



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

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5th July, 2009

The Honourable **Emily Gaynor Dick-Forde**
Minister of Planning,
Housing and the Environment.
44-46 South Quay
Port of Spain

Dear Minister;

RE: GOVERNMENTS POLICY WITH RESPECT TO QUARRING OPERATIONS.

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC) has noted with some alarm the fact that the government has again diluted the intent of the Environmental Management Act by reducing the CEC requirements for quarrying. In December last year when attention was diverted towards Christmas, a notice was published in the press indicating that the Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC) would not be required for the purposes of establishing a quarry of under 150 acres. This notice was laid before parliament for "negative resolution" (meaning that if nobody raises the matter it will become effective in 40 days). No objections were made. Preceding this, the activity of quarrying was exempted from the list of "Designated Activities" under Section 35 of the Act so that prospective quarry operators would not have to apply to the EMA for clearance, but the drafters of that resolution made a tactical error by not changing the requirement to have a CEC before forest or other vegetation could be cleared. Also, an error was made by using "acres" as the stated area measurement, when our laws use the metric system.

Few quarries are as large as 150 acres so this effectively means that quarrying can proceed almost anywhere, in forest reserves for example, without the stipulations of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA). One of the major beneficiaries will be Sunway, the Malaysian company who are blasting their way through limestone in the Arima valley towards our internationally renowned Asa Wright Nature Centre, and no doubt wish to expand to other areas for other materials. Sunway was introduced to this country by UDECOTT who are themselves presently under scrutiny by Commission of Enquiry. Widespread destruction of the environment in the foothills of the Northern Range around Valencia and onward to Matura is the result of quarrying for sand and gravel.

Quarrying is responsible for serious loss of the natural environment and consequently is an activity that requires careful regulation. This indecent haste to remove the restrictions on quarrying can only be viewed

as a backward step and does not signal to the world that we are a mature nation that recognises the importance of the of our environment. The claim put forward that shortages of aggregates is the result of insufficient quarries which has caused the increase in prices for building materials is questionable. On examination, the shortage in supplies seem more related to the rapid pace of developments, consequently, established quarries and normal growth simply can't keep up. The pace of building has resulted in a gross oversupply of residential and commercial properties, which combined with the downturn in world business has already resulted in the fall of in property prices. TTFNC notes that the majority of large building projects are being done by government agencies.

TTFNC accepts that the Environmental Management Act is not perfect and has not, in its implementation resulted in effective protection of the environment. We believe that very little protection from projects have resulted, penalties have been ineffective when directed at agencies of the government (offender and recipient of penalty being the same party), loss of previous enforcement such as noise pollution has effectively occurred when the police surrendered control to the EMA, water and air standards took too long to enact, and harmless legitimate projects have had to suffer high costs of CEC requirements. There also appears to be a lack of coordination among government departments responsible for project approvals so that much time and effort is expended, at the end of which the project is approved anyway, and the environment suffers the consequences.

However until a better system is legislated, the Environmental Management Act must still take precedence. We are concerned that such conspicuous moves are being made at the highest levels to undermine the law of the land. TTFNC stands ready to assist in the drafting of more effective and practical legislation, but must condemn in the strongest terms this deliberate abuse. This particular exemption will allow new quarries to start up in almost any area unchecked by the EMA, and will be a major embarrassment to the nation when such large-scale environmental destruction is able to by-pass the very agency responsible for environmental protection.

Yours Respectfully

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Palaash Narase
Vice President TTFNC