



**MINISTER KENRED DORSETT
MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

STATEMENT

**OUR OCEAN CONFERENCE
JUNE 17TH, 2014
WASHINGTON D.C.**

The Bahamas is an archipelago, comprising over 700 islands and cays, of which 30 are inhabited. The Bahamas is over 100,000 square miles in size and 94% of my country is comprised of Ocean. we are truly an ocean state and a legislated sanctuary for sharks, manta rays and turtles.

Today I am pleased to announce the formal passage of the Bahamas Protected Area Fund (BPAF) legislation. BPAF is a model piece of legislation, developed with wide stakeholder consultation and input, which establishes a new trust fund dedicated to ensuring reliable and long-term funding for protected areas management in The Bahamas. BPAF should receive annual funding from the regional Caribbean Biodiversity Fund. In addition, BPAF will be capitalized from other sources within The Bahamas, such as fee mechanisms and donations from domestic and international sources. I would also like to announce today that the Bahamas Government is committing \$2 million in the upcoming 2014/2015 budget to the BPAF. The Bahamas is proud to be the first Caribbean Challenge Initiative country to establish its protected areas fund and the first to contribute to the endowment of such a fund.

Since the launch of the Caribbean Challenge Initiative in 2008, we have declared six additional marine protected areas. While we are proud of the increased protection provided, there are more critical marine and coastal ecosystems in need of protection. I am pleased to

announce today that by the end of 2014, my Government intends to significantly expand our marine protected areas system, taking us from the current 3% of near-shore marine environment protected to at least 10% protection. To facilitate this expansion, earlier this year my government endorsed the declaration of at least 15 new MPAs across the country. Public consultation on the proposed boundaries of these areas began in May 2014 and will also include dialogue on the expansion to 20% protection, which we have committed to establish by or before 2020.

Not only will my Government declare new MPAs but we will also use the marine protected area system of the Bahamas as the catalyst for a blue economy which will empower Bahamian communities surrounding the MPAs throughout our archipelagic chain of islands.