



OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

**Statement by the Honourable Premier and Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency
Supplementary funding for the establishment of the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency
December, 2021
Parliament**

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to make this statement, in accordance with Section 11(6) of the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision), regarding a Cabinet decision under section 11(5) of the Act to allocate supplementary funding to support the creation of the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

I have previously spoken of this Government's commitment to create a legacy of sustainability in both my Policy Statement and my contribution to the second reading of the Appropriation Bill, and the creation of the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency as part of meeting that commitment to our country.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that I have outlined some of the rationale behind the creation of this Ministry in my previous statements; however, I would like to take some time now to speak to the urgency of the situation that I believe the Cayman Islands, and indeed the world, finds ourselves in. We must act collectively and decisively if we want to ensure that future generations can enjoy the quality of life that we have had the privilege to experience.

In her book, “Saving Us”, climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe wrote, and I quote, “*The future we collectively face will be forged by our own actions...We cannot afford to be paralysed by fear or shame. We must act, with power, love, and a sound mind. Together, we can save ourselves.*”

I recently attended the United Nations’ Conference of Parties, or “COP”, meetings in Glasgow where I met global leaders and some of our impressive young Caymanians who were there working extremely hard alongside other youth representatives from around the world to make their voices heard. Mr. Speaker, I was able to spend some time with these passionate young Caymanians who shared their concerns for the future, for **their future**, and they told me in no uncertain terms that our generation must act now and do much better than we have been doing, if we truly care about them and their future.

While I speak of the future, Mr. Speaker, we must recognise that we already see the impacts of human-induced climate change. In many cases it is too late to stop these changes so our only option is to prepare to adapt to those changes. What the young people are concerned about, Mr. Speaker, is that these climate change impacts are only going to increase and magnify, in some cases exponentially, if the world continues on its current course. It is clear that the world needs an urgent and immediate course correction, Mr. Speaker, if we want to save ourselves and future generations from the worst of the impacts.

Agreement around what that course correction entails, and each nation’s role in these changes, was discussed and debated at the COP meetings. As I interacted with fellow delegates, I felt a shared sense of

optimism, excitement, and hope that the discussions would result in real commitments to the changes that are needed to stave off the worst impacts of global temperature rise, and perhaps more importantly that countries would take action on those commitments.

However, intermingled with that sense of hope was a recognition that countries are simply not doing enough.

Scientific evidence shows that even fully implementing the standards agreed in the historic Paris Agreement will not be enough, and the world's actions to date have us on a path to see a global temperature increase of more than 2 degrees Celsius. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the United Nations Environment Programme's Emissions Gap Report 2021 projects a global mean temperature increase of 2.7 C by 2100. That is nothing less than a potentially disastrous scenario for the world, but especially for low-lying islands like ours.

What does that increase look like, Mr. Speaker? A 2.0 C average global temperature rise is projected to translate into severe water shortages for 8% of the global population, the disappearance of all coral reefs, a sea level rise of 56 cm displacing tens of millions of people, a rapid fall in agricultural yields, and 37% of the global population being exposed to severe heat every one in five years. The impacts of an increase of 3 C - the path we are on if countries fulfil the pledges they made under the Paris Agreement - are even more dire and include the complete collapse of some

ecosystems, including the extinction of some fish species, and sea level rises of over 7 metres¹.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, the complete loss of our coral reefs and the impact that would have on us, not only from a tourism perspective, but also our increased vulnerability to waves and coastal impacts in storm events. Combine that with projections for sea level rise and it is even more concerning.

Members may recall reading the headlines in 2008 when the then-president of the Maldives announced a plan to buy land elsewhere so his citizens could relocate as their islands become submerged as a result of sea level rise. There are many other examples of communities that are already being relocated and re-established, whether in response to increased frequency and intensity of storms, increased frequency of flooding, increased coastal erosion and landslides, or the thawing of the arctic permafrost – all impacts that are directly linked to human-induced climate change.

Even our regional neighbours who are fortunate enough to have mountains have large coastal settlements and critical infrastructure that would be impacted. Having to relocate entire communities, Mr. Speaker, is a scenario that I am sure all Members can agree is one that we would like to avoid at all costs, but sadly a scenario that may well come to pass if the world does not act to prevent it.

¹ Source: climatenexus.org/international/ipcc/comparing-climate-impacts-at-1-5c-2c-3c-and-4c

While at COP, I was also impressed by the many indigenous people who travelled there to make their voices heard. Like the Cayman Islands, their contributions to the climate change crisis are minimal to the point of being immeasurable on the global scale, but they stand to bear the brunt of the impacts. We heard that it is not only their way of life that is threatened, but their entire existence – sobering thoughts that, frankly Mr. Speaker, hit a little too close to home.

It is an unfortunate fact, Mr. Speaker, that the members of the international community who are most responsible for contributing to the problem have not made good on their promise in the Paris Agreement to provide \$100 billion in annual funding to assist those who are most vulnerable and most impacted by climate change. This funding is needed to help the most vulnerable prepare to adapt to the impacts and provide assistance to help them continue on their economic development pathways without the heavy reliance on fossil fuels that is the hallmark of the more developed nations' journeys.

Members may be familiar with the tagline “1.5 to stay alive”, the call to keep global warming to a maximum increase of 1.5 C to try to prevent some of the most catastrophic impacts. We need to accelerate our plans globally and have a paradigm shift to get back on the path to achieve that objective. The evidence is clear that we will still see impacts at that level of temperature increase, but these impacts are potentially more manageable than what is projected to occur with greater temperature increases.

Making that paradigm shift will not be easy, and it will certainly come with significant costs – but Mr. Speaker, I believe that the costs of doing

nothing will be significantly greater. We also need to recognise that with those costs come opportunities. By embracing sustainability and climate resiliency, the world will see the development of new technologies and the emergence of entire new industries. I share the hope expressed by Sir David Attenborough at the opening of COP that we can “turn tragedy into triumph” and work together to save the planet. It is my Government’s hope and vision to be part of that solution.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it is our Government’s intention to provide an increased emphasis on getting the Cayman Islands’ house in order, with a focus on climate resiliency as part of our overall sustainability agenda. To that end, our Government has established and funded the new Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency to help us deliver change in these important focus areas.

Mr. Speaker, part of the purpose of this statement is for me to outline the “exceptional circumstances” that arose and led to the need for this supplementary appropriation. Members may recall that the approval of the current year’s budget took place in late 2019 when the 2020-21 budget was approved, well before this year’s General Election. So the approved budget could not possibly have anticipated or reflected any post-election changes. As a new Ministry, which was created some 18 months into the 24 month budget period, there were no funds appropriated in the current budget to support the new Ministry. As a result, Mr. Speaker, there arose the exceptional circumstance and the associated need for Cabinet approval of the supplementary funds to create the new Ministry.

While the Ministry is utilising some shared core resources in the areas of finance, human resources, and communications, there is still a need for dedicated policy staff and additional finance and administrative support. The proposed staff complement of the Ministry will include a Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officer, five policy staff, two additional finance staff, and one administrative role. The Chief Officer and three of the policy staff were transferred from other Ministries and Portfolios, and recruitment is under way for the other roles.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, Cabinet has authorised to increase the 2021 budget appropriations, via Section 11(5), to support the creation of the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency. For Output SCR 1 – Policy and Administration (Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency), an amount of \$849,624 has been approved, as well as an Equity Injection (EI 84) of \$20,000 for equipment purchases, such as computers. In considering this allocation, Cabinet was advised by the Ministry of Finance that this expenditure would be included in the forecast expenditure to the end of the 2021 financial year, and it will be included in the 2021 Supplementary Appropriation Bill when that Bill is brought to Parliament for consideration.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to again thank my PACT Government colleagues for their support in creating this new Ministry, and I look forward to working with Members on both sides of this House, and the community, to secure a more sustainable and climate resilient future for our beloved Cayman Islands.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

###