



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Health, Seniors and Environment

Ministerial Statement to the
House of Assembly

by the Minister of Health, Seniors and Environment

The Honourable Jeanne J. Atherden, JP, MP

On 27th June, 2014

“Accreditation of the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo”

Mr. Speaker and Honourable colleges, I rise this morning to report to the Members of this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda on the recent accreditation of the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo (BAMZ), by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

Mr. Speaker, BAMZ continues to be one of the island's most popular attractions, especially for children and families. Last year 84,000 people visited the aquarium and zoo exhibits. Over 6,300 students participated in the educational programs offered by its supporting charity the Bermuda Zoological Society. The Natural History Library and Museum, with its unique natural history collection, continues to be a very well used resource assisting not only school children in their studies but also international researchers including the Smithsonian Institute.

Mr. Speaker, BAMZ has been accredited by the AZA since 1994 ensuring that the facility meets the highest standard industry standards. This rigorous process must be repeated every five years.

Mr. Speaker, The AZA is a United States based non-profit organisation, founded in 1924, dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquarium worldwide in the areas of conservation, education, science and recreation. The AZA sets a global standard that all zoos and aquariums strive for. Currently there are only 224 institutions accredited by the AZA.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of accreditation are many. Accreditation provides impartial evaluation by professional colleagues, promoting excellence through continuous self evaluation and professional recognition from the top zoological parks and aquariums. It increases eligibility for international grants and is critical for the transfer of animals. It also provides staff an invaluable opportunity to learn from experts from some of the best Zoos in world.

Mr. Speaker, the process for attaining accreditation is rigorous and requires the approval by the AZA Accreditation Commission. This Commission is comprised of twenty experts in their respective fields, each having many years of experience and education in zoo and aquarium operations, animal management, and veterinary medicine.

Mr. Speaker, evaluation is multifaceted and is based on the following areas: animal management and husbandry; veterinary medicine programs; conservation and education programs; safety policies and procedures; security; physical facilities; guest services; quality of institutional staff and finally finances.

Mr. Speaker, in early September 2013, BAMZ submitted its accreditation submission which comprised a 1076 page report on the operations of the facility, as well as its supporting charity, the Bermuda Zoological Society (BZS). This report included copies of organization's policies, procedures, records, lists, and reports.

Mr. Speaker, in November 2013, BAMZ hosted three AZA Accreditation Inspectors for four days. These experts were given free access to go anywhere on the facility and review any record they chose. Interviews were held with staff and management independently to allow staff to speak freely. Following the visit, an inspection report was submitted to the AZA Accreditation

Committee. Copies were also provided to the Director of the Department of Conservation Services and the BAMZ Principal Curator.

In April 2014, Dr. Walker, the Principal Curator, attended a mandatory meeting of the Accreditation Committee in the US to support the BAMZ submission. Subsequently the Commission voted unanimously to grant accreditation to the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo from 2014 to 2019.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to mention some of the outstanding achievements noted by the inspectors. As reported these included comments such as:

- *The “educational programs for school children are creative, innovative and free;*
- *the BZS education vessel, “Endurance”, is a wonderful opportunity for children to be on and in the water to learn about their precious marine resources;*
- *the Madagascar exhibit is state-of-the art and a wonderful addition to the island theme;*
- *the veterinary hospital, quarantine areas and state-of-the art reptile exhibits represent the best in zoological practises;*
- *the museum library is a treasure trove of knowledge about Bermuda focusing on natural history and science;*
- *and all staff that we met are enthusiastic, professional and exhibit a team approach to facing challenges and solving problems.”*

Mr. Speaker, BAMZ has been able to achieve this in no small part because of its long-term partnership with the Bermuda Zoological Society, its major support charity. The Government provides the infrastructure and staffing to operate the BAMZ, while the charity serves to staff and operate the well regarded education and conservation research components of the facility. In addition the BZS raises funds to assist with new exhibits and innovative programs that greatly benefit the community.

The BAMZ and BZS have recently completed a 10 year capital campaign goal which has seen the addition of the Madagascar exhibit, Animal Care Center, Veterinary Hospital, Azu Beastro

Cafe, BZS's floating classroom RV Endurance and a host of other smaller improvements. All of this would not have been possible without the synergistic relationship between the BAMZ and the BZS and their private partners.

Mr. Speaker, Further enhancements are planned for this coming year with the most major project being the replacement of the Aquarium roof scheduled to begin in October. This much needed and technically challenging project will require the Aquarium to be closed for several months while works are completed. However,

BAMZ and BZS staff are hard at work to update the interior of the aquarium hall during the closure so it will return with a refreshed look. I look forward to providing updates on the progress in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, In closing, continued AZA accreditation represents “an external stamp of approval” and pushes BAMZ to continue to innovate and raise the standards of the facility. Consequently, BAMZ frequently receives high marks both from locals and visitors alike, an example being the Certificate of Excellence from **TripAdvisor** that it has just received. BAMZ is truly a community asset that is well utilized and for which we can all be justifiably proud.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bermuda Government I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Andrew Pettit (Director of Conservation Services) and Dr. Ian Walker (Principal Curator of Conservation Services), and all of the staff and volunteers at BAMZ and BZS for a job well done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.