

# ENVIRONMENT

# A community, a wetland and a port



IT seems a sad inevitability that, as our nation grows, we end up destroying some aspects of our natural environment.

The concept of sustainable development is that sufficient natural resources must be maintained to support future generations with minimal impact on natural ecosystems. This is something to be kept in mind when new developments are being discussed.

At such times, attention must be directed to determining whether a development is in the long-term interests of our nation. What resources will we lose as a result? How can we ensure that we minimise the loss of resources that are essential for the long-term wellbeing of our people and environment?

The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment applied for a certificate of environmental clearance for the construction of a drydock and trans-shipment port off the coast of Pt Dor, La Brea in February 2014.

The proposal will see the reclamation of 66.35 ha of land in the shallow waters off the coastline (an area known as Pt Sable). Approximately 104 ha of the marine environment will be dredged to facilitate the movement of ships and for the reclamation of land.

Associated facilities and infrastructure will be needed onshore to support the port.

While such a facility has the potential to benefit the community and the south-west peninsula as a whole, the proposed location has been the source of much concern



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among stakeholders.

Before looking at some of the concerns, it is important to note that this application is still currently at the stage of the drafting of the terms of reference.

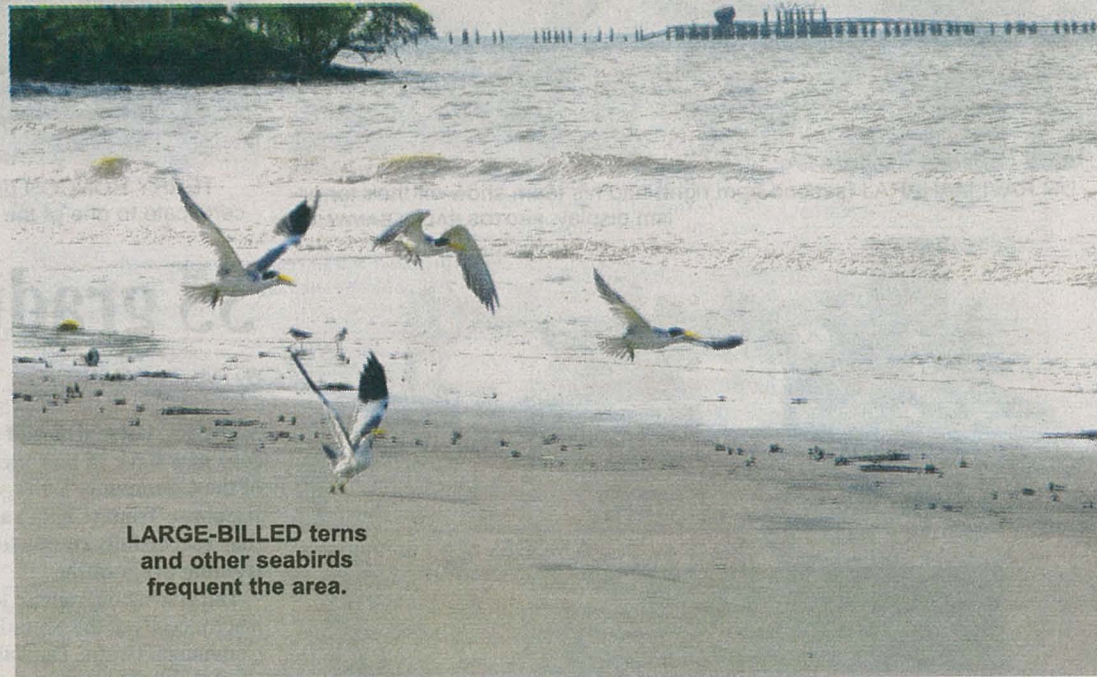
At this point, research into the impact of the proposal has not been started, as this will rely on the final terms of reference.

The research, when it is complete, allows for the production of an environment impact assessment (EIA), which will outline what the negative consequences of the project are and the ways in which they can be addressed. As such, the responses to many of these concerns may not yet be possible.

Nonetheless, it is important that the public and the Government be aware of what these concerns are.

One concern relates to the impact of the project on the area's fisheries. The shallow coastal region that flanks the Rousillac Swamp supports populations of shrimp and several commercially important fish species.

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LARGE-BILLED terns and other seabirds frequent the area.



THE shallow waters along the coast support shrimp and commercially valuable fish species.



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MAP showing the proposed drydock and transshipment facility in relation to the surrounding community and the Rousillac Swamp.

## Rousillac wetland supports mangrove, wildlife

### ● WETLAND *from Page 3B*

The facility will be built on a portion of this shallow water region and additional shallow sea bed will have to be dredged to facilitate ship movement. The source of the material used to reclaim the land for the port must also be looked at – shall it be taken from this shallow water region or elsewhere? Will pollution from the facility affect the fisheries?

Another concern is whether the construction and operation of any onshore support facilities (roads, waste disposal, parking etc) will have any impact on the adjacent mangroves and marshland.

The land immediately opposite the proposed site is not wetland, however the amount of onshore land that will be needed is unclear so the impact on the wetland is difficult to ascertain. Is the plan to fill parts of the marshland? Will material for land reclamation be taken from the wetland?

Yet another concern relates to how the community usage of the area will be affected. Pt Sable is a popular bathing and recreational beach for residents of Pt Dor and communities further afield.

As for the value of the Rousillac wetland, the area supports a wide range of mangrove and marsh-associated wildlife.

Crabs and oysters are found in the mangroves and are exploited by residents of the surrounding communities. Birdlife in the Rousillac Swamp include a range of typical species including egrets, herons, ospreys and wood-rails. Less typical species include Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) which use the swamp for feeding and have been known to nest here. The Black-collared Hawk (*Busarellus nigricollis*), a rare visitor, has also been seen in the swamp in recent years.

The reedbeds are home to bitterns, crakes and harriers, and several seabirds utilise the shallow coastal region. Note again that the impact of the project on this ecosystem has not yet been determined.

As the certificate application progresses, there is no doubt that this issue will raise its head again. Already, these have been concerns raised by members of the community and fishermen that utilise the area. Is this a reasonable development? Will these concerns be adequately addressed? Only time will tell.

Today's feature was written by Kris Sookdeo. For more information on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at [admin@ttfnc.org](mailto:admin@ttfnc.org) or visit our website at [www.ttfnc.org](http://www.ttfnc.org). The Club's next monthly meeting will be held on October 9 at St Mary's College, PoS. Lecture: Kayaking TT by Glen Wilkes.