



Senatorial Statement

by

The Senator Lindsay Simmons-Wilson, JP
Junior Minister of Home Affairs

Wednesday, 11th December 2024

Release of the Climate Change Study entitled
*“Bermuda and Climate Change: Impacts from Sea Level Rise and
Changing Storm Activity.”*

Madame President,

I rise today to share with this Honourable body a significant step forward in Bermuda’s commitment to addressing one of the most critical challenges of our time: the impacts of climate change.

Madame President, the world is changing faster than many anticipated. While future generations—our children and grandchildren—will bear the brunt of climate-related impacts, we already see clear signs of this change here in Bermuda. Recent events have highlighted the unprecedented shifts in our weather patterns and seasonal conditions. For example:

- September saw the second-wettest day on record, contributing to 2023 being the wettest year on record.
- We are experiencing increased flooding in low-lying areas.
- The frequency of major storms impacting our region continues to rise, as evidenced by Hurricane Ernesto this summer, Bermuda’s eighth direct hit this century.
- Ocean temperatures and sea levels continue to increase year on year.

Madame President, although Bermuda’s contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions is minimal, our vulnerability to the impacts of climate change is significant. As a small island state, our geographic isolation, limited resources, and reliance on critical coastal infrastructure, such as the L.F. Wade International Airport, key roadways, and power systems, place us at heightened risk. Issues such as saltwater intrusion, coastal erosion, and storm damage jeopardise our homes, businesses, and economy.

Climate change is no longer a distant threat—it is affecting Bermuda today and it is projected to continue with potentially far-reaching consequences for all of us who call Bermuda home. We stand at a critical juncture and must act decisively to protect and preserve our island for future generations.

Madame President, In March 2022, the Government commissioned a comprehensive study, *Bermuda and Climate Change: Impacts from Sea Level Rise and Changing Storm Activity*, which was to be conducted in collaboration with Smith Warner International (SWI) and funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO). The purpose of which was to assess Bermuda’s vulnerabilities to rising sea levels and intensified storm activity; and

Secondly, the Ministry of Home Affairs had formed an *interministerial Climate Change Taskforce (CCTF)* to provide oversight to SWI as they undertook this study. This Taskforce comprised representatives from key ministries and departments, including: The Ministry of Home Affairs – which oversees the Department of Energy, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Public Works; The Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transport, the Cabinet Office which oversees the Department of Planning; and the Bermuda Weather Service’s then Director, Dr. Mark Guishard. Dr. Guishard is now the Chief Operating Officer of the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences

(BIOS) but he has remained committed to the Taskforce in his new role, and for this we are truly grateful for his expertise.

Madame President, At the outset of this initiative, the Government recognised the importance of a coordinated and strategic approach to effectively tackling climate change. By unifying efforts, we aimed to reduce duplication across Ministries and other organizations, enhance understanding of ongoing initiatives, and leverage the extensive expertise available across various sectors.

I will take a moment to thank the Ministries involved, their technical officers, along with Ms. Rozy Azhar, the former Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Home Affairs, for their dedication to this critical project.

Madame President, I am pleased to announce that the resulting report and related resources has been shared with the public and is now available on the Government Portal at **gov.bm/climatechange**.

I urge all members and the entire Bermuda public, to review the findings of this comprehensive study. There are four extensive technical parts to the study, but there is a shorter, more easily readable Executive Summary of the report that is also available.

This is a wide-ranging study – the first of its scale undertaken by the Bermuda Government – and one that, thanks to the UK Government’s

commitment to Bermuda as an Overseas Territory, has not been a drain on our public purse.

Madame President, SWI, who are based in Jamaica, have extensive experience working in many other small island jurisdictions, including other British Overseas Territories such as the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos. They have also previously undertaken similar work in Bermuda, for the Department of Planning, in 2004 with their report on coastal erosion, making them an ideal choice to undertake this important work.

The SWI reports, provide in-depth analysis, assessment and understanding of the potential effects of climate change on Bermuda using the latest data available from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate (UNIPCC) and through their own local assessments to:

- Produce a vulnerability assessment for major infrastructure such as the airport, ports, public highways, the electricity generation plant, subterranean utility cabling, the Tyne's Bay incinerator, and sewage management systems;
- Identify the likely effects of sea level rise from an ecological perspective on Bermuda's waterways, inshore ponds, and marshes;

- Map projections for inundation, identifying both low-lying coastal areas that will be periodically or permanently inundated by seawater, and low-lying freshwater resources that could be impacted by saltwater intrusion;
- Identify Government infrastructure and facilities located at or close to the shoreline that are at risk from erosion or inundation;
- Identify agricultural areas vulnerable to saltwater inundation and to soil salinization, within the context of food security and continued ability to cultivate fields;
- Update coastal erosion and flood inundation projections for the offshore islands, bays, beaches and dunes, especially during storms and hurricanes;
- Understand the effects that coastal erosion and sea level rise will have and their potential impacts on waterfront development;
- Identify coastal areas prone to hydraulic erosion and / or destabilization of the cliff faces for the island shoreline areas; and
- Identify critical infrastructure that will be at risk over the near, medium and long-term time frames.

Additionally, the report identifies significant risks for Bermuda's existing built and natural environment including:

- Some two thousand one hundred and thirty (2130) of Bermuda's buildings, some six per cent (6%), face some level of risk, with 326 classified as highly exposed.
- Critical areas, including major roadways, the BELCO plant, and the airport, are at risk.
- A staggering 96 per cent of our coastal reserves require protection.

Finally, the report recommends adaptive measures, such as shoreline advancement, submerged breakwaters, and land reclamation which are available and which will need to be undertaken. Whatever of these strategies we undertake, they must of course balance protection with the preservation of environmental integrity.

Madame President, to address these risks we will be establishing an expanded **Multi-sectoral Climate Change Task Force**. Given the serious threat that climate change poses to every single person in Bermuda, this taskforce will include members of the public, private and third sector. It will be tasked with:

1. Assisting in the creation of a **National Action Plan for Bermuda**, and prioritized recommendations for action;

2. **Public Education and Outreach**, by launching an awareness campaign to foster community understanding and engagement. This will include meetings with stakeholder groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, the construction industry, engineers, surveyors, and environmental groups;
3. **Legislative and Policy Adaptation**, ensuring both the Bermuda Plan and Bermuda Building Codes are amended to include considerations for climate resilience; and
4. **Instituting Nature-Based Solutions**, with continuing investments in ecosystem restoration, such as mangrove and coral reef rehabilitation which reduce storm surges and erosion whilst also preserving biodiversity.

These efforts will be coordinated by a dedicated project manager to provide support and strategic guidance to our inter-related initiatives.

Bermuda, **Madame President**, has an opportunity to lead by example. As a global hub for climate risk and insurance expertise, we can model resilience and innovation for other small island states. Collaboration at every level will be essential as we work to secure resources and solutions.

Madame President, I again urge all members of this Honourable body and the entire Bermuda public to read the report. It is available at

gov.bm/climatechange. There is also a dedicated email, climatechange@gov.bm for questions and comments.

Climate change is the defining issue of our time. By acting now, we can safeguard Bermuda's natural beauty, economy, and way of life for generations to come. Thank you, **Madame President**.