

**HON. KENRED DORSETT M.P.**  
**MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING**

**COMMUNICATION TO PARLIAMENT**  
**MOVING THE**  
**BAHAMAS SPATIAL DATA INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMME BILL**  
**(BSDI BILL)**

**JANUARY 8TH, 2013**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I rise on behalf of the wonderful people of Southern Shores, upon whose shoulders I stand. For without them, I would not be here and I would not have been given this privilege to be a voice for them in this ancient and honourable place.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the second reading and passing of a Bill for an Act to establish the Bahamas National Geographic Information Systems Centre as a Department of Government within Article 127 (c) of the Constitution; to define the special purposes and functions of the Department; to establish the Bahamas Spatial Data Infrastructure system and program and the Geospatial Advisory Council; to define the functions and objectives of the System, the program and the council and for connected matter. I do so proudly, as the Minister responsible for Bahamas National Geographic Information Systems (BNGIS) Centre.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2004, under the visionary leadership of the Right Honourable member from Centreville, the Government invested in the development of a national strategy to implement Geospatial Technologies. The Bahamas National Geographic Information Systems (BNGIS) Centre was established as a unit in the Office of the Prime Minister with a national mandate and mission to advance the practical and efficient use of Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) in The Bahamas.

Now some of you may be asking, What is GIS? Well, according to ESRI, a leading global technology organization, “a geographic information system (GIS) integrates hardware, software, and data for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information. It allows you to view, understand, question, interpret, and visualize data in many ways that reveal relationships, patterns, and trends in the form of maps, globes, reports and charts.” It can be integrated into any enterprise information system framework and can help Governmental institutions, agencies and private sector entities answer questions and solve problems by looking at your data in a way that is quickly understood and easily shared.

The benefits of GIS generally fall into four basic categories:

1. Cost Savings and Increased Efficiency – it can optimize maintenance schedules and daily fleet movements. Typical implementations can result in a savings of 10-30% in operational expenses through reduction in fuel use and staff time, improved customer service and more efficient scheduling. Things we should all strive for, whether we are in the public or private sectors.
2. Better Decision Making – GIS is a heavily relied upon technology used for better decisions about real estate site selection, route/corridor selection, evacuation planning, conservation, natural resource extraction and exploitation.
3. Improved Communication and Integration of Services-GIS based applications can improve the communication between different teams, departments, professional fields and the public and avoid duplication of research, planning and expenditures associated therewith.
4. Better Recordkeeping

So, in 2005, the Government adopted a policy that formed the framework for a national spatial data infrastructure and authorized BNGIS Centre to execute the 2005 IDB Land Use Planning and Administration Project (LUPAP) Component 2 “Land Information Management”. One of the goals of this project was the development of national spatial data infrastructure legislation, which some 9 years later we are finally advancing.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Bahamas Spatial Data Infrastructure System and Programme is a national strategy that comprises the technology, policies, standards, human resources, and related activities necessary to acquire, process, distribute, use, maintain, and preserve spatial data. It is a system of authority, responsibility and accountability.

The BSDI System includes a library as a central repository for non-sensitive data, will allow technical officers the ability to analyze spatially interrelated information stemming from a range of governmental and private/international sources.

This national initiative was initialized in consultation with representatives from multiple governmental agencies with stakeholder interest in spatial technologies. These agencies included: the Office of the Prime Minister, BNGIS Centre, Department of Physical Planning, Lands & Surveys Department, Ministry of National Security, Finance, WSC, Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Works and many others.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Bahamas Spatial Data Infrastructure Programme Bill (the BSDI Bill) provides policy statements and identifies initial core databases for the use of the BDSI System. The Government of The Bahamas recognizes that direction must be given to providing an environment which fosters activities for using, managing and producing geographic data and applying standards, procedures and protocols in a coordinated manner. The BSDI Act gives direction to facilitating the sharing of data, which is extremely useful, to enable multiple spatial data users and procedures to save their efforts when trying to acquire new datasets.

We recognize that sustainable development is the driving force behind BSDI where access to reliable and accurate spatial data and information is needed for planning and research to impact policy decisions.

So Mr. Speaker, public health officials might want to map the numbers of physicians per 1,000 people in each census tract to identify which areas are adequately served and which are not. The Aviation Ministry may use GIS to track shipping routes, cargo lanes, the movement of ships carrying oil or heavy fuel through our waters. Similarly, GIS technology was used to a few years ago to track where those persons who contracted dengue fever resided to analyze patterns and help drive policy and decisions. The point that I make is that the proper use and management of GIS can help government make prudent and informed decisions.

**Mr. Speaker,**

It is time for The Bahamas to include spatially-referenced information for improved management of land, sea, air, and the environment, and we must better coordinate the management of these physical assets among public and private sector agencies/organizations.

The Bahamas Spatial Data Infrastructure Bill seeks to establish The BNGIS Centre as a Department. As a department, BNGIS will have the statutory authority and be strengthened and equipped to make the appropriate institutional arrangements to meet its national mandate and mission. The Bill also establishes the BSDI System and Programme, which will now permit a spatial context to information for scientific research and analysis in an automated, structured and coordinated environment. As a Department, the Centre will administer the BSDI system and ensure compliance with the provisions of the Bill and policy directives.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The new Act will establish a Geospatial Advisory Council with responsibility to ensure GIS sustainability; provide guidance to government on issues related spatial technologies; improve coordination in the development and use of spatial technologies and data. It will also regulate the collection, management, maintenance, integration and distribution of geospatial data to support a diverse range of stakeholders both nationally and internationally.

Without this legislation challenges will remain including:

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> The continued duplication of effort and expenditure of scarce resources;

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Public agencies with their own GIS operations, resulting in uncoordinated activities, data collected in different formats; suspect or reliable data that cannot be layered or compiled to allow for comprehensive analysis;

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Lack of standards, procedures and protocols and central oversight to ensure accuracy and reliability;

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Outdated topographic and imagery information;

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> A high level of bureaucracy in compiling data and sharing data from and among multiple agencies in a timely manner to support decision making.

**Mr. Speaker,**

It is important to recognize that the advancement of this technology through the passage of this legislation will begin a process of structured GIS implementation nationwide. The BNGIS Centre will therefore be required to launch the Programme in a phased approach with appropriate time lines in order to incrementally accomplish specific BSDI Programme Goals in collaboration/consultation with other agencies.

It is for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, that the Ministry of The Environment & Housing supports the enactment of this Bill and see this as a necessary step to modernizing the Public Service and continuing to promote and advance e-government strategies which primarily focuses on the transformation of internal and external business processes of the government, thereby making it more accessible, efficient, effective, transparent and accountable.

Thank you for listening attentively Mr. Speaker.