

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

COMMUNICATION TO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL

JANUARY 8TH, 2013

MR. SPEAKER

Once again, I rise for the second reading a bill for an Act to amend the Forestry Act. Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments are simple and straightforward. Therefore, I trust what is being proposed will be accepted by all in this place.

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas possesses considerable forest resources of pines, coppice hardwoods and mangrove. Approximately, 80% of forest resources are on state lands (Crown land).

Forests are vital to life on Earth. They purify the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, prevent erosion, and act as an important buffer against the adverse impact of climate change, something that low-lying small island states like the Bahamas must take seriously having regard to the impacts of sea level rise and the increasing strength of tropical storms and hurricanes, which visit our territory.

Forests offer a home to much of the world's diverse array of plants and animals and provide essential natural resources from timber and food to medicinal plants.

MR. SPEAKER

Pine forest (*Pinus caribaea* variety *bahamensis*) commonly referred to as Caribbean Pine, is considered the most productive and lucrative of the three vegetation types and is found on four islands - Abaco, Andros, Grand Bahama and New Providence. These are an untapped and important natural resource. Coppice (hardwood) forests are predominantly found in the central and southern Bahamas. Some notable coppice species include Buttonwood, Mahogany, Gumelemi, Ratwood, Black Ebony, Braziletto, Horseflesh, Lignum Vitae and Red Cedar. However, coppice forests are considered one of the most endangered forest types due to the pressures of urbanization, illegal logging, poor or non-existent forest management practices, transport infrastructure and agriculture.

Mangrove and/or wetland ecosystems dominate the leeward shores of most islands. The major wetlands in The Bahamas include the north coast of Grand Bahama, western Andros Island, The Marls of Abaco and the Bight of Acklins.

MR SPEAKER

Our country has had a long history of forest exploitation dating back to the 1700s when almost all of the large sized valuable hardwood species were cut down and exported. The first license to harvest pine was issued in 1906 and this harvesting and exploitation continued unabated until the early 1970s. During this period, the sector relied primarily on the exploitation of natural pine forest resources for wood products for export, such as pulpwood to produce paper and sawlogs for constructional timber. At the end of the exploitation process all licenses and concessions were relinquished to the government. The harvesting of the pine resource contributed significantly to the national economy in terms of employment and the development of infrastructure in Family Island communities.

MR SPEAKER

Since that period the focus of the forestry sector has shifted from one of forest exploitation to that of the multipurpose functions of the Bahamian forests, and today the sector can best be described in terms of the goods and services being derived from the National forest. This transition began in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. It has now been accepted that the pine, coppice and mangrove forests provide in addition to commercial forestry, the preservation and protection of freshwater resources, maintenance of the hydrological cycle, biodiversity conservation, ecotourism, soil conservation, microclimate regulation, agro-forestry development and environmental enhancement. Forests have the potential to absorb global carbon emissions and help us to adapt to the adverse affects of climate change. Research by the University of Leeds in 2009, determined that tropical forest trees are absorbing about 18% of the CO₂ added to the atmosphere each year from burning fossil fuels, substantially buffering the rate of climate change. Hence trees act as “carbon sinks” with about half the total carbon 'land sink' found in tropical forest trees," Co-author on the study, Dr Lee White, Gabon's

Chief Climate Change Scientist said, "To get an idea of the value of the sink, the removal of nearly 5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by intact tropical forests, based on realistic prices for a tonne of carbon, should be valued at around £13 billion per year. This is a compelling argument for conserving tropical forests." It is now widely accepted that value exists in simply having forests.

MR SPEAKER

The Ministry of the Environment and Housing sees the re-development of the forestry sector as a priority for the country. By expanding the utilization of our natural resources like the pine forests in a sustainable manner, our country can become less dependent on certain wood products that are imported. Rural employment for example green jobs and opportunities can become available and these increase the long term economic revenue from the natural pine forest by maintaining its ecological integrity.

MR SPEAKER

I wish to speak briefly on the history of the institutionalization of the forestry sector in the Bahamas, and how we have arrived at this point, today. The first forestry institution was initiated in The Bahamas in 1952 when the post of Forest Supervisor was created under the then Crown Lands Office. The Crown Lands Office then morphed into the Department of Lands and Surveys. In 1985, a Forestry Section was established within that Department, with the objective of managing the forest resources of The Bahamas. In 1986, the Government of The Bahamas with financial support from the Inter American Development Bank (IDB) embarked on a “Forestry Development Project” executed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The project aimed:

(i) to conduct an inventory of the pine resources on Abaco, Grand Bahama and Andros;

(ii) to propose appropriate management options for these islands in the preparation of a forest management plan for the pine forest islands;

(iii) to build capacity in local staff in The Bahamas by exposing them to various forest techniques and by providing appropriate training. The project was very successful, and laid the foundation for the future sustainable forest management and the drafting of forestry legislation.

MR SPEAKER

In 1996, the Government requested the Forestry Institution to review the 1987 draft forestry legislation, based on a process of consultation with all stakeholders. The draft legislation was amended to take into account the new “environmental conservation ethic”. By 1998, the Government formally agreed to and approved its first official National Forestry Policy which blossomed into the Forestry Act 2010 which came into effect on 4th January 2011. The overall objective of the Act is to provide a legal framework for the long term conservation and sustainable management of forests in the national interest. Subsequent to the Act, a Forestry Unit was established within the Ministry of the Environment, a Director of Forestry was appointed with overall responsibility for the administration of the Unit, the Forestry Act, and the management and

development of forests. Every five years the Director of Forestry is required to submit a national forest plan for the National Forest Estate. In regulation of the use of the National Forest Estate, the Act also makes provisions for the public to apply for permits to harvest protected trees and the issuance of permits, licenses and leases to utilize the National Forest Estate and its products. The Protected trees provisions of the Conservation and Protection of the Physical Landscape Act were repealed and incorporated in the Forestry Act. The Act also prescribes the powers of officers and offences for contravention of the Act, and gives the Minister power to make regulations for carrying into effect the provisions of the Act. In this regard, Forest Regulations have been drafted and will be gazetted, to provide the tools for the implementation of the provisions of the Act.

MR SPEAKER

Under the Forestry Act, The Minister is mandated to declare the National Forest Estate, comprising three categories - forest reserves, protected

forests and conservation forests. A forest reserve is defined as an area of land, subject to affirmative resolution, declared to be managed as a permanent forest estate primarily for the sustained yield of timber and other forest produce. A conservation forest is defined as an area of land, subject to affirmative resolution, declared to be a conservation forest by reason of it being a significant wildlife habitat, wetland, woodland or area of scientific interest; significant natural resource; and area of biological diversity. A protected forest is an area of land declared to be managed in the same manner as forest reserves until the land is required for agriculture, industry, residential purposes or other development. A protected forest declaration is less permanent than the other two forest classifications.

MR SPEAKER

As comprehensive as this Act is, it does not vest any lands in the Minister responsible for Forestry so that he may be able to declare the

National Forest Estate, for classification as forest reserves, protected forests and conservation forests. This declaration and designation of forest lands is essential and integral to the implementation of the provisions of the Forestry Act and the functions of the Forestry Unit. Declaring the National Forest Estate ensures that forests can be scientifically managed to meet the needs of future generations of Bahamians. Consequently Mr. Speaker, the following amendments to the Forestry Act 2010 is sought:

1. An amend of Section 6 of the Principal Act by the insertion of the words **“to be vested in the Minister and”** after the words “land to be a forest reserve”, to allow the Minister to declare any Crown land to be a forest reserve and such reserve will be vested in the Minister subject to the affirmative resolution of Parliament.
2. An amendment to Section 7, subsection (1) of the Principal Act by the insertion of the words **“to be vested in the Minister”** after the words “Crown land to be a protected forest”, to grant the Minister the ability to declare any Crown

land to be a protected forest and such forest will be vested in the Minister.

3. An amend Section 8 of the Principal Act by inserting the words **“to be vested in the Minister”** after the words “a conservation forest”, to allow the Minister to declare any land to be a conservation forest and such forest will be vested in the Minister subject to the affirmative resolution of Parliament.

MR SPEAKER

I am happy to report that the pine forests resources have rebounded and rejuvenated from its past exploitation. They offer considerable potential for future sustained yield forestry practices, and the development of small-scale forest based industries to reduce wood imports. Technical analyses conclude that several feasible options exist for forest industries in The Bahamas including, sawmilling, to produce the traditional construction timber and high end forest products, utility poles, fence posts, charcoal production, resin production, mulch and, chips. These forests provide an opportunity Mr. Speaker for the expansion of eco-

tourism services and wildlife management, in particular, the establishment of hunting and game reserves, within the National Forest Estate. Yet all of this is contingent upon declaring the National Forest Estate by vesting appropriate forests lands to the Minister, once identified. Therefore, an amendment to the Principle Act is not only needed but is justified!

MR SPEAKER,

I so move and support the amendments to the Forestry Act 2010.

THANK YOU