



## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By

**The Hon. Alexa Lightbourne, JP, MP**

Minister of Home Affairs

### **Bermuda's Next Steps with CARICOM**

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**Mr. Speaker,**

I rise to signal to this Honourable House that we will today release the Green Paper on Bermuda's Application for Full Membership in the Caribbean Community.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This represents an invitation to the people of Bermuda to examine the evidence, weigh the arguments, and share their thoughts with the Government.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Green Paper examines how Bermuda can move from the margins of regional decision-making to its centre. It sets out the strategic framework, the historical context, the constitutional constraints, the costs, and the benefits of full CARICOM membership. It presents the implications plainly. And it invites the scrutiny of every Bermudian.

Today, at 1pm, the public is invited to tune in to Government social media channels as we launch the public consultation.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This Government has been transparent about its intentions. The Hon. Premier tasked the Ministry of Home Affairs with leading this work, and the Ministry has adopted a two-phased approach.

In the first phase, we consulted directly with stakeholders across a broad cross-section of Bermuda's civic, sporting, cultural, labour, and business institutions. We met with the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, the West Indian Association of Bermuda, the Bermuda Public Services Union, the Bermuda Cricket Board, the Bermuda Olympic Association, the Bermuda Credit Union, Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda, the Ministry of National Security, the One Bermuda Alliance and more- . Their input collectively shaped this document.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We also added a question to the 4th Quarter Omnibus Survey to gather baseline sentiment among Bermudians. The areas that made full CARICOM membership a viable direction for the government to take were identified as food security, climate resilience, energy resilience, healthcare, public safety, education and training opportunities.

These are the daily concerns of Bermudian families. They are the same issues that occupy the centre of CARICOM's regional agenda. And they are the same issues that were discussed at the 50th CARICOM Heads of Government Conference in Basseterre, St. Kitts and Nevis, just two weeks ago.

Now, the second phase begins. The Green Paper invites the public to read, to question, and to respond. Over the coming months, the Ministry will engage directly with stakeholders across the community to share information and to listen. The Green Paper invites the public to consider and respond on matters ranging from whether Bermuda should seek a greater role in CARICOM's engagement with international partners, to what concerns Bermudians may have about deeper integration.

The Government will accept written submissions through the Ministry of Home Affairs. Details of the submission process, public meetings, and the timeline for the Government's response will be published separately. The

public is invited for a launch which will take place at 1pm today on the governments social media channels and civv.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Some will ask: why now? The answer is that the world has changed around us, and the terms of our participation have not kept pace.

Almost 23 years ago, Former Premier Dame Jennifer Smith brought a historic motion to the House of Assembly that set Bermuda on the path to CARICOM Associate Membership. Bermuda became an Associate Member in 2003, following the Conference of Heads of Government decision at its Thirteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting in Belize City in February 2002. The Agreement between caricom and Bermuda confirms us as observer status at Meetings of the Conference of Heads of Government and the Community Council of Ministers; participation without vote in the deliberations of most subsidiary bodies; and explicit exclusion from the Council for Foreign and Community Relations, known as COFCOR, and from all discussions relating to foreign policy in any Organ of the Community.

That decision was right for its time. Associate Membership gave us a framework for regional cooperation, and we have used it. Our uniformed services train alongside their Caribbean counterparts. Caribbean utility crews helped restore Bermuda's power after Hurricane Fabian. The Bermuda Regiment deployed to support Caribbean recovery after Hurricanes Ivan, Irma, and Maria. We compete in the CARIFTA Games. We sent eighteen artists, musicians, and Gombey dancers to CARIFESTA in Barbados in 2025.

But Associate Membership has reached its structural limits. We are in the room but not at the table. We participate but we do not decide. And as the challenges facing small island economies intensify, the gap between attendance and partnership grows wider.

**Mr. Speaker,**

ninety percent of what Bermudians eat comes from overseas. Ninety-eight percent of our electricity is generated from imported fuel. When global shipping is disrupted or fuel prices rise, the cost of groceries, electricity, and transport rises with it. These are the same pressures felt across the Caribbean. CARICOM members are confronting them collectively.

Bermuda is on the sidelines of those conversations. This Green Paper asks us to consider if we want to remain outside of those conversations.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Before I speak to the contents of the Green Paper, I must speak to the story it tells. Because the question of CARICOM is not only a question of policy. It is a question of identity.

Our history has never been solitary. For more than three centuries, Bermudian vessels sailed the Caribbean Sea. From the 1660s, our seafarers worked the salt pans of the Turks Islands. Our shipwrights, many of them enslaved, built some of the fastest sloops in the Atlantic. Our families put down roots from Grand Turk to Kingston. The surnames Bradshaw, Charles, Thomas, Scott, , Lambert, Smith, Bean, Crisson, DeGraff, Durham, Adderley, Haskell, Wood, Spencer, Frith, Talbot, and Tatem are found on both sides of that historic connection to this day.

The connections to St. Kitts and Nevis run particularly deep. More than half of Bermuda's population traces ancestral roots to those islands. The Honorary Consul for St. Kitts and Nevis has documented that hundreds came to Bermuda for work after the decline of the slavery-based sugar industry, with emigration increasing from 1875 as workers came to build Watford Bridge and later the Royal Naval Dockyard. The neighbourhoods around Victor Scott Primary School in Pembroke were settled largely by Kittitian families.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Our most celebrated cultural tradition carries this connection in its bones. The Gombey is Bermuda's distinct art form, recognised by UNESCO in 1970. But it did not emerge in isolation. The Gombey tradition shares direct lineage with the Masquerade dance troupes of St. Kitts and Nevis. The same headdresses. The same masks. The same capes decorated with mirrors, ribbons, and bells. The same drums.

When the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, Bermuda and Antigua became the first colonies to implement full emancipation.

That act of liberation did not happen in isolation. It was part of a chain that stretched through the Bahamas, through the wider Caribbean, and into the conscience of the abolition movement. Bermuda's story is the Caribbean's story. It always has been.

And yet, **Mr. Speaker,**

During our consultations, we heard something that must be placed on the parliamentary record. We heard from Bermudians whose parents deliberately concealed their Caribbean heritage from their own children. They did this not out of shame, but out of fear. Fear that acknowledging where they came from would make their children targets. Fear rooted in a colonial narrative that told us we are not like them.

Who benefits from that narrative? Not our families. Not our children. Not Bermuda.

***Division has kept us small. Connection makes us strong.***

**Mr. Speaker,**

Let me turn to what this Green Paper sets before the people of Bermuda. The Paper is organised into five chapters. It begins with an explanation of what CARICOM is, how it functions, and what full membership entails. It

addresses Bermuda's constitutional status as a British Overseas Territory and the constraints that status places on our participation. It sets out the history of Bermuda's relationship with CARICOM across nearly thirty years of engagement. It examines the tangible benefits of full membership in the areas that matter most to Bermudians: cost of living, trade and economic opportunity, climate resilience, healthcare and education, and cultural connection. And it presents the results of the stakeholder consultations and the Omnibus Survey.

The Paper is direct about costs. Bermuda's current annual contribution as an Associate Member, the indicative contribution as a Full Member would be approximately 0.16 percent of the Government's 2025/26 annual expenditure. The Government's position is that Bermuda's financial contribution should reflect the terms of membership we are able to accept, and the final figure will be determined through negotiation.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Paper is also direct about protections. Bermuda will retain full authority over its immigration framework and labour market. The existing work permit system remains in place. The Government's approach to the Caribbean Single Market and Economy is measured and phased. Bermuda's regulatory authority over financial services will not be compromised. The 60/40 ownership rule will not be automatically dismantled by membership. These are commitments stated plainly in the Green Paper for every Bermudian to read.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Green Paper also sets out what Bermuda brings to the table. Enhanced participation is not a one-way request.

Bermuda is the world's risk capital, home to a sophisticated insurance and reinsurance market of direct benefit to Caribbean nations facing increasing climate-related losses. Bermuda pioneered the regulatory framework for

digital assets through the Digital Asset Business Act 2018 and is now developing AI governance frameworks.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Bermuda's participation strengthens CARICOM's collective negotiating weight and extends its geographic footprint into the mid-Atlantic. This is a partnership of mutual benefit.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I wish now to share with this Honourable House what I witnessed at the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM, held in Basseterre, St. Kitts and Nevis, from 24 to 27 February. The Conference theme was "Beyond Words: Action Today for a Thriving, Sustainable CARICOM." For the first time in over a decade, every CARICOM Head of Government was present.

The Premier and I attended. We participated in the Opening Ceremony and in bilateral engagements with Overseas Territories leaders. The benefits of attendance were significant. We strengthened bilateral relationships. We engaged directly with regional leaders. We advanced Bermuda's profile within the Community. These are the relationships that open doors for Bermudian businesses, students, and institutions.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Our presence demonstrated the seriousness with which this Government approaches regional engagement and the evolution of our membership journey.

On 25 February, United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio attended the Conference. It was the first visit by a U.S. Secretary of State to a CARICOM Heads meeting in approximately a decade. Secretary Rubio engaged CARICOM leaders on matters of direct consequence to Bermuda: regional security cooperation, energy partnership, economic growth, trade and

investment, combating illicit trafficking, and the future of U.S.-Caribbean relations in a period of significant geopolitical realignment.

All overseas territories were informed that the substantive engagement session between Secretary Rubio and CARICOM leaders would not be open to their attendance or participation.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Bermuda, was in the building, but not in the room.

Cooperation Framework covering migration, security, trade, investment, and disaster recovery. These are issues that affect Bermudian lives directly. Bermuda had no voice in shaping that framework.

The US-CARICOM engagement alone makes the case for why Associate Membership is no longer sufficient. But it is not the only example. That is the cost of Associate Membership in 2026.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This House should understand the constitutional framework clearly. Bermuda's status as a British Overseas Territory means the UK retains responsibility for external affairs, defence, and security. The Governor holds reserved powers under Section 60(1) of the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968.

The UK has progressively expanded Bermuda's authority to engage regionally. In 2016, a Letter of Entrustment, requested by the OBA Administration, granted general authority to conclude agreements with Caribbean regional organisations including CARICOM, PAHO, ECLAC, and CARPHA. On 20 February 2024, a further Letter of Entrustment specifically authorised Bermuda to negotiate full CARICOM membership.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I draw this House's attention to an important fact. The 2016 Entrustment was sought and secured by the One Bermuda Alliance Government. The 2024 Entrustment was secured by this Government. The pursuit of stronger CARICOM ties is not a partisan initiative. It has bipartisan precedent. Both governments have recognised the value of this engagement. It is a commitment that reflects the settled judgment of successive Bermuda governments.

The 2024 Letter comes with conditions. Bermuda's representative must abstain on issues bearing directly on external relations, defence, or security. Any proposed membership text must be submitted to the FCDO for review. A further Letter of Entrustment will be required before Bermuda can formally accede. In January 2026, the UK provided additional guidance clarifying how Bermuda's status constrains participation in certain Treaty provisions.

These constraints are real, and the Green Paper addresses them in detail. But they do not prevent Bermuda from deepening our relationship. The vast majority of CARICOM's practical work, in health, education, trade, food security, climate resilience, digital infrastructure, and cultural cooperation, falls within Bermuda's delegated authority. The areas constrained by UK guidance relate primarily to external affairs and binding international arbitration.

CARICOM membership and strong UK-US ties are not in tension. They are complementary. Our Caribbean neighbours are themselves America's trading partners, security allies, and neighbours. Deepening our partnership with them does not diminish our relationships with Washington and London.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We have heard the concerns take them seriously. We also take seriously the responsibility to distinguish concern from fear, and fear from fiction.

Some say Bermudians will lose jobs. The Green Paper is clear: Bermuda retains full control over immigration and work permits. Full membership does

not grant CARICOM nationals the right to live or work here. The work permit system stays.

Some say international companies will leave. The Green Paper is clear: Bermuda's economic substance requirements, its world-class regulatory environment, and its concentration of global expertise in reinsurance, FinTech, and professional services are the reasons companies operate here. Membership in CARICOM does not change any of that.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Fearmongering has run its course. The Green Paper replaces speculation with evidence. It replaces anxiety with information. It puts every claim to the test of fact.

I say to every Bermudian: read the Paper. Examine it. Challenge it. Bring your hopes and your skepticism. That is exactly what this process is designed for.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This consultation places the people of Bermuda in the driver's seat. Too often in our history, decisions about our place in the world have been made for us. Too often, the question of who we are and where we belong has been answered by others. This process is different. This Green Paper gives Bermudians the facts, the analysis, and the framework. The next step belongs to you.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This country has always known who it is. A Caribbean island. A mid-Atlantic bridge. A financial centre of global standing. A community built by generations who sailed between these worlds and made them one.

The structures that kept us at the margins of our own region's decision-making no longer reflect who we are or what we are capable of. Bermuda does not need permission to believe in its own value. It needs the standing to act on it.

The question this Green Paper puts to the people of Bermuda is whether we seize this opportunity. Whether we participate in the trade relationships, climate partnerships, and regional conversations our Caribbean neighbours are leading. Whether we claim the seat that is waiting for us.

At its heart, ***this is the story of us.***

The answer should be guided by self-belief, by self-assurance, and by an honest understanding of who we are and where we stand in this region.

***Division has kept us small. Connection makes us strong.***

And every Bermudian has a place in this story.

You are invited to find your place in it. Bring your hopes, your skepticism, and your solutions. The future we build will reflect the care we give this moment.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**