

Joint Select Committee
Local Authorities, Service Commissions and
Statutory Authorities (Including THA)

2016.04.27

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF THE JOINT
SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND
REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS
AND STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA)
HELD IN THE VICTOR E. BRUCE FINANCIAL COMPLEX, #6-10
POST OFFICE STREET, SCARBOROUGH TOBAGO ON
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2016**

9.30 a.m.: *Meeting resumed.*

PRESENT

Mr. H. R. Ian Roach	Chairman
Miss Ramona Ramdial	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus	Member
Mr. Daniel Solomon	Member
Mr. Darryl Smith	Member
Mr. Nigel De Freitas	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Miss Gina Marajh	Research Assistant (OJT)

ABSENT

Mr. Faris Al-Rawi	Member [<i>Excused</i>]
Mr. Stuart Young	Member [<i>Excused</i>]

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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR - THA

Mr. Raye Sandy

Chief Administrator

OFFICIALS OF THE DIVISION OF FINANCE AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT - THA

Mrs. Petal-Ann Roberts

Senior Financial Analyst

Ms. Jacqueline Job

Administrator

Ms. Esther Pilgrim-Soanes

Director of Finance

Ms. Shelly Trim

Budget Analyst IV

OFFICIALS OF THE DIVISION OF TOURISM AND TRANSPORTATION - THA

Ms. Cheryl-Ann Solomon

Administrator

Mrs. Frederica Brooks-Adams

Director Tourism

Mr. Samuel Henry

Transportation Coordinator

Ms. Gwen Toppin

Management Accountant

OFFICIALS OF THE DIVISION OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC UTILITIES - THA

Mrs. Wendy Guy-Hernandez

Administrator

Ms. Sherrilyn Paul

Project Officer II

PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICE CORPORATION

Mr. Henry Cook

Assistant Deputy General

Manager Operations, Tobago PTSC

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Mrs. Patricia Thomas-Clarke	Assistant Manager Operations
Mr. Barry-Lee Graham	Mechanical Engineering Supervisor

**OFFICIALS OF THE DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE, MARINE
AFFAIRS, MARKETING AND THE ENVIRONMENT - THA**

Ms. Nevlin Renwick	Administrator
Ms. Karen Shaw	Agro. Investment Specialist
Mr. Carl Murray	Agricultural Officer 2
Ms. Ruby Warner	Technical Officer
Mr. Abdullah Chadband	Specialist Engineer

Mr. Chairman: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Sixth Meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (Including the Tobago House of Assembly). As you know, there are several parliamentary Committees. We are one of them, which is mandated by Section 66A of the Constitution, and the Standing Orders of the Houses, which are empowered to investigate, enquire into, report on all matters relating to the mandate, management, activities, administration, and operations of the assigned Ministries, Department or Bodies, including the THA.

So, this hearing here, is to inform people that have us here, on the

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business of how it was conducted, how it is being conducted. I guess we are all here, whether members of the public or us here as members of this Committee, on one common purpose, which is for the development and the prosperity, and the further advancement of our society. In this instance, the focus is on Tobago, being administered by the Tobago House of Assembly.

So I would like to welcome you. I will like you to know that I think it is necessary that this not an inquisition. So no one needs to be anxious or fearful of any prosecution, because the witnesses here are all protected and enjoy the same protection as members of the Committee, which is parliamentary privilege. As far as the Committee is concerned, as far as we sit as a precinct of Parliament.

However, having said that, if you were to say anything outside of this, that may be contentious, defamatory in any way, you are on your own, okay? So during the precincts here, we expect you be honest, to be truthful and also be respectful to other person's rights, okay? Outside of that you enjoy the same privileges as we do.

I do not know if all witnesses who are here, would have also been briefed, that you are entitled to have advisors, but they are not able to participate directly engaging us in any of our concerns and our questions, but they can advise you on the side, so to speak, okay?

My name is Hugh Russell Ian Roach. I am the Chairman of this Joint

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Select Committee, one I am privileged to Chair, which is one of the many Committees I told you that is mandated by the Parliament to enquire into the affairs. Members, other members, I would like them to introduce themselves, starting with the, Vice-Chair, which is –

[Introductions]

Mr. Smith: Again, I just want to thank the Parliament for pulling this together on this historic moment. The warm welcome we have had so far from the THA and the people who met us at the airport; so thank you all.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the members, the witnesses to introduce themselves to the Committee, and to the public.

[Introductions]

Mr. Sandy: I also want to take this opportunity to thank Parliament for having the session in Tobago. It truly brings the Government closer to the people of Tobago. I think it is an historic occasion. I cannot recall in my memory, of Parliament actually meeting in Tobago. Normally we are invited down to the parliamentary building. So I really want to thank the Parliament for having the session here, and giving Tobagonians an opportunity to participate in this kind of exchange, thanks.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. As you all would have noticed, that this is certainly the first Joint Select Committee of Parliament,

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being held in Tobago, and certainly since the commencement of the Eleventh Parliament. We do agree with what Mr. Ray Sandy has just said, it is in an effort on our part as Members of Parliament, to bring Parliament to the people, alright? So, it is not just Parliament by the people, for the people, but to have that closer synergy with you all, that we can do a better job in serving you, because we are all your servants, okay? Thank you.

I will not invite – no, before I go on –

[The Chairman confers with the Secretary.]

Mr. Chairman: Let me inform the audience that they can send comments, not questions. They can send comments via email at parll01@ttparliament.org or on the Facebook page, at facebook.com/ttparliament, or on Twitter at @ttparliament, okay? So the committee will facilitate comments, not questions, comments.

The sequence in which, because of the number of witnesses we have before us this morning, we have 19 witnesses basically, that have agreed to come before us, which we appreciate very much, but we will take them in the sequence. We will deal with Finance first, okay? Tourism and Transport will be taken together, and then lastly, we will have the Agriculture sector, okay?

So, again, welcome to the Tobago House of Assembly. We are pleased to have you, and we hope that this will be a fruitful exercise for all

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concerned, alright? The objective of this enquiry is first of all, to assess the management of the allocation, the financial allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly. To assess as well the sufficiency of the budget allocation, and how this is being disbursed or being used or challenged to be implemented thus far.

I will invite Mr. Raye Sandy, to make a short opening comment, before we proceed with questioning. We will ask you questions, and we will expect you to answer the questions that are asked, through the Chair, okay? Mr. Raye Sandy?

Mr. Sandy: Thank you very much, Chairman. Well, we have put a team together of the senior public officers in the Tobago House of Assembly, to respond to any of the questions that you might have. The team put together, that surrounds me here, are the senior officers in the Division of Finance and Enterprise Development. We are quite ready, willing and able to respond to any of the questions that you might have.

You might be aware that the Tobago House of Assembly has a budget cycle, where we present our estimates of expenditure in June of the year, preceeding the year of the expenditure. So, in June of this year, the THA will be presenting its budget. Then we will have the parliamentary budget being done sometime before the beginning of the financial year, usually, sometime in September.

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After the parliamentary allocations are known, then the Tobago House of Assembly will do a revised budget, so to speak, because our budget of June will basically be the ideal kind of budget. I would not want to call it a wish list, but it would be the ideal kind of budget that we think is suitable for Tobago. We generally are not allocated the amount of money that we would have requested.

So in September, we do a revised budget based on the Parliament's allocations, and we prioritize our projects based on the parliamentary allocations, that are assigned to the Tobago House of Assembly. So our programmes and projects are then decided after the national budget is read, and then we go to the Executive Council with a revised programme and that is approved, and that becomes the programme of works for the Tobago House of Assembly for the current year. So I just want to put that on record.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Sandy. Before we actually embark upon the exchange between ourselves and you, let me just acknowledge that we did receive from the THA, your written submissions on April 22, 2016, and we thank you for it. We also received submissions from Ms. Christlyn Moore, on behalf of the Tobago Forwards. We received this on April 26, of this month, and we also thank her for it. We also received from the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association on April 26, comments as well, and we thank

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them for it. We will now invite Mr. Smith to ask you.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Chairman. First of all, let me thank all those who submitted questions and information. I think the THA information that we gathered, we had time to go through it and ventilate it. It was very comprehensive. So thanks for that information. But based on the information we received from your submission, you indicated the projected monthly release is less than one-third of the amount requested of the Ministry of Finance by the THA. Based on that, can you indicate the value of the monthly releases received from the Ministry of Finance for each of the first three months of 2016, first three months of this first quarter? And also, given the considerable reduction in the rate at which funds are being released by central government, what are the priority areas to which funds will be assigned, or which areas unfortunately, you may have to pull back or deprive at this time?

Ms. Pilgrim-Soanes: Members, the amount requested for the third quarter was, \$486,457,600, right? A third of that would have been \$162,152,533.33. The amount received was \$147,076,514, which 30.23 per cent, right? The difference is \$15,076,019.33.

Mr. Smith: The second part is as I said, with the slow rate with regard to how the funding is how coming. How are you all going to prioritise with regard to that, and what you all may be slowing down within

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that, with regard to how you are getting releases?

Ms. Pilgrim-Soanes: The amount that is presented to us, seeing that it will affect our planning, we will have to look at the Executive Council to give us some directive, but on the recurrent side, it will affect how we pay our suppliers. It will affect our commitments, and how we move forward, because we are looking at the Act – is saying that section 47 of the Act, if I may quote here, says:

Monies appropriated by Parliament for the service of the financial year of the Assembly, shall be credited to the fund in quarterly releases in advance en bloc.

And now we are getting the money on a monthly basis. So we usually will plan quarterly. So it will affect our planning, and we will have to look at the Executive for directive.

Mr. Chairman: Ramona, anybody? Mr. De Freitas?

Mr. De Freitas: Good morning again, members. In your submission you indicated, that the Tobago House of Assembly has not determined any new or possible streams of revenue. The question is, is revenue generation an immediate priority for the THA at this time? And what are some of the potential avenues that the THA will be exploring to generate additional revenue outside of tourism?

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Sandy: Yes, member. The Tobago House of Assembly, certainly,

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has started looking at areas where revenue or additional revenue can be generated, and we are taking a very serious look at the Studley Park Quarry as a major revenue earner. We are also trying our best to see how we can reduce expenditure in areas where expenditure is not absolutely necessary. So we have looked at areas where we can reduce on expenditure.

You said outside of the tourism sector in terms of revenue generation: the agricultural sector—as you would hear a little later on when the people from agriculture face the Committee—they are looking at areas in which agricultural production can be substantially increased thereby reducing—not only increasing revenue, but also reducing the outflow of foreign exchange through the importation of foodstuff and so on. Within a general sense, we are looking at areas where revenue can be increased.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Sandy, if I can ask, I mean, could you give any more details of the specific areas? And as well, what about sport as an industry, I mean as a financial potential of delivering some of what you are looking for, foreign currency?

Mr. Sandy: Yes, we have discussed—and you are right—the whole area of sport tourism as a foreign exchange earner and sport is an industry in a general kind of sense. The major sporting facilities on the island are the Dwight Yorke Stadium, we have tennis courts. We are

looking at the construction of an indoor-sport facility. All of those are done in the context of trying to encourage foreign teams domiciling here during their off season so that they can practise and so on, given the favourable weather condition that we would have, and also to encourage more sporting activity generally. So that not only the residents of Tobago would benefit from increased activity, but also we would be able to generate some income from teams visiting the island for particular sporting activities and so on. But sport is just one of the areas. We are looking at it throughout the entire gamut of activities that take place in Tobago, and sport is certainly one of those areas that we have starting taking a look at.

Mr. Chairman: So do you have a written sport policy where that is concerned?

Mr. Sandy: Not that I am aware of.

Mr. Chairman: But is there an intention of formulating a policy that everybody would be on the same page, basically?

Mr. Sandy: Yes, there is, and there might very well be a draft policy, but I know that we have started discussion on it, but I cannot say exactly where that is right now, but I know we have started discussions on it.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Chair. Mr. Sandy, can you for accountability and transparency purposes and as to how the

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taxpayers' dollars are spent: can you explain why there has been no Auditor General's report of the THA accounts from 2007 to the present time?

Mr. Sandy: No, I cannot explain why there is no Auditor General report. What I can tell you is, the Tobago House of Assembly has submitted its financial statements up to the year 2013 to the Auditor General, and it is up to the Auditor General to find the staff to do the audits. The last audit which we defended at the Public Accounts Committee would have been the year 2007. So the Auditor General has the financial statements of the THA up to 2013–2014 will be available in two weeks' time and 2015 in about six weeks' time. So we are very current as far as our submissions to the Auditor General. It is up to the Auditor General to do the audits.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Anybody can answer this question, not necessarily Mr. Sandy. I do not want to keep him in the hot seat, so to speak. But I am looking at the financial resources. Between 2012, there is a current trend—there is a consistent trend from 2012 to 2015 as actual, the allocations given to the THA and there has been a constant increase. In 2012 you went to \$1.65 billion; 2013, you went to \$1.98 billion; 2014, you went to \$2.01 billion; 2015, you went to \$2.11 billion and the estimate projection for 2016 is \$2.772 billion. My question is—these are

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significant increases over the years constantly – is there anyway of assessing whether Tobago is better off as a people with this type of increase in terms of allocation, generally speaking or any areas in particular where you can see the justification for this increase in allocations and increase in development, increase in whatever you have in terms of bettering the lives of Tobagonians?

Mr. Sandy: Okay Chair, although you said it was not directed to me, but I would –

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Sandy: As you may be aware, the allocations to the Tobago House of Assembly are determined by an order of the Dispute Resolution Commission where the Assembly should receive between, I believe it is 4.03 per cent and 6.9 per cent of the national budget. Invariably, we get the 4.03 per cent. So any increases, generally, are because there are increases in the national budget and we benefit from that increase. So if the national budget increases, the 4.03 per cent will increase, not the percentage will increase, but the amount that represents 4.03 per cent will increase. So, generally, once there is an increase in the national budget, the allocation for the Tobago House of Assembly will be increased.

I will indicate that any study done will show that the development in Tobago lags behind national development. We have always made the

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argument in Tobago that we should be given much more than just the minimum that the Dispute Resolution Commission prescribes, because we are basically playing catch-up in Tobago. So to answer your question, yes any increase we get would redound to the benefit of the average citizen resident in Tobago.

Tobago is challenged by a number of factors that contribute to our slow pace of development, not the least being the one brain drain. What I want to say is that sometimes we do not have the human resource capital in Tobago to prosecute the kind of work that we want done in Tobago and often have to import it.

We have challenges in terms of the higher cost of living in Tobago, the cost of materials and so on coming to Tobago. And, generally, the quality of life in Tobago is reasonable, but it can be improved and, certainly, any inputs from the Tobago House of Assembly, meaning input from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, will lead to that outcome.

There is also a factor in Tobago, in my view, that treats with the issue of development in Tobago and it has to do with the private sector in Tobago. The private sector in Tobago is, in my view, a lil bit risk averse, one reason being that of the market in Tobago. The population of Tobago is about 60,000. The market in Tobago is a relatively small market and, therefore, you do not have the kind of business turnover

that you might get, for example, on the mainland Trinidad, if I may put it that way.

So you find that businesses in Tobago to make a profit, generally has to have a slightly higher mark-up if they are to make a reasonable profit than if they were doing business in Trinidad, similarly because of the size of the market. I mean, I am not an economist but, generally, the demand and supply will kind of dictate that. So you will find that the cost of living in Tobago is, in some cases, considerably higher than the cost of living in Trinidad, and that eats up quite a bit of the allocations. When I say “eats up quite a bit of the allocation” it is not that the THA spends on the cost of living but, generally, the people who work for the THA have to expend more of their disposal income on basic necessities and so on, and that speaks to some issues of the quality of life and so on in Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, thank you. Ms. Ramona?

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Chair. Just a follow-up question, Mr Sandy, to my first question. You mentioned that the statements were submitted to the Auditor General’s office. To my knowledge, publicly, the Auditor General’s Office has stated that they encountered some challenges in receiving these statements. Can you tell me when these statements were submitted to Auditor General’s Office?

Mr. Sandy: I cannot say when exactly they were submitted, but I know

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for a fact that the year 2013 was submitted – that is the last year we submitted – and 2014 as we promised in Parliament will be ready in about two weeks' time and 2015 will be ready in about a month's time again.

The challenges that the Auditor General has identified in a number of cases is that sometimes when they are doing their audits, documents sometimes are not available for audit purposes. We have a particular challenge here which we have admitted to in the sense that sometimes the Auditor General will ask for certain documents and we are unable to provide them with those documents at the time when they asked for those documents, bearing in mind that we are dealing now with an audit for the year 2008. The last audit was done for the year 2007. We are now in 2016.

I mean, most of us who sit around this table here probably were not even employed with the THA in 2006 and 2007. We are not saying that the documents are not available, we are just saying sometimes it is very difficult to retrieve them. More often than not, we retrieve those documents after the deadline has passed for submission to the Auditor General.

In some of the Auditor General's statements, comments were made that they could not see certain documents so, therefore, they could not form an opinion on the audit of the Tobago House of Assembly. We

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have complained to the Auditor General that we find that rather unfair because sometimes they might see 95 per cent of the documents, but the impression is given that all the documents were not seen and, therefore, certain things could not be accounted for. We have made numerous complaints to the Auditor General about this. But we do admit that we do have a challenge sometimes with presenting documents at the time when the Auditor General needs to see them.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much for that explanation. You mentioned that the statements for 2013/2014 were submitted and about to be submitted for 2014, but what about the years preceding that 2007 to 2012? What about those statements going into the Auditor General's Office?

Mr. Sandy: Those statements have been submitted to the Auditor General. As I said, the Auditor General indicated – and I am not here to speak for the Auditor General – they might be short staffed and so on. We have appealed to the Auditor General to do an omnibus kind of audit of the THA accounts for the years 2006 to 2012 or 2013 so that we can become current and it is something I believe the Auditor General is considering, but as far as the THA submission of those documents, those documents are with the Auditor General. So it is no fault of the THA that they are now auditing the year 2007.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Sandy, again. Just one

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more question from me. We had here a concern concerning how much money the Tobago House of Assembly would have spent on eradicating the seaweed problem you all had and, also, do you all maintain a disaster fund and, if so, what is the amount within the fact that we are going soon into the hurricane season?

Ms. Pilgrim-Soanes: Chair, what we are faced with is the THA and the 1990 Act, and that was followed by the—the 1980 Act, sorry and that was followed by the 1990 Rules and then we had the 1996 Act that repealed the 1980. So now we have the 1990 Rules and the 1996 Act, and the 1996 Act provides for the use of the 1990 Rules with modification. So the 1996 Act talks to capital expenditure; the 1990 Rules talks to contingency and the contingency is from the unspent. So the Executive Council directs how the contingency is used. So there is provision for contingency within the THA. Did I answer your question?

Mr. Chairman: Not really. [*Laughter*] What I was asking specifically is how the THA has dealt with the seaweed problem. How much money was expended on it, the sargassum?

Ms. Pilgrim-Soanes: Well, the figures for the expenditure on the seaweed, Chair, we do not have that figure right now, but I could tell you that there is a plan, a sargassum plan, presently, trying to treat because sargassum is here again.

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Mr. Chairman: It is here again?

Ms. Pilgrim-Soanes: It is here again—

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Ms. Pilgrim-Soanes:—and they are trying to treat with it. So, there is something in train, but the figures that we spent last fiscal is not available at this time, but can be provided at a later time.

Mr. Chairman: We will appreciate you providing it to us. And then the other question I had asked is: is there a disaster fund, really and truly, a disaster relief fund?

Ms. Pilgrim-Soanes: No, the contingency is what we use, but not a particular disaster fund.

Mr. Chairman: A more general type of—

Ms. Pilgrim-Soanes: Unforeseen circumstances is what the rules, hence the reason I gave the history. Unforeseen circumstances, money comes out of the Contingency Fund, so disaster, unforeseen, will come out of the Contingency Fund.

Mr. Chairman: I know you all have been before the PAC and the PA(E)C—just the PAC, whose remit is more an in-depth financial enquiry into you all. So we thank you for your contributions here this morning. If there is anything, in closing, Mr. Sandy will like to, say, leave with us and the public, we will appreciate. One moment.

Mr. Solomon: Through the Chair, you mentioned Studley Park

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Quarries: could you tell us a little bit why it is that you chose that as a revenue stream option?

Mr. Sandy: Because we think that the quarry is now underperforming, and the studies have shown that there is great potential as a revenue earner at the Studley Park Quarry, not only as a revenue earner, but also as a foreign exchange earner in the sense that we do import quite a bit of quarry material into Trinidad and Tobago, and we feel that the Studley Park Quarry can satisfy a large part of the that need and so, therefore, it will stem the outflow of foreign exchange to purchase aggregate material from outside of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have some challenges, and we are treating with them now. One of the challenges being having an industrial port in Tobago to treat with the movement of barges of materials and so on. And, for your information, when Atlantic LNG was being built in Point Fortin quite a bit of that aggregate came from the Studley Park Quarry. Barges left Tobago on a weekly basis with material to construct that plant. The studies have shown that the resources at the quarry are not inexhaustible, but we have quite a bit of resources there, and if it is properly utilized it can be a serious revenue earner for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Solomon: I appreciate that. I want to ask you about earning foreign exchange, in particular. Are there any projects that the THA is

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considering that could assist in the foreign exchange earning apart from the tourism sector which is an obvious one?

Mr. Sandy: Not that I can point out a particular project, but we can earn foreign exchange in two basic ways: one is to reduce the foreign exchange outflow in that sense and also as tourism would do to bring fresh foreign exchange in. When the agriculture sector comes at the table here, they can perhaps discuss with you the thing that we are doing to improve agricultural production that would reduce the foreign exchange outflow as far as purchasing of food and so on is concerned.

Mr. Solomon: Through the Chair, the Auditor General's report, I understand for 2007 – is that the last Auditor General's report?

Mr. Sandy: That is the last one, yes.

Mr. Solomon: Can you tell us if you are happy with that report that you received and, if not, what improvements you plan to make in the THA with regards to that report?

Mr. Sandy: No, we are not happy with the report, because the report largely says that they could not form an opinion on the audit of the THA given that quite a few documents were not presented for audit scrutiny at the time when they was requested. So we are not happy with that at all. The Auditor General would have pointed out a few areas also where we can improve on our operations here, and we have

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taken those on board. The challenge though is that the Auditor General started making those comments from the audit of, I believe, 2005 or 2006, but those comments were made in the year 2012 and 2013. So you will find that in the continuing audit of 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, we will have the same negative reports, because they were only brought to our attention in 2012 after the fact. If you understand what I mean.

The 2006 audits were brought to our attention by the Auditor General in 2012. So it is only from 2012 that we were able to address some of the concerns that the Auditor General had. So between 2006 and 2012, we would have the recurring problem that the Auditor General will continue to report on, because it was only brought to our attention in 2012 when we would have made the adjustments and so on. It is a real challenge for us.

Mr. Solomon: Through the Chair, Mr. Sandy, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have an entitlement to an Auditor General's report every year. It appears to me as though you are blaming the Auditor General, to some extent, for those reports not being available, and we are talking almost nine, 10 years ago that we have not had the benefit of the Auditor General's report or the Auditor General's accounts. I mean, what do you have to say about that?

Mr. Sandy: I am glad that you are agreeing with me, member. What

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we are saying is that we have submitted our accounts to the Auditor General up to the year 2013. We have submitted them on time. We have a statutory timeline in which to submit those reports, and largely we have submitted them on time. It is up to the Auditor General to do the audits. Sitting at the Auditor General now are the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. They are now auditing the 2008 – well my understanding is 2009 they are now auditing, because they might have completed 2008. So the next report to come to Parliament will be the Auditor General's report of 2008 and that is the one that we will be questioned on, but we have submitted – “we” meaning the Tobago House of Assembly – all our financial statements to the Auditor General up to the year 2013.

So, in other words, if the Auditor General wishes and the law allows them to, they can audit the 2013 report and the 2014 report will be with the Auditor General in short order in the next two or three weeks' time so they can audit the 2014 report, but they are now doing 2007, 2008. I understand they are now starting 2009. It is no fault of ours. We have submitted our reports to the Auditor General. It is up to the Auditor General to do the audits. We cannot be blamed for the Auditor General now auditing the year 2007 or 2008. They could audit 2013 if they so wish.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Mr. Sandy, I have a question coming from Ms.

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Ramdial.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Chair. Mr. Sandy, can you tell us what the unspent balances were for the period 2001 to 2015? In addition to that the total revenue and the total expenditure for those same years?

Mr. Sandy: I am afraid, Chair, those figures are available, but I would have to provide them via a separate report, but those figures are available.

Mr. Chairman: Sure, we will appreciate that. Members of the Finance Committee, I would like to—are there any more questions? No?—thank you for your contribution. At this time, we would like to invite tourism and transport divisions to take your place. We would ask Mr. Sandy his kind indulgence to remain with us being the Chief Administrator. *[Pause]*

[Officials of the Division of Finance and Enterprise Development depart]

Mr. Chairman: We are on again. This is the Division of Tourism and Transportation. Welcome to the hearing. You all have been part of what I would have said earlier on in terms of the purpose of this enquiry, this public hearing. Mr. Sandy, again, has graciously continue to keep his presence here, and we appreciate that, and he has been helpful thus far.

I would like you all to introduce yourselves to the Committee and to

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the public, please. Just keep your voices up, because it is being recorded by Hansard so we need to get every word that is said otherwise we would misrepresent you.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Is that it? Is there anybody else? That is it? Okay. Thank you very much. I will call on Ms. Cherryl-Ann Solomon to make an opening statement, a brief opening statement, please.

Ms. Solomon: Good morning once again. As the Administrator of Tourism and Transportation I would just like to remind all of us that tourism is all of us. So it is not just the division that is responsible for tourism, but everyone in the island and who visit the island. And on this note I say welcome to Tobago our beautiful island and trust that this session will be very productive. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. Well let us get into the meat of it, eh. In light of your responses, the division of Tourism and Transportation, do you all engage in direct marketing or tourism in Trinidad per se?

Ms. Solomon: I will prefer to direct this question to my director.

Ms. Toppin: Yes, we do. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. You see, based on your responses eh you will give certain figures and it seems to be that there is an increase in

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your tourism generally speaking and it seems to be overshadowed by domestic arrivals as tourists in Tobago, and it seems to suggest that a significant portion or a significant number of your tourists are coming from Trinidad, hence my asking whether or not there is a targeted campaigning or solicitation of visitors from Trinidad as part of your tourism drive.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Yes. We have targeted certain aspects of tourism in Trinidad. For example, we have every year a road show in Trinidad where we go to certain areas to sort of sell our products. I also want to point out we have not been able to separately identify regional arrivals. These flights are often classified as domestic because they are not direct and these numbers would be included in the domestic arrivals that we have produced.

Mr. Chairman: I see. So is this not Trinidad because of how your flights are configured?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. So that would account for the differences in — Now, are you satisfied with the air bridge support between Trinidad and Tobago at this point in time? I understand that it is something like — my last reading there — it is something like 28 flights per day between Trinidad and Tobago in terms of the airlift? Is that a true figure?

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Mr. Henry: Yes. That figure seems to be correct. But to answer the question, if we are satisfied? The real answer to that is sometimes, because during a normal day we “doh” have much of a problem however, during peak periods or during peak times —

Mr. Chairman: Which would be when? What times?

Mr. Henry: — will be a challenge. Let us say, on a Friday evening coming to Tobago or on a Sunday evening going to Trinidad, we have real peak traffic or during, for example, we just finished the Tobago Jazz festival. During periods like those, during Easter and during the July/ August vacation, then we have a challenge with the traffic coming from — sorry with the service on the air bridge.

Mr. Chairman: Now, this seems perennial? Right? What strategies of efforts have been made to rectify this?

Mr. Henry: Well, what has been happening lately is that the Tobago House of Assembly along with stakeholders and Caribbean Airlines have been sitting down. As a matter of fact, we sat down and developed what we call a Heat Map. And what the Heat Map does is to identify those peak periods that I have just spoken about and determine the kind of supply that needs to be put forward on the air bridge in order to accommodate the demand at those peak periods. So we have looked at that, developed the Heat Map so that we can, in future, deal with these periods.

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Mr. Chairman: Would it be fair to say that there is a significant, there is a high volume of traffic between Trinidad and Tobago generally speaking?

Mr. Henry: Yes. It is. There is a high volume of traffic and we could add that there is also this, what we could call, late on demand where some people would be probably willing to come to Tobago, but just would not go to the airport because some of the difficulties they might experience.

Mr. Chairman: My next question therefore is: why has anybody the powers that be, be it the Government of Trinidad and Tobago or THA have not been able to attract private enterprise in, if not competing, but certainly providing an alternative source of airlift or whatever it is to Tobago? Has that been explored?

Mr. Henry: Well I know the THA at one time had chartered a flight, an airline that is, to deal with the July/August situation some time ago and that helped tremendously. But for that to happen it really has to be a sort of a policy decision especially if it is coming from outside Trinidad and Tobago because you run into problems with [*Inaudible*], for example. So that has to be a decision taken by the central government.

Mr. Chairman: But is that not being engaged as a matter of priority because it is the basis on which Tobago tourism will survive or strive

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or become more profitable?

Mr. Henry: Definitely, and I think it is something that needs to be looked at urgently, probably that or even restructuring the whole thing so that you can have a dedicated airline serving the Tobago air bridge. Because right now what we have is not a real dedicated airline to the air bridge. Sometimes we, for example, would be at the airport waiting to come to Tobago and for some reason there might be a breakdown of an airplane and what happens we would have to be late, long lines, delayed. At the same time I must add, at the same time, you would be sitting in the departure lounge waiting and you see airlines, I mean, the same airplanes loading and flying to other destinations, regional destinations.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I can identify with that with the most recent experience coming here yesterday, because I was advised I should be at the airport at 3.00 p.m. I got there at ten to three, I never came to Tobago until around almost after five almost close to 6 o'clock. I could have gone to Miami and probably on my way back down, you know. So I was very disheartened by it, you know. I was very, very disheartened. I can identify with what you are saying and there are people would like to come to Tobago more frequently and cannot come.

As a matter for fact, I have your ear now, as well in situations like

me, persons who are disabled. It was quite a challenge to have — and there seem to be not a cohesive or any fixed policy how people with disability are to be transported, because there were about two other persons similarly disabled like me. And my experience internationally when I am travelling is that the disabled, young and persons in need of assistance are allowed to board the flight first. We boarded the flight last and more so we were made to wait on the tarmac somewhere around there while the bus brought other people because it was parked some way away from the closest [*Inaudible*] and people had to commute by bus. Of course, I commuted by my own wheels, you see. But I found that totally unacceptable. All right? And having to wait that long and given the challenges and, of course, the challenges that I have to or any disabled person would have to bear in mind did occur. I would not go into details, I mean, you could just use your imagination. It did occur and it is very unfortunate.

So I would want to believe there is a tourist destination, those are areas that one will have to look into. And, I mean, coming here I want to be positive, the hospitality is without question, on par with the best, very engaging, very friendly and so forth. But again, I am staying at a hotel, overnighing, of course, to be here on time and at the facility there were only two rooms for physically challenged like

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myself and they were not what you will require to be physically challenged rooms at all. Had I not walked with an assistant, I would have been in great difficulty in having a shower to refresh myself this morning. I would have ended up taking a cowboy. [*Laughter*] So, you know, with assistance I avoided the cowboy and I had a shower with great difficulty.

Now, the ones that you have when you are coming as a tourist or whatever, business person to accommodation in Tobago in a hotel that says it caters for the disabled, that there is proper disability. But I want to believe that people who are dealing with these things are not really understanding or probably do not consult with the stakeholders, with the very users, because putting up a rail in a bathroom and making it bigger does not make it disabled-friendly, eh. And I was surprised of the hotel that I stayed in before I became paralysed was Coco Reef. Coco Reef did not have disabled facilities as well and I wonder how many other hotels in your stock of hotel rooms would be catering adequately for such. I mean, the disabled tourism like in many other areas, there is a significant market internationally.

If you go on certain websites when you go in Europe, North America you can see where they can tell you, they make comments where are the places to go that are user friendly, and certainly they will flock

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to those places. If we are to be a tourist destination, we have to cater for all. I know it is a challenge, generally speaking, in Trinidad and Tobago, tourism or not, and it is something that we have to address with certain urgency. Tobago will not certainly be, in any way, a flagship in bearing the banner of making their facility or public facilities much more quickly disabled-friendly so as to attract persons differently built with resources or money to spend and to contribute to the economic welfare of the country. Yes?

Having said that, I do not want to monopolise because I am here to ask you questions, all right, not to make statements. But I could not resist what you were saying as one of the handicaps of transportation and I having just recently been a victim of that. Right? I wanted to share that with members of the public and the Committee, my fellow members as well. But Mr. Smith has a question for you which I will invite him to do so now.

Mr. Smith: I always say leave the stars to the astronomers and you all, what we read, is your main income is from tourism. Right? My background is marketing and advertising and there are so my facets and different realms in tourism. I mean, there are destinations that sell decadence. You see Dubai and those oil-based places selling decadence now. There are other places that sell shopping. There are places that sell sun sport, beach sports and so on, those who sell

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cruise ship destinations for retirees and so on. There are those places that sell the spring break party nightlife; those who sell the casino nightlife. Just here in the Caribbean alone you can find different pockets and corners in different islands that try to benchmark themselves as that.

And again, you all will be the experts because you all will have the research and stuff, but just like everything else, things evolve all the time. I do not know which one right now is the most lucrative worldwide in terms of which kinds of tourism. Some people go for nature trails, for bird watching. But what does Tobago benchmark itself now and if so is it that we are looking at other ways or other revenue streams to enhance or rejuvenate or to move forward to try to see if we could get more income? It is a kind of a weird question, but I think it is understandably where we want to find our benchmark is.

Because I will tell you, I saw a debate a few years ago where people were actually discussing if to advertise Trinidad and Tobago combined. Trinidad's market is different to Tobago. Trinidad is more industrial, business, finance; Tobago, as you know, is tourist, and there was a debate if we should separate them. I mean, you see it in North America all the time and it is such a hard space to find with all the noise that is going on in terms of the advertising. But

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are you all seeing you all evolving to find what is the more lucrative niche right now in tourism?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: The first thing when we think about tourism is that we have to know our product in order to position it where we want to be. You say that you look at the other Caribbean islands, et cetera, and they offer different things, but because you have to know your product, there is where your product differentiation can come in and work for you.

For example, we have within the whole Caribbean the sand, sun and sea, but because we have now come to the point where we are beginning to understand our product, we can identify our product offerings and now that festivals can always play a part, an integral role actually, in Tobago's tourism product and hence we have festivals like the blue food festival, the heritage festival, jazz, dragon boat, cycling, I could go on and on and that is because we have taken the time to study our product in order to give that product differentiation that is absolutely necessary for creating a successful tourism destination.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Chair. We have been advised in 2014 working on the hotel room expansion project, two properties were purchased at the cost of \$32 million: the Manta Lodge at Speyside and the Sanctuary Villa Resort at Black Rock. To date, can

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you give us the cost of these ventures and the timelines for opening?

Ms. Solomon: Manta Lodge and Sanctuary, with regard to the actual figures I will ask my management accountant to give you the details. But we just recently signed the contract for UDeCOTT to do the renovations and so on and we are estimating it would be ready by the end of this year. Right? So my management accountant will tell you the actual figures.

Ms. Toppin: We would have spent \$32 million to acquire both properties.

Ms. Ramdial: Yeah. Just one follow up question. How many rooms are we looking to expand by, accommodation and is this sufficient enough to boost the tourism sector here or do you need additional rooms? And this is just one, a part or that project.

Ms. Solomon: Approximately 78 rooms. And yes we would need more, but the THA, with regard to the division, in our attempt to improve the quality and the availability of rooms, this is one of the steps that we are taking.

Mr. Chairman: Can I ask, I do not know which one of you be the appropriate person, if it is the Director or Mrs. Books-Adams? The Jazz Festival that has just finished a couple of hours ago or a day or so ago, this has been going for some what—10 years now? Is it as old as that or it is more or even greater vintage?

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Ms. Solomon: It is approximately 10 to 11 years.

Mr. Chairman: Ten to 11 years. Now I know when something like this begins it is deemed to be a profit bearing event. Is it at this point in time profit bearing?

Ms. Solomon: From where I sit, not really profit bearing. It is more aimed at providing an opportunity for our entrepreneurs or business people to improve and to grow. And also the ideal is that we become profitable. But at this point we are, more or less, closer to breaking even than to say a profit because the idea of jazz, the jazz experience is really to encourage tourists to come to our island to explore much more than music, not just the singing and so on, but the island of itself. So it is an initiative that was really geared to encourage our entrepreneurs here to improve, rise to the challenge and the standard that is required.

As I am sitting as the administrator it is my hope whether it is under my watch or my successor, that we could really review the whole jazz experience as a THA, and yes improve on the business persons or the entrepreneurs, but also make profitable so that my staff especially my accounting staff could be more comfortable with the whole idea. And I am saying that to say that we would have offered some timelines and so on for the festival to come off. Thank God the reviews that we got were pretty good, but we still could do more

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and we know that. So in the post-mortem we are hoping that we could make some recommendations to the executive council to the THA that we could really see it as a profitable venture.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. At this stage can you tell us at this stage whether or not what percentage of your visitors for the jazz is domestic as opposed to foreign?

Ms. Solomon: It would be a little early to give you that information now, but if you give me a little time we could provide that information at a later date, if you would allow us.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. But what about in the past? What was the trend from the past? Is there a trend? Was there a trend?

Ms. Solomon: I will ask my director to answer.

Mr. Chairman: Also in the meantime and, I mean, if you do not have this. In the meantime this is a short question: what was the cost involved in making such a production?

Ms. Solomon: The initial approval was \$19 million.

Mr. Chairman: Nineteen million, 19.

Ms. Solomon: One nine million, but because of the economic constraints we had to cut the budget and we tried to bring it as close to \$16 million. I am still to do the final figures as to the real cost. But we had to cut the budget because of our economic situation.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So we go back to the first question.

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Mrs. Brooks-Adams: This question it takes us back to the challenge of identifying regional tourists as opposed to domestic tourists seeing that we are not able to separately identify who are Trinidadians and who are regional.

Mr. Chairman: You mean because from the Caribbean perspective? Right?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: From the Caribbean perspective.

Mr. Chairman: You do not fill out an immigration slip coming in from the Caribbean anymore?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: No.

Mr. Chairman: You do not?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: No.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So, I mean, that is probably an issue we need to consider. I mean, in order to track the movement of Caribbean brothers and sisters, we need to be able to know how many people are coming from abroad. I find that very odd, eh. That is odd. You will land from Grenada or Jamaica, Guyana as the case may be and you come off your plane and you are coming here without filling a slip to see where you are coming from?

Mr. Sandy: Brother Chair, yes you fill out a slip at Piarco. But what you are saying is that, when you are coming to Trinidad and Tobago at the first point of entry, you do fill out that slip. But you can come

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to Trinidad and Tobago for three weeks and decide to come to Tobago for jazz and we cannot tell the difference whether you are Trinidadian, or Grenadian or, you know. So that is the point she is making.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thanks. But you think it will be useful having identified that is an issue that we implement something, not to get too bureaucratic again to impede the free flow of movement, but in order to track that as an information that is necessary in you making any plans towards focusing more into the region or elsewhere that we have some means of tracking persons that are coming in that kind of way?

Mr. Sandy: Yes. The research department of the Division of Tourism has that responsibility and I believe that they are looking at ways and means of doing some kind of survey that will give us an idea of who are the visitors coming to Tobago. I know it has been done in the past, but we need to continue that kind of activity so that we can say well, okay, based on the results of our survey, estimate the number of non-nationals who are coming to Tobago for the jazz and so on.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Mrs. Baptiste-Primus.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to piggyback a bit on what you said. This is a situation that is a very simple one

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because our policies must be data driven, it cannot be emotive in context and in form. And from where I sit, to me it is simple. Those foreigners coming Tobago should be asked to complete a small slip, no bureaucratic form, just a brief form that captures where they are from and the length of time that they are staying in Tobago, because without that mechanism, from where I sit, it is difficult for any research department to capture that kind of data. How would you go about capturing such data that would influence the policies that the division would have to develop from time to time to further stimulate the tourism sector?

Mr. Sandy: Member, you have just identified the research that needs to be done. Basically as you said, a slip indicating where you are from and so on. But we also remember, we have to bear in mind that you also have the sea bridge. We have the air bridge and the sea bridge and there are no limitations on persons once you enter into Trinidad and Tobago on travel anywhere between Trinidad and Tobago. And if we are to do this on a consistent basis, when I say consistent, if every flight and every ferry trip that comes to Tobago, we have to ask persons to fill out a slip it means we have to give everyone on those flight a slip to fill out. And the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago might consider that to be a bit of a —

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: No. No. No. My suggestion, I am sorry if —

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I accept full blame for my weak area in communicating properly what I meant. Not for the locals to fill out that small slip. It is for foreigners to fill out, to complete, not locals.

Mr. Sandy: And how do you identify a foreigner?

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Well just as when you travel internationally, locals go here, foreigners go in the other direction. But I am saying we cannot work out—you are going down into process. I am not dealing with process here. I am dealing with a solution for which the process can be worked out. Once the idea is one of searching for solutions, then a policy decision will have to be taken, that listen, we are going to implement X or Y and therefore the follow-up procedures can be worked out at the level of whichever committee or what have you. But I am saying the issue of ensuring that policies developed are data-driven and not emotive in intent or direction.

Mr. Sandy: And I certainly agree with you on that, member. And as I said the research department of the Division of Tourism will certainly be looking at that.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Thank you. Mr. Solomon.

Mr. Solomon: Through the, Chair, on behalf of the mariners and the ocean-going folk and that includes everyone from the fisherman to the reef boat operator to the yachtsman to the yacht charterer, the regattas, I have witnessed and I have heard the pleas and I have seen

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from my own eyes the “sufferation” that these mariners go through in the island of Tobago. The reef boat men are picking up people at Store Bay while the waves are crashing and tourists are falling off the back of the boats. I have seen the reef boats on Pigeon Point actually doing haul-out repairs while they balance on rocks, highly dangerous, highly toxic, destroying our reefs, putting the reef boat cleaners and men themselves in danger. And for the life of me I see them having to tote gasoline on the back of their trucks and haul it over to the boats, the gas is spilling all over destroying the reef, destroying the ocean. We have fishing tournaments here which are international grade, we have great yachting yet still there is no sign of a marina or even a haul-out facility or a proper gas station or coast guard base or reef patrol base in Tobago. I do not know if you can help me if that is on the cards or if that is at all being considered by the tourism department of the THA?

Mr. Sandy: Yes. I can answer that by saying it is not on the tourism department’s agenda, but it is on the Tobago House of Assembly’s agenda. I know that as we speak surveys are being done and efforts are being made to identify an ideal spot for a marina and actually it is one of the projects that the Government identified as important for the development of Tobago. Efforts were made in the past. We had an entrepreneur who had put a gas station in Plymouth and

because the turnover was pretty small and you know the mark up on the sale of fuel is not very high, the business floundered.

And we have had other, how I should say, opportunities that would have passed by. But certainly we recognize what you are talking about and we know that is important if we are to develop a tourism industry in Tobago and we have to service the yachting fraternity and so on, that we must put these things in place. And as I said, we are actively looking at that situation right now.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Again, Mr. Sandy I want you to take a break, have some water and let me see if you can get some of these abled people to help you along. Okay? The question I have here, you have basically three major festivals or events being hosted in Tobago annually which is the heritage festival, you have the carnival, and you have the Jazz Festival just concluded here. Is there any way of assisting us to know which of those mentioned will be the most profitable or attract the greatest amount of tourism or patronage as the case may be? And why I am asking this, quickly, is because, in order to prioritize the scarcity in your allocations, you will have to say which venture means more should be given, or something should be taken away from. In a gist, that is it.

11.30 a.m.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: In keeping with what I had said earlier about

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some of the initiatives that will play an integral role in Tobago's tourism advancement, because in our effort for product differentiation we looked at festivals. I will have to say that the heritage festival should be one of the main priority areas, and the Blue Food Festival. Because, being able to sell, for want of a better word, our food, a lot of people, or we have noticed that in this new tourism where people are looking for more definite activities, food has been one of the greater aspects of people travelling for culinary festivals.

Mr. Chairman: An experience?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Yes, for an experience. And we find that in these days of tourism when you have something that is extraordinary, like an experience, the best way to sell an experience is because it is not something that you can wrap your arms around, it is something that you have to feel, which is why we are going towards these sort of experiences instead of the normal sand, sun and sea. So, I will have to say the heritage because it showcases our culture, and lots of people travel for culture and heritage, and we will have to say food because of the experiences that we can offer in these areas.

Mr. Chairman: So again, is there some bases in place that could track the number of persons that would come for either one of these festivals, the blue food or the heritage? Like, you know, 100 come for the heritage; 200 come for the blue food, is there any means of tracking

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these things? Because, as Member Jennifer Baptiste-Primus said, these things must be driven by data. You must have the data to inform decisions. It must be based on some empirical considerations.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: We do have in our division a research unit. We do not have the information with us, but we can pass that on to you at a later date.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: It is available, not with us at the research unit, that is why I say —

Mr. Chairman: Okay, well, we would appreciate you forwarding it to us as soon as possible.

Mr. Solomon: Through the Chair. As I understand it, there was a law passed where foreigners were not allowed to own land in Tobago without a licence since 2007. We are informed that that has had a dramatic effect to the negative of foreign direct investment, can I ask if the THA is looking at changing that policy?

Mr. Sandy: Yes, member. The THA is having a second look at that policy. But I also want to add that sometimes the THA is unfairly blamed for the sole implementation of that policy. It largely rest with, I think, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment in Port of Spain, THA has a minimal input into that process. It largely rests with the Ministry of, I think it is Trade, Industry and Investment, in

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Trinidad. But, it is something that the Tobago House of Assembly is looking at. It is national in scope in the sense that if you are a foreigner and you have to own certain properties in Tobago you are required to have a licence and so on. But, the process ought not to be long drawn out and a difficult one. But, it appears to be so because of all of the factors of the approval does not rest with the Tobago House of Assembly. We have a minimal role to play in it.

Mr. Solomon: But, do you agree that it has a significant negative impact on foreign direct investment on the island?

Mr. Sandy: I have no information to agree to that. But, what I do know is that it was recommended at the time, because the cost of real estate in Tobago had skyrocketed and there was tremendous speculation in the international market on properties in Tobago. And had put the average Tobagonian basically could not have afforded to purchase anything in Tobago, and that regulation law licence arrangement was put in place to put some kind of control on the cost of real estate in Tobago. Because, at that time when it was put in place the average Tobagonian could not even dream to buy property in Tobago.

Mr. Solomon: Thank you for that. Could I just ask, do you know how many licences have been issued to foreigners to own property in Tobago?

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Mr. Sandy: No, I do not, but that figure is available from the Ministry. I think it is the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment, but that figure is available. But, it is not a large amount, I know.

Mr. De Freitas: My contribution is two part. The second part is a question and the first part is tacking back to Mrs. Baptiste-Primus and the Chairman's comments in regard to tracking these specific events for tourism on the island of Tobago. I would like to humbly suggest that one way of tracking is at the point of ticket sales as opposed to the point of entry. The reason being, for example, if ticket sales were done online then you can definitely at that point either at purchase or at point of ordering the tickets you can ask couple questions to find out what the address is. You can even go as far, if you are doing it online via website or what not, to sell directly to other countries, be it Grenada or Barbados, and at that point based on the orders that you have gotten there you can find out exactly how many international arrivals you get per event, and that way you would get more feedback in order to develop policy. So that was the first comment.

The second part is a question. Your submission indicated that marketing initiatives undertaken by the Division of Tourism and Transportation led to an increase in international tourist arrivals by air and by cruise, could you describe for me some of these marketing initiatives, as well as, have all of these marketing initiatives continued

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during the current fiscal year?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: The decision engaged in dedicating advertising programmes that highlighted a highly differentiated product and the uniqueness of the destination. The use of social media online and offline trade activities, store operator and travel agency training and leveraging the popularity of world renowned opinion leaders from Tobago as credible tourist ambassadors. We also took on what we call promotional analysts to further give us marketing intelligence as to afford us deeper penetration into existing markets and allow us insights into new destinations.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Chair. You answered part of the question just now Mrs. Brooks-Adams, in addition to that I just want to say, within the Caribbean region—and I also want to ask a question—and I quote some stats here, in 2005 Tobago had 88,200 tourists arriving; by 2015 that had dropped to 22,435; when we look at tourism within the Caribbean region we have seen growth in Jamaica and Barbados. Do you think that it would be wise, ma'am to follow their models and implement some of what they are doing?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: With all due respect, no ma'am, because we do have a different product. It goes back to understanding your product. If we would look at the arrivals from source markets we would observe—you called Jamaica so I will go with Jamaica, that most of

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Jamaica's tourists come from Canada and China. It tends to follow that people go where their currency can have the greatest values. Because Jamaica is also a very tourist destination they have the right mix for the type of product that they attract. So, to say that we should follow the model of another Caribbean country, we have to know our product and drill down to it, not look at what Jamaica has, or the Dominican Republic has, or even Cuba, they are quite different products and could never fit into our product, mainly because of the differentiation, the different things that people have to offer, and being the most southerly of the Caribbean islands, we cannot compete on sand, sun and sea, which is why we have to always recognize and keep in mind, we are we, we have to understand our product and drill down on what we have.

Ms. Ramdial: Follow-up question, so, in light of all of this information and knowledge that you have, why has there been such a consistent decrease over the years in tourist arrivals to Tobago?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: There have been many challenges that confronted the development or the increase of marketing of arrivals in Tobago. For example, the airlift was not readily accessible. We are mostly long-haul markets, there was a passenger tax that was introduced that severely affected our long-haul travel ability. Because of the fact that this passenger tax was introduced it made the flights

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too expensive, and therefore we had to find innovative ways to make our destination attractive, because, and I have to always go back again to product differentiation, which is critical because of the fact that if it was sun, sand and sea they will go to closer destinations where they can get the value for the money, after you had added on the passenger tax that was introduced by the airlines.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Samuel this question is for you. Tell me, what is the fleet of public transport buses in Tobago at this point in time?

Mr. Sandy: Let me refer the question to Mr. Cook, who is in charge of public transport in Tobago.

Mr. Cook: Thank you, Chairman. Forty-five buses are available on the island. In terms of the size of the fleet in Tobago, it is 45, but they are not all functional.

Mr. Chairman: How many are functioning?

Mr. Cook: As of today's figure?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Cook: There are 14 buses that are available.

Mr. Chairman: Fourteen?

Mr. Cook: Yes, 14 today. But, the figure I dare say at this juncture it fluctuates on a daily basis.

Mr. Chairman: What is the fluctuation?

Mr. Cook: The fluctuation, I mean, like for instance, at the end of today

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you may have a figure that says 18 buses. It goes like that. And we have to bear in mind it is an aged fleet you are dealing with. For instance, I think it was about two weeks ago we had 21 buses available in one day. So, you keep moving figures quite easily as you go along.

Mr. Chairman: The other question I was going to ask you will probably, it will be self-evident without even asking. So, how much of those buses are dedicated to say, tourism purposes?

Mr. Cook: Well, we have not really dedicated buses as such on the fleet. When they ask of us to provide buses, we do it on what is available basis.

Mr. Chairman: So, if you have a fleet of 40 and only 14 is operational and you have a request for two or three buss, a cruise came in and they want buses, what will be your position? It would not be able to be satisfied?

Mr. Cook: Well, we have tried, and I dare say to some extent, maybe divinely so, to successfully respond to the request of the Division of Tourism. On all the occasions that they have had the ships coming in they have asked us for assistance and we have been able to give them. The figures I have, over a 12-day period dating back from October to present, we have been able to give them as much as 105 buses – you know, as much as eight buses in some cases per day to be able to meet their demands.

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Mr. Chairman: Okay. The other question is, sorry, the Public Transport Service Corporation it is central government driven, is it and operated?

Mr. Cook: Yes, sir.

Mr. Chairman: And there is a division in Tobago that is managed by the Tobago House of Assembly, or that is not so?

Mr. Cook: The Public Transport Service Corporation in Tobago, our line secretary is the Division of Infrastructure and Public Utilities. We have to account to the Division of Infrastructure and Public Utilities, so hence is why Mrs. Hernandez is here, under whose ambit, you know, we are performing and have to account to.

Mr. Chairman: So, what is the relationship between Trinidad central government and the THA in terms of Public Transport Service Corporation buses being made available in the country?

Mr. Cook: That is a question I am unable to answer, because I know there is some —

Mr. Chairman: You are unable to answer?

Mr. Cook: Yes, because there is some things there in terms of the link between the THA and PTSC Port of Spain that I am not all privy to, in terms of how the buses are acquired. But, I know when buses are bought for Port of Spain they would give us a certain amount of those buses for Tobago. That is what has been happening over the years. Of

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course, the THA would have purchased buses from time to time dating back to 1997, and they have purchased buses on behalf of PTSC. Again, the arrangement between the PTSC Port of Spain and the THA –

Mr. Chairman: And are they refunded?

Mr. Cook: No, there is no refunding as far as I am aware.

Mr. Chairman: Well, then they did not purchase it on behalf of you. If I purchase something on behalf of you I expect to get back my money.

Mr. Cook: [*Laughs*] The Trinidad and Tobago shortfall as far as, you know, the needs of the public is of concern on the island, so the THA, they have risen to the occasion.

Mr. Chairman: Would you agree that this is woefully inadequate for the servicing of the general public of Tobago far less tourism? The tourism market, would you say is woefully inadequate as to what you are saying here?

Mr. Cook: It is highly untenable. It is something that is very, very unbearable at times when we have those calls because – and that is the other thing, when it is that we have, you know, the call from the tourism department to get buses to transport the tourists, if it is that, you know, the travelling public generally sees those buses transporting the tourists and they are on the streets not being able to

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get access to transport, that is the kind of dilemma that we find ourselves in, to be able to dovetail and to tweak, and to satisfy the expectations of general public at the same time, and trying to deal with the tourism calls. So those are the challenges that we are faced with.

Mr. Chairman: Those are significant challenges. And Mr. Sandy I would just to bring you back in here for this moment. That is a serious issue that has just been raised here. This, to me, underlies the whole thing. Without transportation – transportation is one of the elements of productivity, and without a reliable transportation system, even for the locals, far less the tourism, what are we doing? This is like spinning top in mud. You cannot move people, goods and services from one place to the next, what is really going on? That is something to me that has to be an urgent priority to be addressed. So, what is being done?

Mr. Sandy: Well, THA in recognition of the need to have buses on the island had actually placed in its budget the purchase of, I believe, was 30 new buses this year –

Mr. Cook: Fifty.

Mr. Sandy: Fifty new buses. We actually sent a team of to Brazil, they looked at the buses and so on. We are purchasing, I think, was the Volare buses. We have purchased some before, but because of budgetary constraints we could not afford to do that this year, so we had to shelve the idea of purchasing those 50 buses. But, we had them

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in plan to do. I must agree with you that the bus fleet in Tobago is woefully inadequate and, of course, it is extremely unreliable given the inadequacy of the number of buses. So, you cannot really depend on the Public Transport Service Corporation in Tobago for transport. It is almost like you come and if a bus shows up, well, you ride in it, if not you find alternative means of transport. But, it is woefully inadequate, I must agree with you on that.

Mr. Chairman: So, therefore, even for me to ask you this question, which I must put to you. I mean, in terms of the physically challenged, you go to the European countries, I just came back for the UK, I came back from Miami, I could get into any bus. I could get into any taxi as a matter of fact without any problems. Are there buses dedicated or outfitted to transport the physically disabled person? Yes, those buses you are buying are any going to be earmarked for that, or make sure that all of the buses are suitably outfitted so as to make that allowance?

Mr. Sandy: Yes and no. There are some buses that were purchased for use by the differently abled. My personal view is that we should mainstream the whole idea of making buses accessible to disabled persons, in that all buses, all public transport should be made available, and we should not have these special buses. Because it contributes to the continued stigmatization and elimination of disabled people when you only have a certain type of buses that they

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alone can travel on. I mean, you cannot converse with your colleagues and that kind of thing.

Mr. Chairman: That is right.

Mr. Sandy: So, my personal view is that we should mainstream that, and all public transport buses should be disabled friendly and have the necessary equipment to treat with disabled people. But, I know Mr. Cook might be able to answer this. I know of the fleet that was purchased in Trinidad for the – they call them the ELDAMO buses – a number of them were sent to Tobago. But, in my view that is not the way we should go at all.

Mr. Chairman: So, then the ball is in your court in terms of a policy, in formulating the policy. I mean, the technocrats may be doing implementing, but is that part of influencing Government policy in your contribution in terms of when you are going to –

Mr. Sandy: Well, certainly. Any say I have in this matter it would be attempting to influence Government policy in that direction of mainstreaming the public transport to facilitate differently abled people.

Mr. Chairman: I look forward to that.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And, Mr. Sandy I could not agree with you more, because if we are to attain First World status, how we treat the children and the differently abled

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is very important. I want to turn the attention somewhat, but before I do so, I understood, if either yourself or Mr. Cook perhaps to have said that there are 45 buses in Tobago with only 14 operating?

Mr. Cook: Yes, member, that is what I said.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: So, it means therefore, that 31 buses are out of operation. What are you all doing about that? Do you all not have mechanics on board? If you do not have mechanics, is it that these 31 buses they are not repairable? I think the average Tobagonian would want to have information as to what the administration is doing regarding 31 buses out of compliance.

Mr. Cook: Yes member. In response to your concerns, what is happening is that we have not just sat idly by and allow these buses to just wear down and stay down. There is an engineering department that is established in Tobago, PTSC, it is functional; there are 10 mechanics, and there are also trainees that are also assigned to that department. However, we are having some serious challenges in terms of acquiring spares on a timely basis to ensure that those buses are repaired and are available for service on an ongoing basis. And, as I indicated earlier, we do have an aged fleet. The buses are aged, and in spite of your best efforts in terms of trying to streamline the repairs, it is difficult to determine exactly what is going to happen next.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: The wear and tear.

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Mr. Cook: The wear and tear. So, you fix buses today; you do your monthly checks and so on; your daily checks and all those things, and there is no guarantee that those things that you would have done today means that the bus is going to be continued on the road thereafter, because there are other things that you might not have touched that will go down. And the parts are not readily available. That is one of the serious challenges that we have. The mechanics, however, continue to work and do their best.

We have been asking for them to go for training and so on, continuous training. We have had assistance even from the manufacturers of those buses, the Yutong factory and also the Higer technicians came not too long ago, a few months last year, I think it was. They came in September of last year and spent a few months with us, to train our mechanics and to give assistance in repairing of those buses, but they did not make much of an impact, because a lot of what was expected could not have happened in the absence of spares, and it takes a long while for spares to get here. We ordered the spares on a timely basis, but it takes as much as six months for some items to get here, and that has been a major setback for us.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you very much Mr. Cook for that explanation. Mr. Chairman, through you, Mr. Sandy, I did note in the written responses from the Tobago House of Assembly the intention

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to purchase 50 Volare buses, but because the funds were not allocated the THA had to shelve those plans, and my question is, perhaps in the absence of large scale acquisition of buses the THA can perhaps focus on the incremental acquisition of buses? That is to say, if funds are not available for 50 then purchase five. Purchase five this year, and next year if you do not get sufficient funds, and you may be able to purchase two or three. So, instead of not acquiring any at all, you do it more on an incremental basis. Have you all considered that approach? Because, we are into, you know, some serious economic constraints.

Mr. Sandy: I could not agree with you more member, and I am certain that the Tobago House of Assembly is considering a smaller number of purchases. I do not know, because of contractual arrangements why, maybe, they could not have purchased five instead of 50. Because, I know a team went to Brazil, would have made some arrangements and all of that, I do not know if –

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: That may have impacted on the price of the –

Mr. Sandy: That may have impacted on the whole arrangement. But, I am certain that it is still on the front burner, and it is something that is currently being discussed about supplementing the PTSC fleet in Tobago.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you kindly. And, Mr. Chairman, if you

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would just bear with me and permit me. In your written responses on pages 3 – I am focusing on pages 3 into 4, you identified – and when I am saying you Mr. Sandy I am not talking about you in the person, eh. You in the THA – that the attractions which appeared to be financially feasible revolved around Buccoo Reef and Nylon Pool tour, Main Ridge Reserves, Pigeon Point Heritage Park, Fort King George, Store Bay, Argyle Water Falls, Englishman's Bay scuba diving and, of course, the festivals; but then you pointed out that the attractions or experiences that are experiencing decline includes Little Tobago or Bird of Paradise Island, which is located some 20 minutes of the village of Speyside, and it is the home of 50 species of native birds, an occurrence and existence that people all over the world would want to see. But, you pointed out that this attraction is presently experiencing challenges due the existing infrastructure. And my simple question is, could you share with this Committee some of the infrastructural challenges that you all are experiencing with regard to Little Tobago or Bird of Paradise Island?

Mr. Sandy: Yes, the main infrastructure has to do with the jetty and landing facilities to access the island. It is an island just off Speyside, and the jetty has been under some repairs for a while. And, not I suspect, I know that that is one of the major deterrent to persons visiting the island in a safe way. So that the boats can dock in and you

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can walk off the boat unto the jetty and unto the island. I know that that is one of the challenges that we have.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Just a follow-up, Mr. Chairman. So, how far, or how low, or how high on the priority list is the repair to this jetty? Because repairing this jetty to make it more accessible could be quantified in terms of foreign exchange into Tobago?

Mr. Sandy: Yes, I guess you can make that connection. But, it is on the plans to be done, and it is on both ends. On the Speyside end and on the Little Tobago end. We have a challenge in a general sense with respect to jetties in Tobago. We just do not have the capacity on the island, so generally if you are doing repairs to jetties and so on, you have to contract an outfit out of Trinidad, and it requires barging up cranes and the kind of equipment that is necessary. Just the mobilization alone cost about a million dollars. So, it is fairly difficult to get that done as easily as you probably might get it done in Trinidad. So, I do not know if this is the case here, but it might be worth the while to consolidate and have an outfit deal with three or four jetties at the same time to minimize the cost of so doing. But, I know that the repairs to that jetty is on the agenda.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: And my final question to you Mr. Sandy.

Mr. Chairman: Final, eh.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Yes, final, final. In light of the indicators that

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you just expressed, the huge mobilization and other costs associated with such a project, have you all considered public-private partnership approach to solving some of these problems?

12.00 noon

Mr. Sandy: Well, you know the PPP has been the most recent buzz words that are being used now, and we have considered that. In fact, we are considering that with respect to the development of a port at Studley Park. We are considering that in the case of a development of a port at Studley Park for the quarry and, as I indicated, for other works. Secretary Joel Jack is heavily involved with that initiative and we are considering a number of avenues for public/private partnerships.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: You are welcome. Mr. De Freitas?

Mr. De Freitas: Yes. Just to piggyback on the hon. Member's contribution, I wanted to suggest that bird-watching, as you were talking earlier about a branding on our product, could also bring in a lot of tourists. I was just googling here the number of birdwatchers worldwide, and the first thing that came up was 60 million American birdwatchers congregate on an ever-shrinking quarry. So that alone can fulfil the demand for international tourism here. So it may be strongly suggested that we look into getting that tourist

product back up and running because it can contribute to a very large portion of the number of tourists coming here, in conjunction with the sand and the sea and the sun.

Mr. Sandy: Yes, Member. I note that at one time we used to have an alliance with Asa Wright Nature Centre, Speyside and so on. So we are familiar with that niche and it is something that we need to certainly build on. But it is certainly a very good idea.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Solomon?

Mr. Solomon: Through the Chair, I agree with my colleague. Birdwatchers, I think, also are one of the highest spending tourist visitors to any island or any tourist spot. I just have a few comments, suggestions and then a question. In relation to the transport between Trinidad and Tobago, it was mentioned that there is a heat map and that you are looking into solving the problems. My comment is that the system can be improved. For instance, if someone is on standby there should be some system of notification to people on standby. There is a lot of block-booking that happens where people block-book and actually do not turn up for flights, which turns the whole system into confusion.

I think that the system should—the booking system should be modernized. I think there is only one booking system in Tobago where you can go and actually book a ferry ticket. This should be

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able to be done far easier with the Internet and technology we have now. In relation to the comments about the operationalization of getting the statistics in relation to foreigners, it can simply be done by an ID card. I mean, when you come and you travel, you have to present an ID card. If you are a foreigner you would not have a local ID card or a local drivers' licence, so that can be easily solved.

The difficulty that I have in relation to the promotion of Tobago is that there is a major crime situation. A number of foreign advisories have advised not to come to Tobago because of the atrocious murders that have taken place of tourists and visitors, most recently the horrendous murder of the Wheeler family—a couple—which has triggered British advisory, Canada advisory, about how safe it is not to come to Tobago. It is not safe to come to Tobago. And this rolls into the question that I have in relation to how were we branding and marketing? How much money has been spent? And is there a consistent branding to promote the island?

Mr. Chairman: No takers?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Overall, from time to time there have been incidences where travel advisories go out. What we do is that we have been trying very hard to make sure that it goes out there, that Tobago is still a relatively safe place. The incidences that happen, we do not at all condone it but in every budding or promising

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tourism destination we have to admit that with the advent of developing tourism, crime also comes with it. We try to make sure that we put all the right words out there, that Tobago is relatively safe. We try very hard. We introduced the Tobago Policing—the crime stopping initiatives. So what we try to counteract that with is by putting out the initiatives that we have put in place to ensure—or to assure the people that Tobago is still a relatively safe place. We try to superimpose the fact that Tobago is green, clean, serene and relatively safe.

Mr. Chairman: I could agree with that.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: And I would like to have my colleague help me out here.

Mr. Henry: “Ah doh know about the help out.” But I think we have to put the whole thing in perspective. Yes, from time to time we have incidents here. There is no question about that. But when you look—let us take, for instance, for the year—we are now almost to the end of April—we have not had any murder in Tobago. But still, we have advisories going out saying: “Do not visit Trinidad and Tobago”, because of, of course, the situation that is taking place in Trinidad. So sometimes because Tobago—and, of course, it must happen that way—is twinned to Trinidad, we come under the Trinidad and Tobago situation where the advisories go out about

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Trinidad and Tobago, although in Tobago it might be a little different from in Trinidad. And when you look back – as a matter of fact, we had a stakeholders meeting a couple months ago – probably about a month ago – and the police, as a keen stakeholder, a very important stakeholder in the tourism industry in Tobago, made a presentation and they were saying that the crime against tourists is reducing, and they proved – they brought their statistics to show that that is happening.

So, yes, we do have incidences from time to time, but overall, I think we are moving in the correct direction. We have just launched, just last year, the Tourism Police Initiative and the Tourism Police Section within the police service, and they are around. They are riding their bicycles. They go on the beaches. They provide the sense of security. As a matter of fact, a couple weeks ago when the Thai Ship came in here – the Thai Cruiseship – normally when that ship docks, a whole section – a whole number of them – get on their bicycles and ride around Tobago, and it was so beautiful; such a beautiful sight to see that some of these policemen on bicycles were riding along with the tourists. So things are happening. Yes, we do have our incidences, but I think we are moving in the correct direction.

Mr. Solomon: Sorry, I just want to ask. I did not quite get the

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answer to the question in relation to the consistent marketing and promotion of the island. How much do you spend? Is there a consistent international and local marketing plan or policy that is in place? If you could shed some light on that for us, please.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Can you repeat that question. Sir?

Mr. Solomon: Yes. Is there a consistent international marketing plan that is active, and what sort of money have you spent on it in the past 10 years? Have you been measuring its success?

Ms. Warner: That question, we would have to provide the actual information at a later date, if you allow us. But yes, we have had marketing plans available which we work with. But if you allow us we would provide it at a later time.

Mr. Chairman: We will conclude with you all shortly because we have another group to go into. But you can see what critical importance you all are to the THA and to Tobago's development that, I mean, Members here can spend the rest of the afternoon engaging you all in trying to get a better assessment in order to be of some assistance in helping to move forward the development of Tobago. There are just a few questions remaining, and one of which, quickly and shortly, is: what type of tourist market is Tobago geared towards? Is it a luxury market? Is it the middle income tourist? Or is it a back-pack market, or a combination of all three?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: We will have to say that because of the type of destination that we want to be, our initiatives are geared towards, as much as possible, getting the front of the plane.

Mr. Chairman: The luxury market.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Yes, Sir. And this is because—well, middle-upper income. This is because of the type of product that we are gearing to become. We are so far south that we have to do something to be able to attract the affluent for the types of products that we have in mind and are developing.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Which exactly brings me to the other question and you now highlight it, which is: of the stock of hotel rooms—of hotels—how many of them are really geared towards the luxurious type of tourists? How many five-star hotels are there in Tobago, as opposed to three stars, two stars or no stars at all?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: There are international rating standards that relate to hotels and guesthouses. None of our local hotels have been assessed by these standards. Any ratings are self-imposed and we are therefore reluctant to adopt these ratings.

Mr. Chairman: Wow. That is a “wow” moment, eh? So, I mean, that has to be reengaged. I mean, one has to look at if you really want to be a player in the market in terms of luxurious—

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: No, Sir. But I think that is a good thing, with

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all due respect, because if we are looking at luxury market, it will make us do two things. It will make us put policy in place to adopt the international rating standards and it would immediately improve our room stock because we are gearing towards something. And as a matter of fact, it comes in with the general idea of the tourism room upgrade programme. Because we have in our vision a mind-set of being luxury, and if we engage our private sector to collaborate with us—because in all these deliberations we have realized that collaboration with public and private sector is the key to success in tourism, and if we do all this holistically, we will be going towards the same page, or the same end at the same time.

Mr. Chairman: But you know what you are saying there, I have an issue with it, eh, which is, you must have some kind of star. The Magdalena where I am, they market themselves as a four-star hotel. Do you know that?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Yes, Sir. I am aware of that. But who told them that they are four-star?

Mr. Chairman: They just determine that they are four stars?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: No, but I am just asking that provocative question to bring to the fore that there is no international rating standard here.

Mr. Chairman: No? There is no entity that goes about rating them

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in Tobago?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: There is a Bureau of Standards, but still, that—I want to, well, rephrase this by saying that there is a standard by which they are measured which is in the Trinidad and Tobago context, but it is not the international rating standards. So because of that, we can—

Mr. Chairman: So tell me—just to interrupt you—in Trinidad you have the Radisson, you have the Hyatt, which are international brands. Right? And they—

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: But they would have gone through the international rating standard to be able to say that, but there is no rating standard in Trinidad and Tobago to rate hotels.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: So, Mrs. Brooks-Adams, what you are saying is that hotels in Tobago will sell themselves as they see fit, but the services they offer have not been measured against the international standards.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: I am saying that in a way, yes. I am saying that to say that because of what they offer, they can categorize themselves into a standard but because there is no international rating, we cannot say that they are four, three or two stars. We can say, for example, that the Radisson is “x” star or the Marriot or whatever, because they have been measured against an

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international standard. In Tobago I cannot say that that is the case.

Mr. Chairman: So it is something to be done in Tobago –

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: – or for Tobago. And having said that, I think my Member colleague here, Mrs. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus, was asking what difficulties you all face. What is the greatest challenge you all face in the Tobago House of Assembly at this point in time, be they economic or otherwise? What is the greatest challenge you all face?

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: With respect to tourism.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Say again?

Mr. Chairman: Well, generally or – she is asking in regards of tourism what is the greatest challenge you all face. But I added on a broader perspective: what is the greatest challenge you all face? I mean, it always will be money – never enough money. But having said that, be that as it may, what is the greatest challenge you think needs to be addressed from your perspective, be it tourism, be it transportation, be it whatever? But at this point in time since you are tourism, what is the greatest challenge you all face in the Tourism Division?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: I would have to say one of the greatest challenges that we face is that most of the hotels in Tobago are privately owned and because of that fact we are not able to

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adequately say to them—or we have to convince instead of demand—that certain things have to be done because there is no policy in place or any—do you understand what I am trying to say?

Mr. Chairman: Well, you are holding yourself out as a lame duck there. I mean, if you are an authority and setting policy, there are rules, regulations and so forth and they want to be players in your market—

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: The greatest challenges that we face is that we have to have a policy framework in which—we have to have a legal framework in which certain guidelines are set out for the industry, and because of this lack we are unable to put the systems in place that are necessary. So while there is no legal framework we have to try to convince. And until and unless there is a legal framework we will still have that challenge.

Mr. Solomon: Through the Chair, this is relevant. Have you met with the Trinidad and Tobago Hotel Association? I mean, these are the stakeholders that would have the recommendations and you could have influence with.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: We have a chapter of the Trinidad and Tobago Hotel Association in Tobago and we work collaboratively, but that still does not exclude the fact that in order for the challenges to be alleviated there must be policy.

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Mr. Solomon: Through the Chair, Mrs. Brooks-Adams, are you not in charge of the policy and the collaborations and working together with these stakeholders?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Because there is no legal framework we have to use, what we call, moral suasion, which is what we have been trying to do and what we have been advocating.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, members of the Tourism Division. You need to say something? You have to put on your mic.

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: I want to bring to the fore here that a policy direction is guided by the Secretary of Tourism.

Mr. Chairman: By the Secretary of Tourism?

Mrs. Brooks-Adams: Yes, Sir, not me – who directs policies.

Mr. Chairman: Well, let me say this. Let me say that at this point in time what has been unearthed here this morning is quite a lot and it therefore cries out that certainly there would be another occasion and hopefully soon, where we will have to ask you all – to invite you all – to come back, because there is a lot that has been raised, of significant importance, that I believe critically affect whatever development Tobago is seeming to focus on in terms of raising its share of foreign exchange and its own revenues and so forth, and we are here to assist. So on that basis, I will want to say that we will

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suspend our enquiry with you until further notice and we want the other division, which is, I think, the Division of Agriculture.

You all have been very, very helpful. I hope that you would have felt some relief ventilating some of what you have shared with us, and that not only ears of this Committee would have heard you but other powers that be would have heard you all as well. Having said that, do you have any closing remarks, Mrs. Solomon, that you would like to leave with us and the public before you take your leave?

Ms. Solomon: Just a small correction, Chair. “Ms. Solomon”.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry?

Ms. Solomon: Just a small correction: “Ms. Solomon” not “Mrs”.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, Ms. Solomon. Sorry. I am trying to marry you off. My apologies.

Ms. Solomon: On behalf of the Division of Tourism and Transportation and my team, I just want to say thank you for coming to Tobago. I want to reiterate what the Chief Administrator had said earlier and I trust that this session really went well. It is a learning experience and we take your comments. Many of your Members gave us good suggestions. We appreciate that and we are going to work on them. Thank you.

[Officials from the Division of Tourism & Transportation depart]

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Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. So we would like to invite the Division of Agriculture, and also, again—yes, Mr. Sandy. I know Mr. Sandy needs some rest. We will take a recess of five minutes.

Mr. Chairman: Good afternoon everyone. We are resuming our session which we hope to conclude by probably 1.15 for the latest, so we do not have much time to waste anymore. Could you please introduce yourselves? You know who we are. I guess you all were sitting in the back.

Introductions made.

Mr. Chairman: Welcome and thank you very much. As you know, we just have, hopefully, a few questions for you all, continuing from this morning's session. The first question, Mr. Smith will like to raise with you.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chair, through you, in your submission again—very good submission with regards to the data and information for agriculture—you indicated that there are 1,000 farmers registered in Tobago and 5,020 persons employed in the agriculture sector. Sometimes you go into a little more depth with regards to a breakdown. But do the farmers export their produce? And if so, what countries are the main buyers of the product? And what product is the main product that is sold—which vegetable or

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fruit or whatever it may be is sold? And what are the agriculture commodities produced in Tobago that are supplied in Trinidad? So I want it domestic for Trinidad and also internationally, whether it is regional or not. Which farming produce is sold the most; exported the most?

Ms. Renwick: Mr. Murray, the officer, will take that question.

Mr. Murray: In terms of the output of Tobago over the last several years, Tobago mainly has not been able to actually attract exports out of Tobago into Trinidad, or even perhaps the regional market. The focus has been on food security, supplying – at least to supply the various residents of Tobago as well as tourists, as far as the hotel and tourism sector is concerned. So the main products that are coming out of Tobago in the form of crops mainly will be in areas of vegetables. The food crop section will be the staples: the sweet potato, the cassava, and particularly in the livestock we have seen tremendous increase in terms of support. And, in fact, we can actually boast and say that we have a very thriving trade with regard to the output in terms of livestock from Tobago going to Trinidad. Our data indicates that more than five years running we have exported, if you want to call it that, more than 5,000, just sheep alone, plus goats, plus a lot of other livestock to Trinidad, and that is a thriving trade, but it is just, basically, what we call, on the hoof.

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It is not in any form of value added. And basically we are trying as much as possible to expand and look beyond Tobago, but right now the emphasis has been on local food and nutrition security.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Renwick, it was remiss of me to ask you if you had an opening remark to make. So please do so if you wish now.

Ms. Renwick: Good afternoon, again. Well, whenever you mention agriculture, and you also mention challenging economic times, everybody always look at agriculture to find the answers, and in our role in dealing with these economic times is that we are pleased that because of the times that we are in, there is a renewed focus being placed on agriculture, and at this time we are thankful for the opportunity for agriculture to step up and provide revenue and contribute to GDP. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Mr. De Freitas?

Mr. De Freitas: Yes, welcome again. The question that I have is, on page 10, Item 6 of your submission identifies certain value-added products which can be derived from agricultural produce, namely, bacon and sausages, herbal tea, cassava and plantain chips and pudding. My question is: Has any action been taken by the Division for Agriculture to facilitate the development of these value-added products?

Ms. Renwick: Yes, we have taken many decisions concerning

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value-added products and my colleague here would provide the answer.

Ms. Shaw: Over the years the agricultural division would have taken a number of initiatives to look at the value-added aspect of the primary commodities that we produce. We have developed successful labels such as the “Taste of Tobago” label that does a lot of cured meats, fruits and processing of fruits. We have also looked at the other initiatives that would help to develop the value added part of production, and as we had identified these areas here. We have been looking through the – well, first of all, let me just add this. The division would have gone through the process of creating a strategic plan for the period, I think, 2015 onto 20 – forgive me, the end of the point. But the plan is there and we would have developed an area called the “Eco Foods” label, which is supposed to look at the value-added process for primary products. We are looking at private/public partnerships as an area for us to focus on in developing that, and I know the colleagues from Agriculture could speak more to some of the projects that we have looked at, like the “Agro Park” which would look to pull some estates that we have – not in production – such as Friendship, to help to build that part of the sector. So, yes, we have initiatives. We had initiatives in the past and we are currently continuing to work on those initiatives. Thank

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you.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Solomon?

Mr. Solomon: Through the Chair, I was wondering, you know, the world stage now is very much on ecotourism and I was wondering if there were any agro-tourism products that the THA was focusing on that could help with tourism and agriculture simultaneously.

Mr. Murray: Sometimes when we engage in the agro-tourism talks, sometimes we are careful because sometimes it gets thrown into the ecotourism talk and that is sometimes a separate jurisdiction. But over the years we have been trying as much as possible and we are now presently engaged in trying to see what initiatives that we can bring towards the agro-tourism sector, trying to collaborate with the Division of Tourism, in identifying, perhaps, what is the agro-tourism product that we, perhaps, should be engaged in, in terms of attracting tourism.

At the local side we have formed alliances with many of our farming entities, certainly given support and facilitating their involvement with the tourism sector. As far as the agro-tourism product is concerned, I know presently the division is contemplating the establishment of a wild life park, certainly looking at drawing tourists, certainly into Trinidad and more so Tobago; looking at the concept of nature tourism, ecotourism, wild life tourism, taking into

the whole aspect of being able to capitalize on that.

As well, there have been some initiatives in the past as well, looking at integrating one or two of our agricultural operations which were, more or less, derived from old estates and seeing how we can integrate that into a tourism product where persons can come from abroad and be part of – which is the novelty now in agro-tourism – of being part of an estate-type life and involving in some of the activities. Apart from the division, we do have some private investors and interests in Tobago who have already started that. For example, I believe there is a particular individual who has a cocoa plantation and right now he is engaging in that, where tours are made available. They can come and be part of that experience.

So there are some plans ahead but I think we are still a long way. But, still, we believe that we have been making the right – in terms of approach or steps towards defining the product and as well, working towards implementing it on the ground.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Ramona Ramdial?

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Chair. Can you tell me how soon before your packaging facility at Lambeau, Shaw Park is opened?

Ms. Renwick: Well, I am proud to say that we opened it yesterday.

Ms. Ramdial: Congratulations.

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Ms. Renwick: It is a state-of-the-art facility and we are very proud that we have this facility that is going to assist our farmers, agro-processors in branding and in quality, having things cleaned, using phytosanitary standards and stuff like that. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Mrs. Baptiste-Primus?

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. With regard to the Division of Agriculture, on page 21 of your submissions you did indicate certain plans for expanding the agricultural production in Tobago, and I am very much interested in you—either yourself, Ms. Renwick, or any other of the officers with you, to expand on that. Because I recall one of my lecturers of many, many years ago, Mr. Jack from Tobago, always told us that Tobago was once the food basket of Trinidad, and that is no longer the case. As a matter of fact, Tobago is not a food basket for Tobago anymore, where the information is that there is an 80 per cent dependence on foreign products. So that I would like you to expand on what are some of the division's plans for expanding the agricultural production, one; and two, with regards to the Tobago hotel industry, what are the main agricultural commodities supplied to the local hospitality sector? And three, what measures, if any, have been identified to put in place to reduce the reliance on foreign goods? And lastly—four questions. Lastly, is the—well I

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did not want to ask the question three times, so that I thought you all were writing down the questions.

12.40 p.m.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Well, Mr. Chairman, I did not want to come back four times to speak. So question No. 1, what are the Division's plan for expanding the agricultural production? And how dependant is Tobago hotels and hospitality enterprise on foreign produce? And what measures, if any, you all are aware off, to reduce that dependence? And what are the main agricultural commodities supplied to the local hospitality industry? And finally, whether or not there is any thought of perhaps utilising CEPEP, within the agricultural programme?

Mr. Murray: Let me first of all address the whole issue of expansion and expanding the agricultural sector, and in some way tie in with your third question. The Department of Agriculture has recognized that, certainly if we are going to be a major player, and contributing to increase GDP and reducing our reliance on foreign imports, that we are going to have to expand our areas of production.

So within recent times we have undertaken activities, looking at lands that are under our purview, and seeing how best we can bring lands that have been lying fallow, and lands that have been lying idle within production. And, therefore, we have identified in the first instance, in

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areas that are under the purview of the department, occupied by stations and surrounding stations, at least in the initial instance of about 45 hectares, which we plan to have establish with a variety of different produce, ranging particularly from food crops, including rehabilitation and conservation of our cocoa genetic reserve resource, even perhaps some coconut rehabilitation and in roads into development of the coconut industry.

So, we have in the first instance, targeted at least initial 45 hectares, in those areas in which we plan to establish a variety of food crops, tree crops and orchards. Secondly, we have also, and we are anticipating the distribution of lands at the acquired Friendship Estate, in which we estimate, again, to be approximately 45 hectares.

We are looking at in the instance once we are able to access these lands, to look at a three-pronged approach towards expanding the sector, and expanding agricultural production. One, we are looking at establishing in that area, crops with export potential. We have been approached by members of the Exporters Association of Trinidad, with the possibility of agricultural activity and production of certain commodities, which already have a demand in the international market.

Given the fact that we are an island that has an air bridge, an international air bridge, and freight system, where, you know, we have

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a lot of international flights coming in and leaving every time empty, and the cheaper freight cost, that it will cost from Tobago especially to European markets, as compared with Trinidad.

So, we would have identified, exporters would have discussed with the possibilities of looking at crops that already have an established market, an established demand, such as papaya, hot peppers, which continue to rate very highly. Not only looking at that from the prospective of export potential with the international market in mind, but also looking at intra-regional trade.

Trinidad and Tobago has a very strong and vibrant trade protocol with Grenada and Barbados, and we are hoping that as soon as we can step up to the requirements of having certified farms and production areas, that meet their demands, that we would be able to also have that.

Our reason for also exploring export potential crops, not only does it help in reducing, in terms of allowing us to have foreign exchange earnings, but it also allows us to deal with an issue in Tobago where we have farmers, and although they are producing in small acreages, the potential is still a lot to also cause glut in the Tobago market. We have a very small market, and we have a lot of competing farmers. At the end of the day, what we are trying to do, if you have farmers now, therefore, not competing, but working with each other, as what we call cluster groups, that they will be able to complement and be able to

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bring synergy to the production and the productive activity.

We are also contemplating embarking upon agro-parks development, something, a model that we would have looked at when visiting Jamaica some time ago. It is an area that we are hoping to attract significant private/public partnership, where we are making available lands that can be used intensively by public investors, in terms of developing agriculture in Tobago.

We have learned and we have understood over the years that, many of the significant, unfortunately, strides that we have made in the agricultural sector, sometimes have not come from farmers, but also they have come from business people who are just pure, you know, businessmen at the end of the day, and that is something that we hope that we can explore.

So, we are looking at the private partnership example, and we are not looking at it only in the area of crops, perhaps as well as livestock, looking at the vibrant trade that we have, and we are hoping that we can align ourselves with the tourism sector, in developing the Eco-Foods label as my colleague said earlier ago. Long now we have established and accepted that foods from Tobago are viewed as, you know, much safer and stuff like that, and we are hoping that we can use that Eco-Foods label. And contiguous with the comprehensive economic development plan for Tobago, strategic priority area which

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focuses on branding Tobago, that we can all be a part of that whole concept of branding Tobago with Eco-Foods labels, looking at exploring niche markets internationally, with our Eco-Foods labels, looking at the products that we can derive from that.

So those are some of the areas that we are hoping to bring some sort of expansion into the sector, but coupling that which as well with what is necessary, which is also improving production, in the areas themselves. We have a lot of farms in Tobago, many small farms, in fact, that are not really productive, and it would also look at improving productivity, such as employing technologies, innovative means, labour saving, equipment and stuff like that, to make Tobago production a little more competitive with the Trinidad side off it.

With respect to the tourism sector, in terms of the hospitality sector and the sort of foods that we have been supplying to them, in fact, probably start on the demand side. There are still some challenges with the local hotels and restaurants, in terms of the menus, and in terms of what they offer to their international arrivals and stuff like that.

We are hoping through initiatives we have are coming, that we can partner with some of these hotels, in trying to get them to introduce and have part of their menu, a lot of local produce grown in Tobago, as well synonymous with the Eco-Foods label.

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What we have done over time, is rather than be directly involved, as a department, we have facilitated a closer relationship between farmers in Tobago and many of these hotels. For example, years ago, the Magdalena, Coco Reef, some of these major hotels, what they have approached us saying, “We want produce from Tobago, but we do not want to deal with all of these farmers that at one time, individual farmers”.

What we have done is, facilitated and interfaced between the – what we have now in Tobago, which is the Tobago Agricultural Cooperative, which is a part of the Tobago Agricultural Society, wholly run by farmers, and what we have done is facilitated them over time. So they now have had a very strong – and which I think is growing, and thriving – relationship, in supplying hotels with many produce, especially we are talking about the areas of vegetable and food crops, and also local meats. We have a demand growing especially for local meats. We, unfortunately, have not been able to get farmers to go into the value added, and high priced type of value added, that you can get from the various cuts of meat, but we have certainly had them engaged in that sort of relationship.

And finally, to say that, I think, in terms of what we can do to stimulate the hotel sector and the tourism – giving support to the local agricultural sector, and certainly it is as much as possible to get them

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to supporting the national drive towards having more local foods. Certainly, part of our plan is to have more chefs and more of the persons in the hotels who are preparing to experiment, to work with the tried – the local produce, to have at least certain local products as part of a daily menu, if it is not one, at least twice a week, that you can have whether it is local goat, whether you want to have pork, or whatever you want to have, but it must be of a local origin, and try to at least build support for the sector in these areas.

I know you through four questions. I hope I would have probably been able to – or the CEPEP, I do not know if any of my colleagues would want to comment on CEPEP?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Murray, your responses have been very, very comprehensive. I am not sure if there is anything else any member here can ask you again. [*Laughter*] I mean, you got – and you were very fluent. So you seem to be an officer on top of your game, which is quite commendable, alright? And we thank you for that. [*Members of the audience claps.*] I do not know, but my colleague here, Ramona Ramdial, she may have something else, not on agriculture, to ask you, [*Laughter*] but, please?

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Mr. Murray, again, thank you very much for the comprehensive overview. We all know at this point in time that the agri-sector is a very viable sector. We also

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know that in Trinidad and Tobago, we have challenges with our young people in getting into viable sectors, and, of course, in recent times with employment. What are you doing as a unit to encourage young people into the agricultural sector and into agribusiness? What are you doing? How are you encouraging them? What are the incentives that you are putting out there, to encourage them into this sector?

Mr. Murray: The emergence of the YAPA Programme, the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture over the years, is something that the THA and the Department of Agriculture would have adopted, and in its own way develop the programme to attract young people into agriculture. We would have been, I think, now, it is about the tenth cycle that we would have been in. We would have had initial enrolments of over about 220 persons, with a little about 50–60 per cent of them, eventually graduating as well.

So that we have the YAPA Programme that is running, which we continue to attract. However, over the years, we have seen a little decline because YAPA is competing with a lot of these other social programmes, and the young people will tell you quite frankly at the end of the day, “Ah goin’ where dey hah de higher stipend”. That is the response. So it has been a challenge, and we are constantly reviewing the YAPA Programme to see how we can make it more attractive.

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As well we have seen, growing interest in terms of applications under the National Incentives Programme, which I think, is very commendable, that has now included an area for incentives for new youth in agriculture, supported by – obviously, a wider and broader policy of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

We have seen persons engaging and applying for incentives across the crop and livestock sector. And certainly, I think, what is also heartening, is that you also have young professionals, persons coming out of ECIAF and stuff like that, who are utilizing this facility which allows for start-up capital, in terms of developing.

However, what he need to do is, to understand how can we get perhaps those who are not of the literacy levels, really involved in agriculture? – and that continues to be a defining situation in Tobago. You continue to have the loss of persons, Tobago continues to have a farming population that is about 55 five years, which is the average age of the farmer based on the last agricultural census, and what we have done in our new strategic plan which was recently done, is introduce a whole new chapter and area that deals with innovativeness and youth involvement in agriculture. Not very much different from what is in the national action plan, food production plan of the Ministry for getting people involved. And what we are planning to do actually, is looking at new technologies and ways that will draw

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the interest of young persons, given the technology component, given the labour-saving component, given the component that links ICT, with agriculture and how as young people, that would more attract them to the business part of it.

I think, perhaps, you focus on the business, you focus on the technology and then the other part, which is the agriculture part will form the necessary foundation for it. So those are the areas that we have been trying to stimulate young persons in getting into agriculture, and even continuing to grow as agro entrepreneurs.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, again.

Ms. Renwick: I will also like to add that at present, we are completing three green houses in Goldsborough. It is an herbs project where we are doing all different types of herbs. We are hoping to export eventually and that project is going to be run by YAPA graduates, from the Kendall Farm School.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

12.55 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. You all may be familiar certainly with a facility by the name of Goldsborough farming facility. Is that facility well-known to you all? They had highlighted that they were having some problems in agricultural production activities and some of the issues they have are: no access roads, they said lack of security of

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tenure of lands which made it difficult for them to access loans from the Agricultural Development Bank. Are these problems still occurring? Is that a general problem in the agricultural sector in Tobago at this time?

Mr. Murray: Good day, again. One of the things I know is taking place currently, there is an occupancy survey being done by the Department of Land Management. This is to make sure they have the correct outline for the plots for all the farmers there. I was told that that exercise should be finished within one month. So the farmers have been engaged and that is part of the process to regularize them for their plots, and that should assist in their troubles from accessing loans.

With respect to the access roads, I personally can say we have just completed two at the area, and in collaboration with the Division of Infrastructure, they are actually getting an asphalt surface in the estate as we speak. There are some other challenges they have with respect to things like irrigation, but we have programmes that we are putting in place to deal with that. Also one of the things we have done – we have heard their cries and we continue to work with that. We have two excavators that we have deployed in the estate. That does terracing for them, because some of the areas are predominantly hilly inside there, so they do have challenges working with the terrain. Now we have actually provided them with a lot of resources now. We

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have supervision inside there and that is actually taking place as we speak as well.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Murray: Excuse me, Chair. I just wanted to point out with respect to the same Goldsborough Farmers Association and the whole concern about security of tenure. They are not alone in terms of farmers, in terms of their concerns in Tobago. I guess security of tenure is rated as probably the number one concern among farmers in Tobago. However, the security of tenure is related to access to credit and finance. In the response that we would have submitted – this was provided by the Agricultural Development Bank in Tobago – it indicated something that is quite significant, that the bank now has undertaken a facility whereby now there is a tenancy waiver. So, therefore, if farmers are occupying areas, first of all, that are Government state lands, once they are provided with Letters of Comfort to say that they have been occupying that, which I know has been happening, the bank will accept this as collateral.

Farmers who are on private lands and they also have problems with security of tenure, the tenancy waiver also holds once they have been occupying it for a certain period and are, therefore, unmolested for that time. So, I think the bank has taken significant steps – and I think it is quite commendable of the Agricultural Development Bank in

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Tobago – in introducing the tenancy waiver and the response as far as I am aware of, they are saying now the number of new persons applying for loans have almost doubled since that happened just about one or two months ago. So I think that will help to also address issues of tenure and access to finance.

Mr. Chairman: Can you tell us, based on what you have said: what would be some of the most pressing or challenging conditions you face in executing your mandate or achieving your aspirations in your division?

Mr. Murray: Perhaps we can start from the human resource capital that we presently have. I think presently, over the last couple years, we have suffered a severe attrition of staff and the untimely replacement from Service Commission has been a problem. One of major problems we are having now is that we do not have a lot of qualified staff who have been replaced to actually effectively man stations, man projects and, therefore, that human resource requirement is critical for us right now. I think we are operating vastly under par, given that lack of human resource requirement, because compared with Trinidad, in Tobago you do not have a lot of persons at the levels of specialist.

We have had several specialist positions created through a rationalization process that took place, I think, since 2007, 2008. To

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date, none of these positions have been filled. I think that the last we knew was that the Chief Personnel Officer had not as yet classified the positions, which is quite ironical because many of these positions exist in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, positions a, Agricultural Engineer, Agronomist, Entomologist, Pathologists, these are all positions that are on the books – the return of personnel of the Ministry – and, therefore, they have a classification but, to date, we have not had these positions classified and as a result we have not had them filled and, as we said, even the lower level staff, critical extension. In 2014, we would have after about more than 10 years had our lowest level staff in terms of just only about one-third of the vacancies. If it was not for the intervention of the Tobago House of Assembly in terms of recruiting persons on contract, we would not have had lower level staff. So it is critical. We have not had that critical mass for the last probably 10 years plus to really effectively carry out our mandate. Financing has continued to be an issue. I think agriculture, it is quite evident not only in the national budget, but as well it trickles down to the Tobago scenario as well. You do not get the necessary type of funding that you need to actually implement many of the projects. Therefore, the division finds itself every year reprioritizing and significantly cutting back on the number of projects that we can effectively implement.

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Projects, in terms of finances, have to be consolidated into one to approach and to implement one project or two projects here and there. So that as far as productive capacity is concerned within the division and within the sector it has seriously been lagging simply because of inadequate funding over the years.

We are hoping to move towards a situation very soon coming out of our strategic plan that we would have a defining agriculture policy and framework that would form the benchmark and form the necessary support that we need to move forward with many of the programmes. But critical within as a division, those are the areas that we think that we seriously are right now being affected by.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Mr. Chairman, permit me. Mr. Murray, you seem—I want to borrow the Chairman’s word—you are on top of the game. You are in full command of the environment you are in, and I commend you for that, but I am a bit puzzled and it has to do with the classification of positions. Is it that you are saying that there are more contract positions than permanent positions on the establishment? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Murray: No. What we are saying is that in certain circumstances where we have had a dearth of vacancies being filled, in some instances the THA was able to supplement through contract positions but, certainly, we do have quite a number of public service positions

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versus contract.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: How many public service positions on the establishment? Those would be permanent and pensionable positions. How many exist on the establishment?

Mr. Murray: I cannot say offhand, but I can speak to the question as I referred earlier to, for example, Agricultural Assistant Is, which are the lowest position in terms of qualified technical position in the department. On the establishment we have I think it is about 30 positions. I said in 2000 and I believe in 2014 or 2015 – 2015, after more than 10 years, I think we had about may be about 14 of those positions filled after about 10 years. Many of the positions have now been dormant and, therefore, would need to be reactivated through Cabinet.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Is it the word “dormant” or “suppressed”? Because it is generally well-known over the years certain public service positions have been suppressed for various reasons, but is it a case that you are at a point now where these positions are required to be unsuppressed and to have persons appointed to those positions?

Mr. Murray: Well, I do not know if I want to use the word “suppressed” but the case is I think that greater focus has to be given to Tobago in terms of filling of these positions and, particularly, at the specialist level knowing fully well that in Tobago, for example – and

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the reason why I seem to be on top of my game is because at my level it is unheard of, for example, at a meeting like this in Trinidad that you will have an Agricultural Officer II.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: That is why I made the statement, Mr. Murray.

Mr. Murray: Because in Tobago, for example, the organizational structure, you have officers perhaps, for example, which has been all of our experience over the years, someone at the level of an Agricultural Officer I perhaps carrying out duties and being more au courant with duties and stuff at the level of probably someone of a Director level, because we have more to carry on our shoulders.

Mr. Sandy: Mr. Chairman, can I just come in here and support Mr. Murray? In 2007 an assessment was done on the Tobago House of Assembly's establishment and Cabinet created a number of positions, specialist positions for the Division of Agriculture. Since 2007, the CPO is awaiting classification. Like Mr. Murray indicated, some of these positions exist in Trinidad, so we do not understand why it is taking so long for them to be classified if they exist in Trinidad. Some of these posts are like agronomists and so on. So we have a number of specialized technical and professional positions that are not being filled because they are awaiting classification at the CPO since 2007. We are in 2016 now.

Mrs. Baptiste-Primus: Well, Mr. Sandy, if it is any comfort, you

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complaint is not alone, if that is any comfort. There is a problem at the level of the CPO's department in terms of brain drain, attrition through retirement and what have you.

Mr. Chairman: I think sorry – this is a comment coming in from social media about the state of the Scarborough Market. I understand the state of the Scarborough market is in an atrocious condition. Is that in fact so and, if so what is being done to rectify that?

Mr. Chadband: The comment has virtue. The roof is in a deplorable state. The internals, we have assessed the whole market. We have rolled out to the public our intentions to move forward with the project. It would start with a relocation exercise, because you cannot be inside there when we are doing anything inside there.

We have everything in place for the relocation exercise, but there is one little aspect that we think may add value to the operation which is a site closest to the market. It has been one of the recommendations of the market vendors and we are seeing a little green light where we may be able to pursue that. In either case, there is a location that we are prepared to move to if that does not materialize in Shaw Park. Up to this morning, I have been in contact with E-IDCOT which is the project managers entrusted with the task of bringing the project to completion for the THA. They have even done all the geotechnical surveys already. The designs are practically complete. They are

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entering into the tender phase.

Because of the economic situation, the project have moved through several different tiers of downscaling. Initially it was upwards of \$40 million, then it dropped to \$25.9 million. Right now we are down to \$15.9 million. I think that is where we have frozen it. That would allow us to do the roof, cold storage facilities, take care of the dilapidated shacks outside, refuse storage, circulation issues and air-conditioning. It requires a giant overhaul, but we are working on it and we expect that as soon as we can relocate the market vendors, we will be able to complete the project in eight months.

Mr. Chairman: I know you said “assume”, it is months, weeks or what?

Mr. Chadband: My best bet is that that relocation exercise could be completed within two months.

Mr. Chairman: Two months. So can we hold you to that?

Mr. Chadband: If all the circumstances that are present now remain the same, yes.

Mr. Chairman: All things being equal.

Mr. Chadband: All things being equal.

Mr. Chairman: That sounds like an economist. Okay. I think your responses, certainly without underscoring any other contributor, Mr. Murray’s wealth of knowledge and his articulation of issues that were

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raised in his comprehensive answers sure would have enlightened all who were listening and all who are in a position to do something to be motivated to do something and assist in this apparent grave situation that you all seem to be doing yeoman service to make it a better division. So for that the Committee commends you. We look forward to your continued cooperation, and in so doing that you will be of greater assistance to the public at large.

I think we have exhausted what we could have asked you. I think you have taken the lead on us. You have really covered your grounds well, and I will invite Mr. Raye Sandy, as this point in time, to make any closing comments you would like to leave with us before we bring this event to a close.

Mr. Sandy: Mr. Chair, on behalf of the Tobago House of Assembly, let me again say thanks for having the session so that the officers can be exposed to the enquiry from the Joint Select Committee. I also want to thank the officers here and let me also point to Mr. Murray's exceptional performance today. [*Clapping*] I really want to thank the officers for their support.

We have done quite a bit of work since the initial correspondence came from Parliament. We have met, we have strategized, we have attempted to answer the questions fully, and I really want to thank the officers for their support. And, again, let me thank you for coming to

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Tobago, because you could have easily summoned us to come to Port of Spain, but we really like the idea of you coming to Tobago and coming on the ground here so that the Tobago constituencies can have an input, so to speak. Again, thank you very much and thanks to the officers for their support.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much for your words. I would also like on behalf of the Committee here to thank the entire Tobago House of Assembly for participating in this historical event, hopefully it would not be the first and the last. We would like to pay special thanks to the Clerk of the Assembly and her team from the Assembly Legislature for their tremendous assistance in making the necessary logistical arrangements to convene this meeting. I know it had its challenges, because it being the first, but I believe they were all dealt with reasonably well. So we all feel very grateful for your efforts and I appreciate it very much.

The Facility Manager and other members of staff at the financial complex, we also thank you very much. To the staff of the Office of the Parliament, again for your yeoman service continually, we say thank you. Members of the media for your coverage of this, Radio Tambrin, I think, Channel 5 – this morning they had an interview with me – and the viewing and listening audience for which this, hopefully, would have been of major benefit.

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The people of Tobago, I thank you for coming out in your large numbers to participate and to make this a true public hearing, and we welcome this and whatever positive things that we, in the other aspect of country in Trinidad and Tobago can take from this, I hope we will be taking it this time. Again, thank you very much. I would like to bring this session to an adjournment. Thank you again. [*Applause*]

1.13 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*