



PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO. 123
Answered on 1 May, 2026
Fifth Meeting 2025-2026 Session – Third Sitting

**PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION
ASKED BY**

HON. JOSEPH X. HEW
**LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, ELECTED MEMBER FOR THE
CONSTITUENCY OF GEORGE TOWN NORTH**

TO

THE HON. KATHERINE EBANKS-WILKS
MINISTER FOR HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

QUESTION:

Can the Honourable Minister say:

- (a) what immediate and medium-term measures the Government has implemented, or intends to implement, to prevent and suppress landfill fires, particularly in light of the three significant fire events within the past three months;
- (b) whether a comprehensive landfill management and fire prevention plan currently exists, and if so, when was it last updated and whether it includes independent environmental oversight; and
- (c) what is the Government's long-term strategy, with defined timelines and funding commitments, for addressing the ongoing environmental and risks associated with the current landfill site?

ANSWER:

The NCFC government has a structured plan to tackle the long-standing issue of waste management across four fronts, with immediate, short and long-term actions all progressing at the same time.

We have money in the budget for immediate infrastructure and operational improvements, and funding for the initial stages of the medium and long-term solutions. I have allocated \$6 million this year and another \$2 million next year so we can implement our plan, and work is already underway.

Immediate and medium term — Exiting ReGen

Based on a number of technical reports including a report by the OAG affirmed the view that the previous ReGen arrangement was considered as unaffordable, high risk and not delivering value for money.

The Government is continuing to bring the ReGen negotiations to a close. This step allows us to accelerate waste diversion and the development of a long-term solution.

These exit negotiations began in 2024, and we are committed to bringing them to an agreeable close by the end of this year.

Phase 2: Improving Landfill Operations

Right now, we are strengthening management of the George Town Landfill to make it safer and more stable. Active fire mitigation remains in place, with daily operations adjusted to manage heat, air exposure, and waste handling.

Let me explain what that looks like.

We are placing approximately 4,000 cubic yards of cover material across the site. This suppresses heat, limits oxygen exposure, reduces odour and pests, and directly lowers fire risk. Cover is now a feature of daily operations and not just a response to the fire.

Equipment

We had identified the need for additional equipment when we agreed a budget of \$2.7 million to improve landfill operations.

Consistent compaction is key as it reduces fire risk and extends the site's operational life. When the fire broke out, the primary compactor was out of action pending delivery of a part in May. Going forward, we will have two compactors plus a back-up to ensure uninterrupted service.

We are also procuring two dump trucks, an additional bulldozer, a medical incinerator, a tyre shredder, two additional fire wells for George Town, and one each for the Sister Islands. Additionally, we are procuring a compactor for Cayman Brac, as well as a second compactor for the George Town landfill.

At the landfill, procurement is also underway to remove end-of-life vehicles, scrap metal and tyres in all three islands.

Air quality

We are assessing what our current monitoring network tells us about air quality during and after the fire. We are evaluating what additional capacity is needed to give residents the continuous, location-specific data they deserve and I will report back to this House on that assessment.

Medium-term - Reducing Landfill Waste & Increasing Landfill Capacity

Waste diversion and landfill life extension are being advanced together along with legislation and policies. As I mentioned at the beginning, the outcome of our exit negotiations is critical to how we move forward with the recycling workstream and the long-term solution.

Forty-nine percent of the waste entering the landfill comes from commercial activity – and two thirds of that is recyclable. Diverting this waste is a high-impact priority. That is why we are introducing mandatory commercial recycling.

We are also investing in a new Material Recycling Facility to increase our sorting and processing capacity by 2029. I will share the final decisions on location, cost and operational specifications at the appropriate stage of the procurement process.

In tandem with this, we are expanding residential recycling depots and developing public education campaigns on responsible disposal of waste, including batteries, waste oil and hazardous materials that could pose a fire risk.

The recent progression of the single-use-plastics ban, prohibiting the import of eight commonly used plastic items under the Customs and Border Control legislation, is also a key part of our push to divert waste from the landfill.

Central to our plan is a new lined landfill.

Adjacent to the current tipping area is Government-owned land, referred to as Site 4. This is where we will construct a new, engineered landfill built to modern environmental standards. This is well-considered infrastructure decision will extend the operational life of the landfill to 2036 - provided there are no major hurricanes, and provides the stable operational platform we need while the permanent solution is being developed.

Fire Prevention Plan

To address my honourable colleague's question about a fire plan, I can confirm that a Landfill Fire Prevention and Response Plan is in existence and it has been in place since 2025. Fire prevention is embedded in daily operations through compaction, daily cover, load checking, fire breaks, and equipment maintenance. Clear emergency procedures are in place, including coordination with the Fire Service and accountability for all personnel on site. We are now reviewing that plan in light of the recent fire to incorporate lessons learned. The Fire Prevention and Response Plan does not have independent environmental oversight, but the Steering Committee for the long-term solution could take this into consideration.

The Long-term Strategy

The Government is developing a modern, integrated waste management solution for the Cayman Islands.

I have said before and I will say again, that I will be honest with this House about the timeline — because after 30 years of missed commitments, honesty about what is realistic is more important than promises that sound good and deliver nothing.

This country deserves, an effective, well-considered, long-term solution that last.

The Steering Committee will be in place by summer, and we expect to reach the Outline Business Case stage – where the preferred solution, its costs, land requirements, and environmental performance are defined – by the fall of 2027.

Applying lessons learned from ReGen and the Auditor General's report, we will not commit major public funds to a project before it is fully scoped and costs are defined. We will not repeat the mistake of turning a well-intentioned project into a financial burden on this country. The capital investment will come when we know exactly what we are investing in and I commit to keeping this House and the public informed with every step we take as we build this long-term waste management solution for the Cayman Islands.

Thank you.