



Open for Business

Fisheries Facilities Built on COOPERATION

EDITORIAL

EXTRA LINE FOR FISHING

Even though it has existed largely at a subsistence level, fishing has always been an important economic activity in St Lucia. Especially for the people who live in coastal communities.

The industry is a valuable source of healthy food as fish is considered one of the cleanest forms of protein. It also provides a livelihood for scores of people in the various fishing communities around the island.

Lack of modern technology and facilities has been the main constraint hampering the commercial development of local fishing. But thanks to the generous assistance of the Government of Japan, the industry has undergone significant transformation in the last decade.

The official handing over of the two newest fishing complexes built with Japanese development assistance is a great gesture of cooperation and the provisions of development assistance to a small country. The multi-million dollar facilities at Choiseul and Soufriere join Japanese-built complexes already in operation at Vieux Fort and Dennery.

Fishermen in the two communities are naturally excited about using the new facilities. Conditions under which they ply their trade will drastically improve. So too will the surroundings under which consumers purchase supplies of fish and other sea food.

The official opening of both facilities coincides with encouraging signs that fishing is providing the basis of a new emerging export industry. No doubt the new complexes will enhance the enabling environment conducive for a further growth in exports.

It's a positive piece of news on the economic front, considering the urgent need for St Lucia to diversify its foreign exchange earning capacity following the decline of bananas, which for years was the major export.

At the same time, if St Lucians choose to eat more fish in keeping with the spirit of the Buy Local campaign of the Ministry of Commerce, Tourism, Investment and Consumer Affairs, considerable savings of foreign exchange on imports could be achieved and put to other uses.

At a time when foreign aid is increasingly hard to come by, the contribution of the Government of Japan to the modernization of the local fishing sector is certainly most appreciated.

Choiseulians turned out in their numbers on Wednesday, May 28, to witness the formal handing-over by the Government of Japan of the village's new multi-million dollar fishing complex.

Built simultaneously with a smaller complex in neighbouring Soufriere under a \$37 million project, the state-of-the-art facility, which is the largest development project the village has received in almost 50 years, is expected to provide a major lift to Choiseul's fishing industry.

On hand were Governor-General, Her Excellency Dame Pearlette Louisy, who cut the ribbon to declare the facility open, Prime Minister, Hon Dr. Kenny D. Anthony, who delivered the feature address, Japan's Ambassador to St Lucia, His Excellency Dr. Ryo Takagi who handed over the keys to the Government of St Lucia, and Choiseul District Representative, Hon. Fergusson John, who delivered the welcome address.

"The Choiseul Fishermen's Cooperative will be the primary beneficiaries of this project as they now can access much improved operational facilities," Dr. Anthony said. He urged villagers to take care of the facility.

The Soufriere fishing complex was opened on Friday May 31. Dr Anthony has identified Canaries and Anse-la-Raye as the next two communities his Government would like to see benefiting from modern fishing complexes under the Japanese assistance programme.



Japanese Ambassador to Saint Lucia, His Excellency Dr. Ryo Takagi, hands over the keys of the new Choiseul fishing complex to Prime Minister, Hon. Dr. Kenny D. Anthony.

Hurricane Season 2003 - Be Prepared



NEMO Director - Dawn French

NEMO Expands to meet Community Needs

The 2003 hurricane season was officially declared open on June 01 2003, with predictions for another busy season. The National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), has built a reputation for sensitising all publics in St. Lucia on the need to be prepared for the impact of hurricanes, tropical storms or any natural disaster.

NEMO Director Dawn French has acknowledged that emergency management in small countries is based on the availability of a large pool of volunteers

Addressing the Dennery Disaster Committees on June 01 2003, she noted, "In disaster management it is difficult to maintain dedication as it is a field that feeds on devastation".

(see page 5)



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MODERNISING THE HEALTH SECTOR

With the Government of the St. Lucia Labour Party embarking on the most far-reaching and ambitious health sector development programme ever undertaken in St Lucia, hardly anyone would disagree with Health Minister, Hon. Damian Greaves, when he says "exciting times" are ahead for health care on the island.

The Ministry of Health is going to be kept quite busy implementing the Government's packed agenda over the next few years. First, it will have the mammoth task of supervising the construction of brand new general and psychiatric hospitals which, together, will constitute the nucleus of a modernized health system.

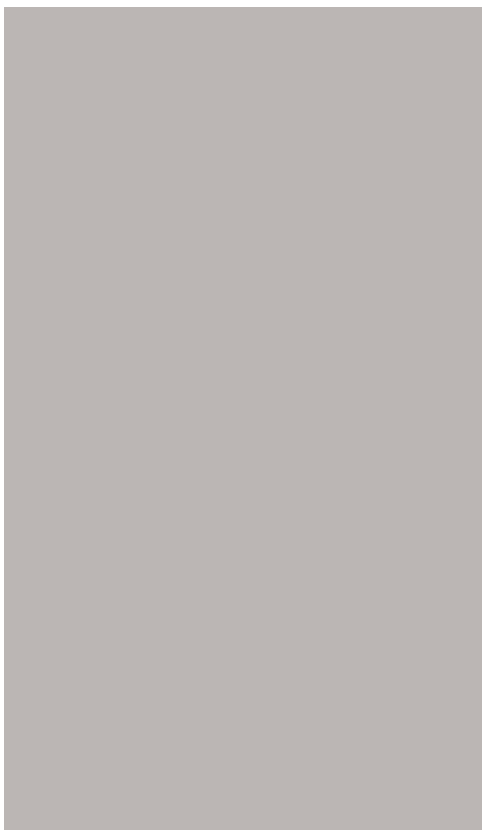
Added to that are extensive renovations planned for 15 health centres around the island and repairs to the Victoria and Golden Hope hospitals. The aim is to ensure the delivery of a reasonable quality of patient care until both institutions, which are more than 100 years old, are replaced by the two new hospitals. Also planned are improvements to the Malgretoute Senior Citizens Home, as well as to the Dennery and Soufriere hospitals pending their eventual conversion into polyclinics.

Health Care Financing

Amidst this hive of activity, the Ministry of Health will be seeking to finalize operational details for a proposed national health insurance scheme. Expected to play a central role in future health care financing, this much-anticipated initiative seeks to relieve most St Lucians, especially the poor, of the hassle of having to raise money, often in a hurry, to pay for treatment whenever serious illness strikes.

Meanwhile, there has been a significant improvement, generally speaking, in the quality of health care delivered at the main Victoria Hospital in particular and also at St Jude's Hospital in Vieux Fort during the past six years.

When the incumbent Labour administration took office in 1997, Health Minister Greaves recalls, hardly a day went by without someone complaining in the media about the service at Victoria. Today, such complaints are few and far between.



HEALTH MINISTER HON. DAMIAN GREAVES: 'Exciting times' ahead for the health sector.

Greaves says Victoria Hospital today, as a result of various Government interventions, has an "improved character and feel" both on the inside and outside. The surroundings, for sure, are lot cleaner. Gone are the old vehicles and debris which littered the premises. Gone too is the old caravan at the entrance that was a source of rodent infestation".

Several agencies joined the Ministry of Health in the extensive clean-up. Among them, The National Conservation Authority (NCA), The Castries City Council, The St Lucia Solid Waste Management Authority, The St Lucia Environmental Company, The Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF), The Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF), The Ministry of Communications and Works, and The Ministry of Agriculture.

"We have been able to refurbish the Medical Records Department (which) is essentially the nerve centre of the hospital," says Greaves, listing improvements which have had a positive impact on patient care.



GOLDEN HOPE: More medical staff on board and a new approach to patient rehabilitation in the last six years.

Specialist Services

"... We now have a fully staffed and functioning Department of Medicine. We have introduced specialist cardiology services which include stress testing and echocardiograms. We have improved our radiology services as well. There has been the reintroduction of the regular grand round, led by the consultant."

In addition, Victoria Hospital today boasts a new kidney dialysis unit to treat a growing number of St Lucians who are coming down with renal failure. Services at the Accident & Emergency Department are also much improved and better care is in the offing for cancer patients as Victoria soon will have the services of an oncologist.

Greaves says Government is addressing "complaints about the unavailability of doctors to provide specialist health services" at Victoria. A major constraint, he explains, is the fact that such highly skilled professionals are in great demand worldwide. This makes their services expensive and forces countries like St Lucia with limited resources to have to compete with others with far greater resources.



VICTORIA HOSPITAL: The surroundings are cleaner and patient care has shown a significant improvement, as Government prepares to construct a new state-of-the-art general hospital.

"I acknowledge that resources are limited and they always will be limited," Greaves says. "However, there is a certain minimum which must be provided if we are to provide an essential or basic package of health services."

He adds: "The National Health Insurance is expected to work closely with the Ministry of Health and other agencies to ensure that an essential package is defined and that adequate resources are allocated for the delivery of those services."

In a move to make St Lucia more attractive to health care professionals, especially in critical areas of medicine, Government is in the process of setting up a commission to review existing compensation packages, including salaries and benefits paid by the public sector.

"As opposed to shooting in dark and causing much variance in the packages offered to physicians, the Prime Minister requested from the Ministry terms of reference for a commission whose mandate it would be to review the terms and conditions of our health care workers," Greaves says.

"I want to applaud this initiative," he adds. "I think it is very good and that it will bring an end to some of the agony we face in this country."

Government has also given attention to mental health, traditionally regarded as the black sheep of the health establishment. As a result, patients today are receiving an improved quality of care, notwithstanding the poor physical shape of the Golden Hope Hospital.

"For years the Golden Hope Hospital operated with only one consultant psychiatrist and one junior doctor," Greaves notes. "Now there is one consultant psychiatrist, one senior house officer and one registrar. Within the past year, we have increased the medical staff to four..."

"As a consequence of increasing the medical staff..., we have been able to reduce the patient population by 35 persons," the minister adds. "This success may be attributed to reduced patient load per doctor and the improved care that patients are now able to receive."

The shift from a custodial to a more community-based rehabilitative approach to

treating persons with mental illness reflects a global trend. In fact, as the Ministry of Health seeks to develop more comprehensive community-based mental health programmes, it is collaborating with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Health Canada, and the University of Alberta to offer appropriate training programmes for health care practitioners through the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College.

Construction of a new psychiatric hospital to replace Golden Hope was originally scheduled to begin towards the end of last year. However, there has been a delay, Greaves explains, "because we are attempting to ensure optimization of available resources and that long term sustainability of the facility is assured".

Greaves is urging St Lucians to take more responsibility to ensure they remain in good health. He says the leading causes of death and illness in St Lucia – the so-called chronic diseases like heart ailments, cancer, diabetes, and hypertension – as well as motor vehicle accidents, can be prevented in some cases. ●

THE ROCHAMEL ISSUE

A SUMMARY OF THE KEY FACTS

1. Negotiations between the Government of Saint Lucia and Rochamel regarding the construction of a "resort complex" on the Pigeon Island causeway began during the former UWP administration. In a Cabinet conclusion on March 26, 1997, the UWP administration offered Rochamel a package of tax concessions in support of the development.
2. Rochamel is the company which built the hotel. The other key players were: Pigeon Point Hotel Ltd, which owned the shares in the venture; the US-based Hyatt Corporation which managed the property; Royal Merchant Bank of Trinidad and Tobago which financed the construction of the hotel; and the Government of Saint Lucia which gave permission for the project and offered guarantees.
3. The Labour Administration learnt of the project soon after it took office in May 1997. Considering that the former UWP administration had spent \$17 million of taxpayers' money to reclaim the land from the sea and it had remained idle, the Labour Administration was eager to see the site being put to productive use. As such, it gave its blessings to the project. Prime Minister Dr Kenny D. Anthony set up a Cabinet committee to pursue discussions with Rochamel.
4. Besides the creation of jobs for St Lucians, the Labour Administration gave its blessings to the project for another important reason. The involvement of Hyatt, the international hotel chain. Believing that Hyatt's presence would give a significant boost to the local tourist industry, Government entered the discussions with Rochamel on the clear understanding that Hyatt would manage the property when it was completed. Hyatt was the first major international hotel brand St Lucia had attracted after Wyndam had opened the Morgan Bay hotel at Choc.
5. As much as the Labour Government wanted the project to go ahead because of the overall significance for the development of the island's tourist industry, Government proceeded with caution because it wanted to avoid a recurrence of the experience involving the Hilton Jalousie. The former UWP administration had invested US\$5.1 million into this hotel venture which was on the verge of closure when the Labour administration took office in 1997.
6. Against this backdrop, the Labour Administration decided it would not put any money directly into the project. Rochamel, therefore, received no money from the Government of St Lucia. Government chose to lend its support by way of a "put option" – essentially, an undertaking Government gave to the Royal Merchant Bank of Trinidad and Tobago to guarantee debt service and cost-overruns on the project if construction costs exceeded a specified limit. The guarantee, however, would only take effect after parliamentary approval was given.
7. It was not the first time that the Government of St Lucia had granted such a guarantee. It is a normal practice for investors, worldwide; to ask Governments to share the some of the risks associated with major development projects that have the potential to yield tremendous national benefits, as was the case with the hotel. In fact, concessions and other forms of Government support play a crucial role in attracting investments in the first place, considering the fierce competition among countries today for private capital.
8. The hotel recorded persistent low occupancy after it opened to business. This was blamed on how Hyatt marketed the property. The situation was compounded by the fact that Hyatt itself ran into financial difficulty in the USA. In the first half of 2000, Government became aware that the hotel was experiencing trouble. The other stakeholders in the venture informed Government that the hotel needed a new injection of capital or it would have to be closed.
9. Acting to safeguard the jobs of workers at the hotel, Government asked the Royal Merchant Bank to use a part of the debt service guarantee to keep the hotel open. The devastating blow which international tourism took following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the USA worsened the situation for the hotel. The bankers decided it could not sustain the operation. After Government said it could not give any more financial support, the hotel was closed and placed in receivership.
10. Hyatt lost its US\$16 million investment in the property. The other investors also lost theirs. The folding of the hotel opened the way for the Royal Merchant Bank to call on the Government to honour its offer of a guarantee, whereupon the matter was taken before Parliament and approved as required by the Finance Administration Act of 1997. Provision was made in a money resolution passed last December for EC\$30 million to cover Government's obligations in relation to Hyatt. If the hotel did not fold, there would have been no need for the bank to activate the Government's guarantee.
11. The receiver sold the property to Sandals. Under the new ownership, more St Lucians are employed at the property than when it was under Hyatt. The hotel is also making a significant contribution to the economy through the international marketing of St Lucia's tourism product, the payment of wages, taxes, and the purchase of supplies from local farmers. Because the hotel is here to stay, Government expects that its net contribution over time will exceed the amount the country has had to forego through the guarantee. If Government had not supported the construction of the hotel, it would not be there in the first place. ●



The former Hyatt, now Sandals Grande hotel: at the centre of the Rochamel issue.

FACING THE COM

Government supports retooling efforts of local manufacturers

With Caribbean countries facing the inevitable of further integration into the global economy over the next few years, several critical questions naturally arise about the future of St Lucia and the region's other small economies.

One such question is: how best can each country safeguard its interests in the unfolding new dispensation, and overcome the pressures of globalization and trade liberalization being presented through the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and other arrangements being pursued at the level of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)?

There is, too, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), being established as a collective regional response to globalization. This initiative will soon be a reality and will fundamentally affect how business is done as a result of the freer movement of goods, capital and, to some extent, people across the region.

New Liberalized Environment

Looking at the issue strictly from the perspective of what should be the response of St Lucian business community, Minister for Commerce, Tourism, Investment and Consumer Affairs, Hon. Philip J. Pierre, is offering a timely piece of advice.

Ensuring that they have a future in the new liberalized environment, he says, lies in expanding capacity so as to cater for larger markets that will become available through the new trade arrangements, and also in adopting a more outward-looking development strategy.

"The Chamber of Commerce, the Manufacturers Association should now be looking at forming alliances, at forming strategies (through) which they can partner with companies from abroad, so that they can improve their methods of production, so that there can be a transfer of technology," Pierre says.

Economies of Scale

Perhaps the main bottleneck which has traditionally affected local business is the small size of their operations. This characteristic inhibits the achievement of what economists call 'economies of scale': namely, a reduction in unit costs resulting from increased production achieved through operational efficiencies.

Whenever there is an increase in production, the cost of production per unit falls and that's basically how economies of scale are achieved. It has always been a key ingredient in business success, especially in exporting.

As local businesses ponder the future, this issue undoubtedly assumes a special relevance since a company's success will be tied increasingly to how efficient and competitive it is, especially in relation to companies from elsewhere with whom it will have to compete.

\$7million Furniture Industry

The furniture industry, which produced \$7 million of products for sale on the local market last year, offers a good example of the challenges which local producers must overcome in order to adjust and successfully participate in the new marketplace.

At present, furniture manufacturers produce mainly for the domestic market where they enjoy Government protection afforded by an import licensing regime. However, in another few years, import licenses are likely to be phased out in keeping with St Lucia's obligations to open up its market under the WTO agreement.

If this happens, furniture manufacturers will face the prospect of competition in their home market for the first time. And it's most likely to come from Trinidad and Tobago, whose furniture producers are among the most efficient in the region.

Government is giving every possible support to the furniture industry to get it ready for the reality of competition. It is offering assistance with training, it has established a 'centre of excellence' where manufacturers have access to the latest technology to improve their designs, and it is also exploring the possibility of the bulk purchase of raw materials.

Challenges of Globalization

"...the problem with furniture manufacturing is that they cannot use the economies of scale for several reasons. They haven't got the market, they haven't got the space, and (there is) the cost of raw materials compared to what happens in the competition..." Pierre observes.

"If they can have a bulk purchase of raw materials for furniture, they can use economies of scale but they have to get together," he adds.

Recognizing the challenges as well as the opportunities which globalization and trade liberalization present to St Lucia, government has adopted an industrial policy as a sort of roadmap to chart a future for business on the island. Getting them export-ready was a key objective.



Hon. Philip J. Pierre, Minister for Commerce, Tourism, Investment and Consumer Affairs

"Already positive results are there. Some companies have heeded advice to retool and producers are emerging who are starting to look to the world as an export market," says Pierre.

He adds: "Right now, we send liquor to London and New York. We send condiments and pepper sauce to North America, to Africa and to London. And soon from now, a local manufacturer will be exporting to Japan."

While Government is seeking to build awareness among the business community about the challenges of competing in a liberalized marketplace, it has made clear that it does not intend to rush headlong into new trade agreements without carefully thinking through what will be the consequences for St Lucia.

Pierre suggests St Lucia has learnt from its experience in the WTO to which the former administration committed the island by signing up for WTO membership back in 1994. Against this backdrop, the Labour Government is taking a cautious approach towards taking St Lucia into the FTAA.

Expanded Markets in FTAA

The FTAA, which theoretically is supposed to embrace all the countries from Canada southwards to Argentina except Cuba, will create a market of 765 million people. The proposed western hemispheric economic powerhouse will produce over \$9 trillion in goods and services annually.

"St Lucia will not be signing as they signed the WTO years ago without looking at the bottom line so that this little country does not suffer unduly," Pierre makes clear. "That is the environment under which we operate."



The provision of factory space - another area of government support.

PETITION



St Lucian pepper sauce: a success story in penetrating export markets as far away as Africa.

Despite the challenges, Pierre does acknowledge there are opportunities which participation in the FTAA can open up for St Lucia.

If St Lucian manufacturers can rise to the occasion, we will have a larger market in which we can trade," he says. "Some of the opportunities that they have are that we can partner, we can have joint venture arrangements with firms from the FTAA."

But also there are several threats," Pierre points out, "and that is why the Prime Minister has said St Lucia will not enter the FTAA unless we can

negotiate a position that will benefit the people of St Lucia."

"...in the FTAA, the licensing regime that we use now to protect our local manufacturers will have to disappear. What is even more important is that the import duties from which we collect our revenue, under the FTAA, we can no longer impose any import duties.

"You can understand the situation that can exist under the FTAA," adds Pierre. ●



Bounty Rum: another St Lucian product reaping success in overseas markets.

Hurricane Season 2003

from page 1



Destruction from a tropical storm.

Beginning in 1994 Saint Lucia faced a barrage of hazards. These included, Tropical Storm Debby in 1994; the Oil Spill in the Cul de Sac Bay in 1995; the fires at Victoria Hospital and Patterson's Gap and the Tropical Wave of Jounen Creole in 1996; the Boguis Landslide of 1997; the rains of Independence in February and the Tropical Wave in October in which a child died in 1998; Hurricane Lenny and the Black Mallet/Maynard Hill Landslide in 1999; the attack at the Minor Basilica of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in 2000; Tropical Storm Lily in 2002.

Miss French noted that tropical storms Debbie (1994) and Lily (2002) put the resources and capabilities of the Dennery Disaster Committee to the test.

Community to the test

"In 1994 when the then WASA informed the Community that it would take weeks to bring water to the Community, because of the damage caused by tropical storm Debby, the Disaster Committee rallied and together with the Community of Dennery they traced the pipe line and repaired it. Shortening the projected time line from weeks to days."

She added "Tropical Storm Debby set the Committee to the test, as they were the focal point for NEMO's predecessor, the Office of Disaster Preparedness. Cut off from the North by landslides at the Barre D'Isle, relief supplies had to be airlifted to the Committee who were also responsible for the management of the Emergency Shelter, which had been opened, to house victims."

Disaster management has evolved over the past decade with the establishment of a wide range of supporting structures within

the communities and at the national level.

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) was established by the Heads of Government of CARICOM, while in St. Lucia, the Office of Disaster Preparedness was transformed into the National Emergency Management Organisation.

During the past decade also, communities island wide were engaged in the creation of a family of District Disaster Committees that now number seventeen (17), and are fully equipped to manage disasters. New satellite warehouses to compliment the future Central Warehouse of NEMO are now under construction.

While the country prepares for the hurricane season Miss French noted "Saint Lucia is located in a seismically active zone. That means earthquakes. We have had large quakes and we will again. The last massive earthquake in Saint Lucia was on March 19, 1953, which measured 7.5. That was fifty years ago this year, and forty-four years before that in 1909 we had a 7.0 magnitude earthquake are we in a cycle of massive earthquakes? Only time will tell.

Man made Disasters

Many other disasters are man made. "We are an independent nation and as a people we exert that independence regardless of the consequences. A stray cigarette can cause bush fires, poor agricultural practices can lead to deforestation and with an exposed hillside comes the potential for landslides while the indiscriminate manner in which we dispose of our refuse where we will, worsens floods." she cautioned. ●

DENNERY PROTECTING RESIDENTS FROM THE ENCROACHING SEAS

Dennery village has lost approximately four acres of its shoreline in the last 36 years due to beach erosion.

And experts are forecasting that unless action is taken to arrest the problem, another 2.5 acres could disappear in the next 25 years, leaving High Street, the village's main thoroughfare, under threat of direct attack from the sea.

Based on the current observed rate of erosion, the experts are also saying the row of houses south of the police station, could be under serious threat of destruction by the encroaching sea within the next 10 years.

According to the parliamentary representative for Dennery South, Hon. Damian Greaves, it has been an uncomfortable and uneasy situation for village residents, especially those living along the shoreline.

"....there is also option five which suggests a mix of options: a seawall, partial relocation of some of the houses, and also, as was clamoured for ... by the residents, a seawall that affords some commercial and touristic viability and this is what we are going for," says Greaves.

Development Plans

In fact, protecting the fragile coastline constitutes a key aspect of a proposed strategic physical development plan which Greaves is planning to develop for Dennery South with the help of the Ministry of Physical Development, Environment and Housing.

"The plan recognizes a number of issues," Greaves, the Minister for Health, Human Services and Family Affairs, explains. "It recognizes the need for land to expand for the purposes of housing. Secondly, it recognizes the vulnerability of the coastal areas... It also speaks to the ... challenge

He is also proposing the acquisition of land for low income housing development.

The water woes currently plaguing Dennery is soon expected to be a thing of the past as a \$3.2 million upgrade is in the works for the water system serving the community. The Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF), Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF), Water and Sewerage Company, and the Ministry of Communications, Works, Public Transport and Utilities together will finance the project, to be executed in phases.

Dennery is also looking to rake in more benefits from tourism. Two visitor stop centres – one in the LaPointe area and the other overlooking the village – were recently constructed.

There are plans to develop the Dennery waterfall and to expand the annual Dennery Village fish festival. In the case of the latter, the festival's organisers are understudying the Oistins Fish Festival, held every year

\$3.2 million upgrade in the works for the water system serving the Dennery community.



THE DENNERY FISHERIES COMPLEX: fishing is the leading economic activity in the village

But there is some good news. Government has taken steps to alleviate the anxieties of residents and is moving to provide a lasting solution to the problem which, it is believed, has been caused by the continuous removal of sand from the mouth of the Dennery river.

Seawall

The consulting firm, Smith Warner International, was hired to study the problem and to recommend solutions. And following the receipt of the report, Greaves says Government is considering "a mix of options to effect some measure of protection for the beach".

Construction of a 275 metre long seawall, seaward of the line of most threatened buildings, is one recommendation. Another involves adoption of an effective sand management plan to contain the erosion.

of the seasonal flooding that we experience in that village."

"The objective of the plan," Greaves goes on, "is to provide a strategic planning framework for the development of the constituency for the next 10 years and will propose a comprehensive land use regime. .. the expectation is for the plan to be completed by year-end."

Intended to ensure that future development in Dennery is carried out in an orderly fashion, the plan will address the crucial issues of land use for commercial and housing development.

Greaves believes that Dennery, because of its strategic location along the Castries to Vieux Fort highway between the north and south of the island, has the potential to be "the commercial buffer zone between the north and the south".



THE DENNERY BEACHFRONT: Government has started to address the persistent problem of beach erosion.

Hon. Damian Greaves; Parliamentary Representative for Dennery South

over the Easter weekend in Barbados, to see what they can learn from the Barbados experience.

"... the Tourist Board is on board, as well as the Ministry of Commerce, Tourism, Investment and Consumer Affairs," Greaves says. "They are going to assist us with the production work, the aquatic sports, the local marketing and the regional marketing plan."

"They are also going to assist us to vision forward," he adds. "This year, they will be assuming observer status so that they could help us with the future plans..." ●

BUILDING BOOM AHEAD

89 acre Choc Gardens Housing Development project The largest to be undertaken on the island.

Poisson highway. Because of this, large acreages of prime land, best suited for agriculture, have been lost to concrete and steel.

"This we are determined to bring under control," says Jean.

"The chaos that we have along the Castries/Gros Islet highway must not be replicated," he adds. "Today, the Government has to find vast sums in an attempt to correct this situation.... There must be order, there must be structured development, and the rule of law must prevail."

Tighter regulation of development projects is coming as St Lucia prepares for an intensification of construction activity over the coming months. The six-year-old Labour Government is leading the way to increase opportunities for home ownership, particularly for low income earners.

New National Housing Corporation (NHC) projects are earmarked for implementation at Black Bay, Vieux Fort; Cresslands, Soufriere; and Monchy, Gros Islet. The biggest project, however, is the proposed 89 acre Choc Gardens Development. It will be the

At Black Bay, 126 lots, ranging in size from 5,000 to 8,000 square feet, will go on the market as a result of the subdivision of 22 acres of land.

single largest housing development ever to be undertaken on the island.

At Choc, Government is proposing to provide 493 serviced lots ranging in size from 5,000 to 6,000 square feet for home construction. Fourteen acres of lots will be set aside exclusively for purchase by Government employees.

"It is part of the JQ Charles estate (bordering) Carellie to the south, the JQ Charles concrete block plant and the old Union Road to the

north, the Union hilltop development to the east, and the Sunny Acres Development to the west," says Jean, pointing out the location of the project.

"It is not the land along the coast or the Castries/Gros Islet highway," he adds.

The Choc Gardens development seeks to address an acute shortage of housing and available land for development in the north and north-western corridor of the island.

Jean says this project, announced by Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Dr. Kenny

retrofit and extend existing homes. The grant meets a crucial need as it is intended to serve as collateral so that the applicants can qualify for loans from lending institutions. Otherwise, such persons would not qualify for financing.

The PROUD initiative, under which Government is regularizing selected squatter settlements and giving dwellers the opportunity to purchase the land on which they live, adds further to the building boom.

Land prices under the programme range from \$1.50 to \$2.50 per square foot depending on the location. Before the lots are offered for sale, Government is putting in all the necessary infrastructure – roads, water, electricity, drainage, etc. The land prices are even lower when special discounts approved by Cabinet are added.



CHOC GARDENS: A panoramic view of the site of St Lucia's biggest-ever housing project.

D. Anthony in the 2003-04 Budget, has "created tremendous excitement". "I have been inundated with numerous enquiries," he says.

At Black Bay, 126 lots, ranging in size from 5,000 to 8,000 square feet, will go on the market as a result of the subdivision of 22 acres of land. Infrastructure costs are estimated at \$3.1 million. An additional \$2.6 million will be spent on the construction of homes.

Falling under the Caribbean Development Bank-funded Shelter Development Project, the Cresslands development will get going next month while the project at Monchy is scheduled to begin in October. The price tag on the two projects is \$23 million.

Meanwhile, considerable progress has been achieved on Beausejour phase two, a 40 acre development launched by the NHC two years ago. Under the \$12 million project, 184 lots have gone on the market. Until recently, only 35 remained to be allocated. Twenty two of 58 houses being built by the NHC have already been handed over the owners.

Government's newly launched Low Income Housing Credit Facility, under which households earning less than \$2,500 qualify for a non-repayable grant to help them acquire land or a home, will add to the building boom.

This \$7.6 million European Union-funded initiative also provides support by way of a grant to low income households looking to

"For example, someone who has been occupying in excess of 25 years, the Cabinet of Ministers has decided that there will be a reduction of \$1.50 per square foot for those persons," says Jean.

"For persons in excess of 15 years of occupation but less than 25 years, a reduction of \$1 per square foot. In excess of 10 years but less than 15 years, a reduction of 75 cents per foot and in excess of five years but less than 10 years, a reduction of 30 cents per square foot."

"This truly is about the empowerment of people," Jean declares. "We promised to put people first and this is what it is all about."

Jean is giving clients who purchase property from the NHC an assurance that they will have proper roads. The assurance comes against the backdrop of a few instances where the quality of roads in some developments was not up to standard. These cases date back to the Housing and Urban Development Corporation, predecessor of the NHC.

"HUDC under this administration of the Labour Government has never left any new project with bad roads," Jean makes clear.

"Neither will the DC (Development Control Authority) approve any new development whether from the private or public sector without the full compliance with the standards required by the Ministry of Communications, Works, Transport and Public Utilities," he adds. ●

Hon. Ignatius Jean; Minister for Physical Planning, Environment and Housing

Persons applying for planning permission to pursue building and other types of development in St Lucia, can look forward soon to getting a faster response from the planning authorities.

"This is of critical importance for the development of this country, for the unlocking of opportunities for business and employment generation," says Minister for Physical Planning, Environment and Housing, Hon. Ignatius Jean.

Speeding up of the planning approval process comes as the Ministry moves to improve customer service and its relations with the general public. The Ministry is also getting ready to promulgate the new Physical Planning and Development Act, as well as implement the island's new Building Code.

When the Physical Planning and Development Act officially becomes law sometime this month, authorities are planning to use its provisions to ensure closer monitoring of all forms of development taking place on the island, and see to it that such projects conform with the law.

This move comes against the backdrop of what Jean describes as a "plethora of unauthorized developments" that have been taking place in some sections of the island, particularly along the Cul de Sac/Ravine



HOUSING THE NATION: homes under construction at Beausejour.

CRICKET

SUSTAINING SPORTS, TOURISM & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The recent One Day International cricket match between Australia and the West Indies, once again put the new cricket ground at Beausejour to the test. It passed.



The sight of almost 100 youngsters playing cricket and going through some choreographed coaching routines have become commonplace during the lunch breaks of games between the West Indies and visiting cricket teams. They adorned the immaculate greens of the Beausejour Cricket Ground during the third One Day International between the West Indies and Australia on May 21, 2003.

The massive turnout of cricket fans at the Beausejour Cricket Ground (BCG), to witness the West Indies play Australia in the third of seven one day international cricket matches, was unprecedented. The BCG packed to capacity.

Batting first, on what was a relatively friendly batting surface, the Australians posted 258 for four in their allotted 50 overs. The West Indies, replied with 233 for 9. West Indies lost the match.

But according to Minister for Sports, Hon. Mario Michel, notwithstanding the final result of the match, St. Lucia has been able to position itself on a prestigious list of possible venues for playing host to the Cricket World Cup in 2007.

"It was important for St. Lucians to turn up in the way that they did. This is the last time that St. Lucia would be hosting a one day international before the bids have actually been decided upon, and we are hoping that the BCG will be on that list," Michel said.

THE CHANGING FACE OF CASTRIES



STEP ONE : Occupants notified of dangers and demolition plans

Up to end of March 2003, Block CS on Jeremie street in Castries was home to many families some of whom had occupied apartments on the top floor of the building for over thirty years. Apartments on the ground floor were leased by small entrepreneurs who operated wholesale and retail liquor stores, dry goods and variety shops. Popularly known as the CDC buildings, the residential and commercial block was among many built, by the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC) to house persons who were displaced after a huge fire razed the port town of Castries in 1948.

In recent times the block CS and also block GS on its opposite side on Jeremie street began to lean. In fact when the music trucks for the carnival bands passed this route, once upon a time, the building shook. They were deemed unfit for use and demolition was recommended. It happened in April 2003. Block GS was demolished early May 2003.



STEP TWO : hazardous materials removed

The demolition of blocks CS and GS of the CDC apartments in Castries have been completed.

The Housing Corporation implemented all public safety measures and the task was completed with minimal disruptions in traffic flow in Castries. Workers firstly removed the roof and the balcony railings, which were made up of asbestos. These materials were removed very quickly in the interest of public safety. Then the mass demolition of the physical shell of the building was done.

Blocks CS and GS of the CDC are now history.



STEP THREE : building demolished

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Contact us at: The Department of Information Services, Grahame Louisy Administrative Building, The Waterfront, Castries, St. Lucia, West Indies
Tel: (758) 468 2116; Fax (758) 453 1614; E-mail: gis@candw.lc; http://stlucia.gov.lc