDECO of the move to single port loading as of the week of 14 January 2002, the Ministry had to seek special leave of the Central Tenders Board to convene a special meeting in December, outside of the regularly scheduled meetings, to open and review the afore-mentioned tenders. Consequently, the process has been significantly abbreviated because of WIBDECO's announcement

pertaining to single port loading. I am totally at a loss, therefore, to understand the basis for the claim that the Ministry has delayed the transition to single port loading – a transition of which we were lately informed.

Moreover, the Ministry is extremely concerned that to date it has received no correspondence from WIBDECO, official or otherwise, on the procedures that have been put in place to facilitate single port loading. We are ignorant of the locations where bananas are to be received or inspected, the arrangements for transporting the fruit to the Vieux Fort Port, or the period during which these arrangements will remain in place. Even more importantly, however, the vast majority of farmers are as uninformed as we are on these fundamental and critically important issues. In effect, by not informing all of the necessary stakeholders, WIBDECO has created a most unwelcomed environment of uncertainty and confusion within the industry.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries wishes to request of WIBDECO, therefore, that commencing immediately, it uses all mass media (television, radio and print) to explain clearly to all farmers the details of the procedures that have been put in place for the reception and inspection of fruit and any other pertinent information. These announcements should run daily for a two week period, and should be broadcast both in English and Kweyol. Additionally, the Honourable Minister wishes to meet with you and your relevant officers on Tuesday January 22, 2002 at 9:00 a.m. to discuss all issues relevant to this subject and to be better apprised of the time period during which these arrangements will remain in effect.

Yours sincerely



JAMES FRETCHER
Permanent Secretary

cc Honourable Minister of Agriculture