

Response to recommendations/comments contained in the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee into certain aspects of the Tobago House of Assembly

Inquiry Objective # 1

Sufficiency and Management of the THA's National Budget Allocation

Recommendation A

The THA consulted with the Central Government on the matter of the late release of funds to the THA and is satisfied that the prevailing financial circumstances of the county were responsible for the delayed release of funds to the THA. Currently, the THA receives its funds from Central Government in accordance with the THA Act.

Recommendation B, C

The THA is considering a Revenue Generation Plan and is in discussion with the Central Government on the matter of access to funding outside of the Parliamentary allocations.

Recommendation D

The THA concurs with this recommendation for the encouragement of FDI in Tobago and will pursue this initiative with the Central Government.

Recommendation E

The observations made by the Auditor General relating to the standard and adequacy of records have been noted by the THA and steps have been and are being taken to remedy this deficiency and to allow for timely presentation of relevant records to the Auditor General.

Inquiry Objective # 2

The State of the Agriculture Sector in Tobago

Recommendation A

The THA supports this innovative recommendation of promoting consumption of local produce by hotels (and restaurants) and intends to pursue same.

Recommendation B

The THA recognises the need to attract and involve young people in agriculture so that it can be considered as a viable option/profession. We will consider the recommendations of the JSC in this regard particularly its recommendation to develop a policy similar to the Food and Fertilizer Technology Center – Agricultural Policy Platform in the Asian and Pacific region.

Recommendation C

We will consider this recommendation but our view is that we need to substantially increase production of agricultural commodities as we are a net importer of such commodities at this time. We cannot seriously consider the development of a viable export market at our current production levels.

Recommendation D

We concur with the recommendations of the JSC to facilitate the production of 'niche crops'. Our efforts so far to increase production in this sector has not been demonstratively successful notwithstanding the provision of technical support, marketing opportunities, and access to arable land by farmers. Agriculture is generally not seen as a viable full time profession by most practitioners (farmers) and the THA is currently evaluating its agricultural strategies to focus on increased food production.

Inquiry Objective # 3

To determine the current condition of the Tourism Sector

Note: In 3.3.4 on page 38 of the Report, it is stated that the '*Chief Administrator submitted that the Prime Minister is the Head of the National Committee on Tourism in Tobago*'. The Chief Administrator submitted that the Prime Minister is the Chairman of the Standing Tourism Committee (of Trinidad and Tobago).

Recommendation A

The THA supports this recommendation for the development of standards for accommodation facilities and for a compulsory registration process but given its mandatory intent, it may have to be legislated.

Recommendation B

This recommendation for the introduction of a Tourism Site Preservation Programme supported by community volunteers will be given consideration by the THA. It is in keeping with the mandate of the administration of the THA for enhanced community involvement in the affairs of the THA.

Recommendation C

The THA concurs with this recommendation to expand and enhance the tourism product and to develop creative strategies for marketing the island.

Recommendation D, E, L

Some internal discussions have taken place on the matter of making it easier to attract FDI to Tobago and given the competitive advantage of the tourism sector in Tobago, for FDI in this sector. In furtherance of this objective, we have arranged for discussions with the Ministry of Finance on the issue of the 'Land Licence Requirement' for investors expressing an interest in investing in Tobago. Our ultimate objective is the development of a one-stop-shop that will facilitate the ease of doing business in (Trinidad and) Tobago.

The THA is also in support of a comprehensive review of the incentives being offered to investors in the tourism sector with special incentives to encourage internationally recognised hotel chains to invest in Tobago.

Recommendation F

Collaboration has started with the TTPS to enhance the security of visitors and residents in Tobago. The issue of policing strategy and the use of CCTV cameras featured prominently in our discussions with the TTPS.

Recommendation G

This recommendation of linking free customer service training for small and medium size establishments with State sponsored incentives is being given due consideration. We recognise the need for such training.

Recommendation H

We agree that collaboration with the stakeholders on a branding and marketing initiative is necessary and if effectively executed would result in increased investment, airlift and arrivals to boost the tourism industry on the island.

Recommendation I, J

We agree in principle with the recommendations of the JSC on the matter of incentives being offered to airlines and on the matter of targeting a limited number of traditional markets. The Executive Council has taken a decision to set up a unit comprising the best tourism minds available to the THA to critically review our current practices and to initiate action that will result in the most efficient use of the financial resources available to the Division of Tourism, Culture, and Transportation.

Recommendation K

We agree that a comprehensive public education programme on the benefits of the tourism industry to Tobago and on the opportunities available in the industry should be developed and executed.

Recommendation M

This recommendation to revise the business model for the 2017 Jazz Festival will be given due consideration.

Recommendation N

This information on the amount spent on jetties and on the work completed in the last five years will be provided by March 27th, 2017.

Recommendation O

This recommendation will be given due consideration but the THA will consider the prevailing economic circumstances on the island, the degree of separation of local labour from the THA, and the unemployment rate among residents on the island before such a recommendation can be implemented. In this regard the THA will also consider mandating the THTI to offer targeted hospitality industry training to unemployed locals to meet the need of the industry.

Inquiry Objective 4

The Efficiency and Reliability of Transportation Services

Recommendation A, B

THA and CAL discussed this matter of increasing the number of seats available to passengers during peak periods. CAL has committed to fulfilling its mandate to provide the most efficient and reliable air transport between the islands. The both parties agreed to continue the discussions on this and other very important matters.

Recommendation C

The THA will consider the purchase of buses on an incremental basis.

Recommendation D

The THA is in discussion with the Central Government on the matter of the construction of a new Airport Terminal at ANRRRIA. Given that with the best of intention and available finances, a new terminal cannot be constructed immediately, the recommendation of the JSC has merit and will be considered by the THA.

Recommendation E

This recommendation for the upgrading to berthing/docking facilities at the Port of Scarborough will be pursued by the THA.