



Cabinet Office

Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Michael H. Dunkley, JP, MP.
Premier and Minister of National Security

Bermuda's Exclusive Economic Zone

Monday, 16th March, 2015

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will be aware that in November, 2014, the Government released the report on "The Future of Bermuda's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)". This report outlined the major findings and conclusions arising from the public consultation that was carried out by the Sustainable Development Department (SDD) in 2013.

This consultation resulted in significant participation from the public. Proposals included diverse opportunities on how to best use the EEZ. Some expressed material support for establishing a marine reserve. Others suggested that Bermuda has the potential to become the "Davos of Ocean Health," whereby massive international attention could result in increased ocean science research being conducted along with ocean-focused conferences and additional convention business emerging.

Additionally, the commercial fishing industry endorsed the position that Bermuda's offshore waters represent the future of local fishing, with the capacity

for growth and diversification of the economy. Another view presented was that valuable marketable minerals are waiting to be sourced and extracted from our sea bed. Those in favour of this activity posit great potential economic gains in the future.

Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of this comprehensive report, under Section 7, **Next Steps**, the Government undertook to issue *"a request-for-quote (RFQ) to determine the cost of an independent feasibility study which will assess, forecast and quantify the potential economic activity within Bermuda's EEZ. This step would ensure "a more rigorous evaluation of the identified options and should provide the Government and people of Bermuda with a reliable economic profile to inform future decision making."*

Mr. Speaker, I must report that it is currently not possible for this specific step to be progressed, as planned. Honourable Members are aware of our budget restraints and our need to prioritise what are our urgent needs as opposed to what is desirable. Unfortunately, for the next fiscal year, the budgeting for the cost of the feasibility study for our EEZ could not be justified when compared with providing for the immediate social and economic needs of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, be assured that we have only deferred the planning for the study and we will be reviewing the possibility of budgeting for the feasibility study over the fiscal years of 2016/ 2017 and 2017/2018. We are cognisant of the number of opportunities that Bermuda's EEZ can yield for its people, both economically and environmentally.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members can be reassured that, until the study is done and a strategic plan is agreed, the Government will continue to ensure that Bermuda's maritime environment will continue to be well protected. Please allow me to highlight some of the regulatory measures currently in place.

Bermuda has many regulations aimed at protecting marine species and habitats, including all corals, marine turtles, marine mammals, parrot fish, several species of groupers, etc. The protection of our marine environment dates back to our earliest history. Early settlers were so concerned about the dwindling numbers of turtles in 1620, after only 11 years on the Island, that they banned the harvest of young turtles. This is thought to be the first fisheries legislation passed in the New World.

Turtle harvest was eventually banned altogether in 1978. Methods of collection have also been limited including bans or restrictions on dynamite fishing, gill nets, trawls, fish pots, spear guns, and long-lines. Bermuda also has a number of spatial management measures in place and seasonal closures by species and area.

Although these measures were put in place to maintain the health of the inshore environment, there are many regulations in place for activities conducted in the offshore waters as well. Net fishing is prohibited and no license has been granted to a foreign commercial fishing vessel since 1994. It is important to note that significant penalties exist for violations by foreign fishing vessels. Other activities such as recreational fishing by a foreign vessel, local commercial fishing, scientific research, and seabed exploration and mining require a permit or license.

Not only are there local regulations to adhere to, we are also subject to some international regulations in our EEZ. Bermuda is required by international law to cooperate with other countries to manage highly migratory fish species that we catch in our zone, such as tuna and billfish. We do this through the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The management of these species in the Atlantic Ocean depends on the cooperation of all of the countries that fish for these species in this area. Bermuda has not used all of its quotas but, even if it did, the impact on the stocks would still be very low as the quotas are a small fraction of the total Atlantic-wide quotas.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has established criteria for six categories of marine protected areas, areas which are designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives. Because of our existing strict proactive management measures, the IUCN category in which we would fall at present would be category VI.

Mr. Speaker, you will be aware that, in March 2014, Bermuda, once again, demonstrated its leadership role in marine conservation by hosting the Signing Ceremony for the Hamilton Declaration on Collaboration for the Conservation of the Sargasso Sea. This brought international attention to the global significance of the Sargasso Sea and commendation to Bermuda for initiating and continuing a process in protecting marine areas beyond national jurisdiction. The Hamilton Declaration defined the Sargasso Sea ecosystem to include international waters or areas beyond national jurisdiction, with the Bermuda Exclusive Economic Zone [EEZ] remaining under the sovereignty and management authority of Bermuda.

The Government of Bermuda, in consultation with the Signatories and Collaborating Partners, established the Sargasso Sea Commission to develop proposals for consideration by the Signatories to maintain the health, productivity and resilience of the Sargasso Sea and to protect its components, including the habitats of threatened and endangered species.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has a long and impressive record of marine and terrestrial conservation and has both partnered with and led small island jurisdictions over the decades on a number of important issues. I can assure Honourable Members that our Government remains committed to our EEZ, and, until we have the budget to proceed further, will continue with our aggressive stewardship of the marine environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker