



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Environment and Planning
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER

Ministerial Statement
To The House of Assembly

By

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Minister of Environment and Planning

Public Consultation for a Marine Reserve
Friday, 7th June, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

Mr. Speaker

I rise today to inform this Honourable House of this Government's plans to conduct a public consultation to ascertain the views of the wider community on a proposal to establish a marine reserve in our Exclusive Economic zone, or EEZ. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Bermuda has special rights over the exploration and use of the natural resources within our EEZ, including managing and conserving those resources. Our EEZ is essentially a circle with a 200 nautical mile radius that covers approximately 465,000 square kilometers of ocean.

Mr. Speaker

Bermuda is recognized internationally as a leader in efforts to study and protect the world's oceans. You would be aware that the Bermuda Institute for Ocean Sciences is recognized worldwide for its research and education programmes. You would also be aware that the Sargasso Sea Alliance, an initiative led by the Bermuda Government, is working to establish a

means to protect High Seas in Areas Beyond National Jurisdictions, or ABNJs. The Executive Committee of the Alliance has just been granted the 2013 Sea Keeper Award by the International SeaKeepers Society in recognition of its efforts to protect the Sargasso Sea. It is the hope of the Alliance that the methods determined for the Sargasso Sea will be utilized for other ABNJs.

Mr. Speaker

The Government of Bermuda understands that its efforts to encourage others to join it in this global effort would be significantly enhanced by continuing to demonstrate our commitment to protecting our own waters. To this end, the Government will consider establishing a Marine Reserve within our EEZ. It is important to note that the term “marine reserve” indicates a “no-take” zone with a prohibition on all extraction from any component of the reserve. A “no-take” marine reserve therefore means no fishing, no seabed mining, etc. The public consultation will assist the Government in determining whether or not there should be a “no-take” marine reserve, and if so, the size, shape, and location of that zone.

The public consultation would be designed to garner the views of all individuals and groups who have an interest in the future use of our EEZ. For example, **Mr. Speaker**, some would advocate for the largest “no-take” zone possible. You have probably seen promotions for what has been described as the “Bermuda Blue Halo” in this regard. Such is the importance of this effort that even a US based organization, the Pew Environment Group, are actively seeking to educate and advocate for the benefits to be realized from establishing the largest possible “no-take” zone.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, other groups, such as the Billfishers who visit us annually to enjoy game fishing, and in so doing contribute millions of dollars into our economy, are keen to ensure that they are able to continue this activity in Bermuda.

Closer to home, there are organizations interested in exploring the potential for revenue from seabed mining. Our fisherman would want to ensure that they can retain their livelihood. Recreational boaters would want to ensure that they are able to enjoy a day on the water, and be able to throw a line overboard.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, there are many groups and individuals who have an interest in the decision to be made. This Government wishes to ensure that each of these voices is given an opportunity to be heard before a decision is taken.

Mr. Speaker

In order to help the public make an informed response to the public consultation, the process we envision would include an educational component. The benefits and costs of establishing a marine reserve have been evaluated by experts in economics, science and our cultural history. Their findings are summarized in a Consultation Document, which will be widely distributed. In addition, a two page summary will also be made available to the public as it is anticipated that there will be interest in varying levels of detail. We anticipate that all reports would be available at the office of the Sustainable Development Department, at other key Government locations including the library and a number of post offices, and online at www.sdbermuda.bm.

The consultation period is set to commence before the end of July, 2013 and will run for at least two months. Various methodologies will be employed to ensure that a wide-ranging set of responses is obtained. These methods will include: electronic postings, an electronic questionnaire, a two-page mail out to residents, print and radio advertising, focus groups, stakeholder consultations, school presentations, public meetings and an educational video.

Mr. Speaker

In seeking a balanced public response, it is critical to engage as many residents as possible to provide input to Cabinet on how best to proceed with this national asset, with due consideration for current and future generations. In order to ensure that a comprehensive and unbiased set of responses is obtained, it is imperative that we seek information without holding a preconceived position. Therefore the Government is not entering this process with a pre-determined outcome in mind. Respondents will be asked to select one of five options to the question “Do you think a marine reserve **should be established in the offshore waters of Bermuda's Exclusive Economic Zone?**” The responses to the consultation will be carefully considered. I should add that it will not be as simple as counting the number of votes for each option presented.

Respondents will be encouraged to support their position, and those arguments will form a critical part of the overall evaluation.

To foster the objectivity of the process, the Sustainable Development Department will oversee the consultation process using as its guideline the “Code of Practice on Consultation”.

Mr. Speaker

I would like to encourage all of Bermuda to participate in the public consultation and to voice their opinion on how Bermuda should manage this most important national asset, both for today, and for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker