

Contribution of
The Hon. Michael C. Pintard
Member of Parliament (Marco
City) Minister of Agriculture and
Marine Resources
to the
Budget Debate – Fiscal Year 2021/2022

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House of Assembly
Commonwealth of The Bahamas

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Speaker, it is with honour and humility that I stand in this house to represent and speak on behalf of the great people of the Marco City Constituency and present the initiatives and projects of the hard working team of the Ministry of Agriculture and Resources.

Mr. Speaker, the past year has no doubt been a rough one for all of the citizens and residents of The Bahamas but we endured and were not swept away by the physically and financial challenges of life. We are a resilient people and our efforts, faith and hope will cause our situation and nation to return to a state of normalcy in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to express sincere gratitude to the residents of Marco City for allowing me to represent them in this honourable place. They are the reason I will not give up.

Mr. Speaker, insert information on the undertakings in the constituency over the fiscal past year.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware of the state of our economy and the obvious need to cut back on spending in Ministries and Departments. It is therefore, incumbent, during the 2021/2022

budget that we submit creative and innovate strategies to address agricultural and fisheries needs with limited resources. With that said **Mr. Speaker**, we pledge our continued commitment as responsible

stewards of the people's money,² and exercising fiscal prudence is of utmost importance to my Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, my allocation of portfolio in the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources grants me responsibility for the Department of Agriculture, Department of Marine Resources, Department of Cooperative, and three (3) Approved Authorities – The Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC), The Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI) and The Bahamas Agricultural Health and Food Safety Authority (BAHFSA). Furthermore, as Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources, I am responsible for Agricultural Crown Land, the Public Markets (Arawak Cay "Fish Fry", Potter's Cay and the Montagu Ramp), Regattas, Homecomings and Festivals. My Ministry does not work in isolation. It is through collaboration with international agencies such as the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) that our agricultural and fisheries initiatives are accomplished.

Mr. Speaker, for the 2021/2022 budget on the recurrent

expenditure side, my Ministry (Head 56) has been proposed an allocation of \$27,684,694.00 which includes subventions to BAIC (\$5 million), BAMSI (\$6,226,088.00), and BAHFSA (\$504,000.00). For the Department of Agriculture (Head 57) \$5,595,974.00 has been

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proposed and for the Department of Marine Resources (Head 58) \$2,835,853.00

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Food Security Capital Development, my Ministry has oversight of \$3 million from which we seek to conclude the AgroVillage Smart Farms Tutorial project on New Providence and Grand Bahama. The additional \$220,000.00 allocated for capital projects will be used to repair packing houses in Smith's Bay, Cat Island and Hatchet Bay, Eleuthera.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry has once again been allocated funds in the amount of \$5 million for Food Security (in the recurrent budget). This in and of itself shows the Government's commitment in this regard and will allow the Ministry to advance its plans and projects to enhance food security and food sovereignty in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND MARINE RESOURCES

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources

has a complement of approximately 500 employees inclusive of The Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC), The Bahamas Agricultural and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI) and The Bahamas Agricultural Health and Food Safety Authority (BAHFSA). These employees are distributed throughout New Providence, Grand Bahama and the various Family Islands.

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Over the years, Mr. Speaker, a number of officers from my Ministry and Departments have either retired, resigned or died, thus leaving vacancies that were never filled.

In order to effectively navigate such a heavy and diverse portfolio, my Ministry, with Cabinet's approval, embarked on an ambitious initiative to appoint new officers to fill existing vacancies.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that from 2019 to 2021, a total of 92 officers were approved by the Cabinet for appointment collectively in the Ministry, Department of Agriculture and the Department of Marine Resources (New Providence and Family Island Offices). Those posts included, Consultants, Assistant Agricultural Officers, Assistant Agricultural Superintendents, Assistant Fisheries Officers, Assistant Fisheries Superintendents, Clerks, Attendants, Handyman, Animal Control Attendant and Janitress. These appointments were extremely important to fill vacancies left unfilled over the years due to retirement, resignation and deaths.

Mr. Speaker, it is essential that the technical capacity of my

Ministry be strengthen in order to achieve our goals throughout New Providence, Grand Bahama and the Family Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I can confidently say that the majority of the recommendations for new appointments are with the Ministry of the Public Service and National Insurance for processing. This Ministry remains vigilant in assiduously pursuing the finalization of these new appointments.

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Training and Development

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19, no doubt, slowed down our training initiatives for the first two (2) quarters of the year. Nonetheless, training will continue to play an integral part in positioning my Ministry in successfully achieving its desired goals both externally and internally. Hence, my Ministry has embarked on a rigorous retraining, retooling and rebranding internal training initiative, for the 2021/2022 fiscal year, for its managerial, technical and line staff in the following areas:

- Leadership
- Succession Planning
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Orientation into the Workplace for newly appointed officers
- Performance Management and Evaluation
- Customer Service
- Communication in the Public Service
- Conflict Resolution

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry will simultaneously take advantage of the ongoing training offered by the Public Service Centre for Human Resources Development (PSCHRD). Employees who are in need of upgrading courses will continue to be nominated through their Heads of Department.

Mr. Speaker, It is envisioned that these training initiatives will reinvigorate employees' zeal and enthusiasm to strive for continuous improvement in their duties, ultimately resulting in increased performance, efficiency and customer satisfaction.

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Mr. Speaker, it is also important to note that my Ministry is taking proactive measures to facilitate the amendments of the career paths for Department of Marine Resources, Agriculture and Cooperatives. We are mindful that the completion of the career paths are required in order to process long deserving promotions. It is our hope that they will be concluded by summer 2021. Additionally, the creation of progressive career paths will allow serving technical officers to advance from entry to management level. It is also envisioned that the career paths will attract new officers with an interest in the various disciplines and afford them opportunities for advancement and fulfilling careers. Further, it is hoped that the career paths would encourage and motivate serving officers to aim for higher educational pursuit in one of the disciplines.

Mr. Speaker, the Human Resources Section will continue to support the development of staff members through a new initiative

called Human Resources Day, when staff members will meet with Human Resources personnel to discuss their development, performance, job satisfaction and career development in the public service. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the Human Resources Section will consider a number of team building activities to encourage and motivate staff members, so that we can all remain steadfast in a collaborative effort to pursue the task of – Strengthening the Agricultural and Marine Sectors in The Bahamas.

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The Policy and Planning Unit

Mr. Speaker, The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the fragility and inadequacies of our food system and underscored the urgency to make changes, making it more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient; ensuring food is available and accessible to all, withstanding economic, environmental and social shocks. To this end the Policy and Planning Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources focused on the following areas during the current fiscal year and will continue to do so in the 2021/2022 budget year:

- (a) Emergency Food Production Plan
- (b) An environment for increased Agricultural Investment
- (c) Increased awareness in climate-smart and resilient technologies
- (d) Strengthened statistics and data analysis

a) Emergency Food Production Plan

This eight component plan comprises: expansion of local crop production; increased use of green technology; strengthen small scale egg production; expand backyard gardening; provide support to food processing to reduce food waste; strengthen selected entities through public private partnerships; monitor the impact of COVID on food security and health with the Ministry of Health and review legal and regulatory legislation to support the initiatives. **Mr. Speaker**, we are currently developing a Five-Year Agricultural and Marine Resource Strategy and Action Plan and it is anticipated that these initiatives will be scaled up. Through our participation in the UN Food Systems

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Summit, we will continue to have dialogues with key stakeholders and the civil society to further develop flagship programmes to strengthen the Emergency Food Production Plan.

(b) Supporting an environment for increased agricultural investment

Mr. Speaker, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) recommended several initiatives to create an environment to increase agricultural investment. The initiatives undertaken by the MAMR included: the revitalization of the Business Review Committee, establishment of a Single Window User Interface for agricultural investors, dissemination of the agriculture sector targeted investment strategy and targeting foreign direct investment that utilizes sustainable 'green' technologies.

(c) Climate Action Workshops and Activities

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions that has led to climate changes. Climate Change is having a significant impact on the productivity of the agricultural and fisheries sectors and my Ministry is committed to ensuring that our production system is more resilient because climate impacts are not going away.

(d) Strengthening Statistics and Data Analysis

Mr. Speaker, the MAMR is steadily working towards strengthening the collection of statistics and data analysis to assist in making informed decisions as it relates to policy decisions.

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Ongoing Initiatives and Projects:

1. Updating the Department of Agriculture farmer database

Mr. Speaker, to better capture information, a Microsoft Access database has been created to support the management and organization of farm data. This will aid in data collection on agriculture to improve the production of statistics and planning for initiatives within the Department of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources.

2. Mapping project

Mr. Speaker, to create geospatial maps of farm locations on the various islands to aid in extension and planning. Points have been received for farms on Cat Island, and a map has been created of

those farms. The farm registrations will be used to capture GPS locations of farms so that maps of the farms in the Family Islands can be created.

3. Surveys

Mr. Speaker, in collaboration with the MAMR's agencies, a livestock survey of farmers and a crop forecast survey have been conducted to determine the country's livestock and produce inventory, to better understand the farming community and to better target programmes.

4. AgroVillage Smart Farms

Mr. Speaker, AgroVillage Smart Farms are not new concepts but provide an innovative model that can be adapted throughout the islands of The Bahamas. It is a system of agricultural technologies within a cluster of units such as production systems, food processing

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labs, research & development, retail services and other social activities to promote a healthier food culture. The AgroVillage is designed in response to challenges such as climate change, limited access to land and freshwater, increasing population growth, food waste and nutrition insecurities. The AgroVillage Smart Farm model is a transformative integrated approach to agricultural production management that relies on the synergies of crop-livestock production systems to promote a shortened food supply chain and an overall enhanced food system through agro-technologies. It will provide a space for sustainable farming, food processing and

bioenergy creation; digitize extensions services and research for improved data collection; assist the co-creation of knowledge for farmers to work in a cooperative manner; encourage new and innovative value-added products to enter the local market while developing a health-conscious Bahamian culture. The AgroVillage is adaptive and is being piloted on New Providence and Grand Bahama Island.

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet agreed to designate 25 acres of GRAC for the establishment of the AgroVillage Smart Farm. Contracts have already been issued for the surveying of the land and will in due time be issued for the clearing of the land. Further, **Mr. Speaker**, construction of Butler Buildings for the Welcome Centre in New Providence and the Mayfield Community Garden Centre in Grand Bahama will commence this month and continue into the 2021/2022 budget at a total cost of \$2.9 million.

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5. Agribusiness Information System/Single Window **Mr. Speaker**, another recommendation of the IDB report was the creation of a "Market Database", a web-based information system compiling agricultural information which is to be collected from across the various sectors to provide information on: basic core agricultural data such as crop types, yield levels, the number of farmers and workforce; Sanitary and Phytosanitary Regulations and Norms; Food Standards; Agricultural technology; Market Information; as well as general requests for agricultural extensions

services. The MAMR hopes to tie in to this platform a single window interface providing information to persons wishing to enter agri businesses where all processes needed, are accessible from a single source i.e. eligibility, process details, turnaround times, applicable fees, contacts, complaints process and inquiry options will all be outlined for each step of the business formation process. Challenges experienced include finding a way to incorporate all of the components desired onto one platform. **Mr. Speaker**, contact was made with DTaD, who advised that they were not in a position to assist and recommended we work with the vendor who built the current MAMR's website. The MAMR is currently seeking to hire an ICT Consultant to provide technical advice on the coordination of building the system. The ICT Consultant will be responsible for determining the technical requirements to build the Agribusiness Information System Single Window, developing the scope of works for the web portal design and liaise with each department and partner

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agencies to determine the services they provide and how the web portal can facilitate.

6. Public Private Partnership

Mr. Speaker, improving farmer services at the Animal Feed Mill and the Packing House System is the goal of my Ministry, hence the PPP Initiative of these services. There is a need to modernize the Animal Feed Mill and Packing House Systems to strengthen

local food production systems, provide for quality products to the Bahamian market and provide financial, operational and logistical support. The PPP's will address the capital needs, infrastructural, and operational challenges currently faced by both entities. Request for Expressions of Interest were issued and advertised in the dailies and MAMR website. The deadline was 16th May, 2021. **Mr. Speaker**, although it is MAMR's sincere desire to see professional Bahamians with specialized skills enter into this partnership arrangements, unfortunately the quality of the proposals that we have received thus far, do not rise to the standards necessary for the entrusting of the people's assets. Nevertheless, we press on and look forward to proposals from a growing group of Bahamian businesses that have verbally expressed their intentions to submit bids.

7. Climate Change Initiative

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has begun work on creating an awareness campaign on Climate Action, targeting farmers, fishers, women and youth to further understand climate change and adoption of climate smart practices. Climate change does not only impact the land but

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also our waters. Therefore, we have partnered with the private sector to aid in restoring our coral reefs. It is crucial that work continue in these areas, however challenges include accessing funding to implement activities and the dire need for technical assistance to provide extensions services for further support.

8. Atlantis Initiative

Mr. Speaker, the MAMR and its stakeholder agencies have been facilitating contract growing arrangements between farmers and large hotels. CARDI was engaged by the MAMR to provide technical guidance and support on this project aimed at developing a cadre of producers to meet the demand of the Atlantis resort. Forty crops were identified and CARDI has been tasked with supporting the technical and extension service needs of this activity. **Mr. Speaker**, the Andros based programme is intended to build capacity in agri business, link contract farmers and hotels with a view to improving foreign exchange through import substitution, reduction of imports and hence increase employment while fulfilling MAMR's policy objective of the purchase of 40% of local produce by the private sector.

Accomplishments:

1. Climate Change Workshops

Mr. Speaker, with respect to climate change initiatives, the MAMR through the support of our partners and key stakeholders conducted a series of composting and waste management workshops in New

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Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco, Cat Island and Eleuthera to build the capacity of farmers on ways to improve soil health and quality to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

2. Agricultural App

Mr. Speaker, the Bahamas was a part of the pilot project aimed to develop an ICT Application to support the work of the extension and advisory services in The Bahamas. The APP, named "AgriExtApp", is intended to enhance the exchange of information and communication between farmers, extension workers and other stakeholders throughout the agriculture sector. Further funding is required to support this work.

3. National Dietary Guidelines Webinar

Mr. Speaker, the MAMR in collaboration with the Ministry of Health held a webinar, August 2020. The webinar endeavoured to carry out the agricultural component of the Food and Nutrition Security Nutritional Policy, created with the assistance of FAO. The webinar aimed to inform farmers and the general public of the National Dietary Guidelines and provide guidelines of what products farmers should grow as it relates to moving towards food security. The virtual webinar had 78 participants.

4. World Food Day Celebrations

Mr. Speaker, due to the pandemic, World Food Day activities were kept on a small scale. An eight page newspaper supplement was produced and placed in both major dailies. Articles were submitted by stakeholder agencies of the organization. A PSA, featuring local

"food heroes" was produced by the Ministry's Public Relations Unit and aired on ZNS for a few weeks during the evening news.

5. Small Business Development Centre

Mr. Speaker, MAMR was given the opportunity to designed and participate in the implementation and management of the Fishing and Farming Grant with the Access Acceleration in 2021. Grants were distributed throughout 15 Islands totaling \$2,812,106.63 for fishing and \$2,216,480.36 for farming totaling (Grand total \$5,028,586.99):

Island	Fishing	Farming	Total
Abaco	\$63,921.20	\$15,000.00	\$78,921.20
Acklins	\$28,900.00	\$43,000.00	\$71,900.00
Andros	\$645,307.08	\$567,188.82	\$1,212,495.90
Berry Island	\$18,499.04	-	\$18,499.04
Bimini	\$38,938.43	-	\$38,938.43
Cat Island	-	\$106,228.20	\$106,228.20
Crooked Island	\$76,254.12	\$21,000.00	\$97,254.12
Eleuthera	\$165,837.20	\$161,768.56	\$327,605.76
Exuma	\$57,094.08	\$122,322.02	\$179,416.10
Grand Bahama	\$734,746.97	\$412,245.13	\$1,146,992.10
Inagua	\$34,514.56	-	\$34,514.56
Long Island	\$304,089.20	\$46,544.70	\$350,633.90
Mayaguana	-	\$14,541.92	\$14,541.92
New Providence	\$605,714.42	\$706,641.01	1,312,355.43

San Salvador	\$38,290.33		\$38,290.33
Total	\$2,812,106.63	\$2,216,480.36	\$5,028,586.99

Yes Mr. Speaker, the Government is funding B\$5 million dollars through The Bahamas Small Business Development Centre to provide farmers and fishers with grant opportunities to develop the agribusiness private sectors.

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6. UN Food Systems Summit

Mr. Speaker, the United Nations' Secretary-General will convene a Global Food Systems Summit in September 2021 to launch bold new actions as part of the UN's Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the lead up to the Summit in September, countries are requested to host Food Systems Dialogues, guided by the five Action Tracks:

Action Track 1 - Ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food for all

Action Track 2 - Adopt sustainable consumption modalities
Action Track 3 - Boosting Pro-Nature Production

Action Track 4 - Promoting Equitable Livelihoods

Action Track 5 - Building Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Tensions

Mr. Speaker, through the coordination of the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources, The Bahamas has announced its participation in the

Summit and will assist interested persons in hosting a Food Systems Dialogue. The Dialogues aim to bring together a diversity of stakeholders, including those seldom heard, and provide an opportunity for participants to collaborate on innovative actions that can provide for a sustainable Bahamian food system. The first National Food Systems Dialogue was held 22nd April, 2021 on 'Making nutritious foods available and accessible throughout the Family Islands'. This was the first of the series of Food Systems Dialogues to be held.

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New Initiative and Plans for 2021/2022:

Extension Services:

Mr. Speaker, a well-organized national Extension Service is pivotal to growth and development of the Agriculture sector. An Extension Services Strategy has been prepared to improve production, resiliency and productivity in the agricultural sector. The Strategy seeks to modernize the delivery of extension services by: (a) increasing the number of extension officers, (b) strengthening the capacity of extension officers, (c) and improving farmer access to training using Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) tools. This Strategy will ensure that farmers, food processors and other agri-businesses throughout the entire Bahamas have access to extension advice. Farming communities have been underserved by a declining pool of extension officers. Furthermore, parts of The Bahamas have gone without consistent advice, mentorship and supportive partnerships for extended periods. **Mr. Speaker**, we

intend to end this unfortunate state of affairs. The dramatic expansion of the extension officer's cohort underscores our intentional approach to growing this important sector which has the potential to add significantly to GDP through import-substitution. A vibrant well designed and executed extension service is an indispensable part of our agriculture eco-system. Our efforts through extension services will be proactive, collaborative, evidence -based, monitored regularly and measured carefully for efficacy. Our ability to accomplish this requires an Extension Services Coordinator to

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ensure that there is focus and accountability in the delivery of the New Extension Services Unit.

Regional and International Partners

Mr. Speaker, despite the pandemic, The Bahamas continued to receive support from International organizations such as IICA and FAO, as mentioned earlier, MAMR and IICA worked together on a series of composting and waste management workshops and was also a part of the pilot project aimed to develop an ICT Application. The Ministry intends to continue this work in digital agriculture in the coming year. Further, IICA continues to support by providing technical assistance in policy development, GEF projects formulation and strengthening government initiatives; for instance, building aquaponics demonstrations in schools.

Mr. Speaker, the work of the FAO in the country continues with the

assistance in recovery efforts on the islands of Grand Bahama and Abaco following the devastation from Hurricane Dorian. FAO's newest project, Hand-In-Hand Initiative, will establish agri-tech incubators with the aim of promoting the development of agribusinesses and agri-entrepreneurs, further supporting agrifood systems on the islands. Further strengthening of rural economies will be provided through the linkages between the rural farmers and school food vendors as a part of the School Feeding Programme, which is also supported by FAO.

CARICOM held several meetings providing guidance to member countries as it relates to COVID and strengthening food security. Several webinars and meetings were held in conjunction with FAO,

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IICA and CARICOM in response to COVID 19 and food security in which Minister Pintard participated.

DEPARTMENT OF COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT Mr. Speaker, as Minister with responsibility for cooperative development we will continue to promote the importance and benefits of the establishment of cooperatives throughout The Bahamas.

January 2020 a new Director of Societies was appointed – Ms. Cheryl Bowe-Moss. The department has undertaken a rebranding of the co operative sector, which has significantly reduced the gap between traditional business enterprises and cooperative enterprises. The Department of Cooperative Development

continues to strengthen its operational capabilities, technical competencies, technology improvement, product development and market penetration of producer/service co-operatives and school co-operatives.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Cooperative Development has stepped up its efforts to ensure that every Bahamian is an investor in the cooperative sector. In celebration of Cooperative Month June 2020, it published newspaper supplements in the Nassau Guardian (30/7/2020) and the Tribune (27/7/2020) highlighting cooperative locally. This created renewed awareness of the power of cooperatives as an alternative form of business. Serious inquiries resulted which are being followed-up. In 2020 the Department

successfully rejuvenated one (1)²⁰ adult cooperative and registered eight (8) new adult cooperatives. Since January 2021 we have successfully registered three additional adult cooperatives. Exuma (1) Grand Bahama (1) and Nassau (1)

Mr. Speaker, the youth sector in New Providence and the Family Islands will be further developed and undergirded to foster greater unity, motivation, training of the youth in enterprise and development of products to be produced and sold by the students. Despite being challenged by the COVID-19 restrictions in the operation of the schools, the department is adapting its school Co op Programme to ensure its sustainability. Virtual meetings are

being advanced until such time as face to face meetings can happen. The combined effect of all the cooperatives is bolstering the economy in each island.

Mr. Speaker, the youth sector will be the spring board for the further advancement of the agricultural sector. Investment in the youth sector is vital for the further advancement of the agricultural sector. My Ministry is partnering with the Ministry of Education to support the agricultural programmes in the country. 2019 – 2020 saw installation of two aquaponics systems in the schools namely the Anatol Rodgers High School (Nassau) and the Jack Hayward High School (Grand Bahama). Hydroponics is being actively introduced into the agricultural programme with thirty-two (32) systems actively being placed into the schools across the country.

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Unfortunately, **Mr. Speaker**, due to budgetary constraints, the three year Agricultural Technical Cadet programme, The Summer Aquaponics & Hydroponics Programme and the Annual Youth Entrepreneurial Summer Programme had to be deferred. These programmes are designed to further concretize and augment significantly the training, development and sustainability of agriculture and entrepreneurship in The Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker, the Advisory Committee for Cooperatives was successfully reconstituted and they are now meeting. The committee has pledged personal involvement in all cooperative

ventures on their respective islands.

LANDS UNIT – Agricultural Crown Land

Mr. Speaker I now turn my attention to The Land Unit of my Ministry, This is the area that is responsible for the issuance and monitoring of Crown land for the sole purpose of farming.

In 2019 we had begun the process of a Land audit of crown land under our purview in the Ministry. With the onset of the global pandemic due to COVID-19, our efforts were halted for the greater part of 2020. During the last quarter of 2020 we were positioned to re-launch this program and are in the process of digitizing our current inventory of Agricultural Crown Land throughout the country on the island of Andros, Grand Bahama, Abaco and New Providence. Our inventory includes those plots that are currently leased to Bahamians

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as well as plots that are waiting to be issued to qualified Bahamians who are interested in the field of Agriculture. To date, we have approved the issuance of agricultural crown land as follows:

- 1 New Providence
- 62 Grand Bahama
- 19 North Andros
- 16 Abaco

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry is cognizant of the demand for Agriculture Crown Land for farming, and we do have a backlog of applicants, that we are addressing. The Bahamian people would be pleased to know that we have increased our staff complement in the Land Unit in the Ministry in an effort to get more land in the hands of Bahamian farmers as soon as possible. **Mr. Speaker** I can confidently say to the Bahamian people that we are on the right track to food security as we empower our farmers throughout the country. We have issued letters of offer to qualified Persons on Andros, Grand Bahama, Abaco and New Providence identifying various acreage of plots for them to begin farming. Persons on the listed islands are now surveying their plots to begin farming.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry is committed to, and serious about food security. Our land audit has revealed that there are persons in possession of leases for agricultural crown land for farming and are not farming the land – the land is overgrown with bushes. Based of

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these findings we have increased the size of our inspection team, the number of days devoted for farm inspections, as well as the frequency of inspections to farmers that have been delinquent on their farms. **Mr. Speaker** we do understand that sometimes farmer may need a little extra encouragement to get back in the swing of things, hence our increase in the frequency and follow up of inspections

Mr. Speaker, Our land audit has revealed that there are some plots leased to persons that are deceased, others are no longer interested in farming, others still are not paying their fees for the various plots. We have also discovered that some persons no longer have the means or capacity to cultivate the acreage that they were originally leased. All of these things are an infraction to the lease agreements between the individuals and the Ministry. In light of these discoveries the Ministry is in the process of the Resumption of plots that are not being utilized for farming and reissuing these plots to qualified Bahamians that have previously qualified for Agriculture Crown Land. You see **Mr. Speaker** we are actively working towards ensuring that we are able to feed ourselves. We are putting agricultural crown land in the hands of Bahamians that want to farm.

Mr. Speaker, in our commitment to the development and regularization of our Agriculture Crown land throughout the country, we have also partnered with the Ministry of Public Works, specifically their Physical Planning Department in the training of staff within the

Lands Unit in The Geospatial Information System. This **Mr. Speaker** is an advanced mapping system that will allow us to plot every Acre of Agriculture Crown Land in The Bahamas (Andros, Abaco, Grand Bahama, New Providence). In so doing we will have an accurate

account of what land is available, who has what plot and how best we can advance our agricultural industry in The Bahamas

Mr. Speaker, we have revised our application to make it a more comprehensive document which will provide us with more statistical data to assist with our strategic agricultural planning once an applicant is approved. Applications are now online and can be filled out and submitted online. We have also provided the steps an applicant goes through from submitting the application to the signing of the lease.

Mr. Speaker my Ministry is about to launch a comprehensive public relations campaign to familiarize the public with the Lands Unit and our role in the grant of Agricultural Crown Land. Through the campaign, we hope to assist and encourage those that are interested in farming to apply for Agricultural Crown Land.

PUBLIC MARKETS

Mr. Speaker, I now move to the Public Markets that fall under my purview. They include:

- Arawak Cay Fish Fry (**Managed by Mr. Paul Willie**)
- Potters Cay Marine & Produce Vendors (**Managed by Bishop Gregory Minnis**)
- Montagu Ramp Food Vendors (**Managed by Bishop Gregory**)

Minnis)

- Gladstone Market (**Managed by Ms. Donnalee Bowe**)

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that we have completed the survey for the Arawak Cay "Fish Fry" area and the survey shows that we now account for forty-two (42) vendors/stalls, located on Arawak Cay with approximately 1 million dollars in outstanding Government revenue to be collected. Mr. Speaker, my Ministry proposes to put together a strategy to support a payment plan for the Vendors in an effort to collect the arrears.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry is now working assiduously to update vendors' files of all Public Markets with the view to issuing leases during the 2021/2022 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, the categories of vendors under our Public Market system include:

FISHERIES:

Fisherman

Fish Vendors (wholesale & Retail)

Fish Scalers

Sea Food Vendors

(Walking Salespersons)

AGRICULTURE:

Farmers

Food Vendors (wholesale & retail)

Fruits & Vegetables

Meat Products

Grains

Mobile Vendors

Potter's Cay Dock

Mr. Speaker we are all aware of the recent fire at Potter's Cay Dock that has left some six (6) vendors displaced along with approximately fifteen (15) employees. To date, through the initiatives of my Ministry, we have been able to link and assist the vendors through the National Feeding Network; secure financial assistance for building supplies from private donors to support the rebuilding of stalls and identify funds in my Ministry's budget to help with the cost of labour.

Mr. Speaker, the technical personnel, including the structural and electrical engineers of the Ministry of Public Works and The Bahamas Power and Light are working to conclude their assessments and as soon as they are completed, we will begin the building phase.

Mr. Speaker, the vendors have been temporarily relocated to another site on Potter's Cay Dock until the stalls are completed.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry is committed to the security of our vendors and customers and as such, we have contracted through the approval of the Tenders Board, a security firm that will provide such service to the Potter's Cay Dock and Arawak Cay "Fish Fry" on a daily basis, including weekends and holidays.

The Market at Gladstone Road

Mr. Speaker, the Market at Gladstone Road has been holding its own during the weekend and throughout COVID-19 to provide the public with fresh produce, poultry and meat. During the upcoming fiscal year, the public will see improvement to the market as we seek to implement policies and guidelines to support its development.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry has over 100 applications from persons wishing to join the team at that market and we will be processing them in the coming months.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. Speaker, the fiscal year 2020 has been a very unprecedented year for the Department of Agriculture. We were greatly affected by the COVID 19 Pandemic and our farmers as well. The Department experienced setbacks as we were forced to temporarily close some of our offices due to staff exposure to the COVID virus. Nonetheless, our administrative office in New Providence remained open throughout the entire COVID period to serve the public. Our most

vulnerable staff worked from home, while a small crew worked from

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the office to carry out our regular duties. Initially, farmers were affected by the Emergency Orders issued by the Competent Authority as they were not allowed access to their farms, however this issue was quickly rectified as farmers were issued instruments of approval to traverse to and from their farms. This provided a good opportunity for farmers who would have been harvesting to sell their produce both to the direct markets and the farmer's markets. In addition, it allowed livestock farmers to tend to their herds. During this time, farmers became more interested in registering with the Department therefore we saw an increase in farmer registrations. As travel to the Family Islands was hindered, we tried to keep in contact with farmers in New Providence and the Family Islands through virtual meetings. During these meetings farmers were informed of the various initiatives being offered by the Ministry and how they can benefit from them. The Department continues to offer Duty Free concessions to registered farmers that submit applications throughout The Bahamas on those items listed in Schedule B of the Tariff Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry was the recipient of Hurricane Dorian relief assistance of a shipment of fertilizer from the Government of Morocco. The shipment consisted of seven (7) twenty-foot containers of assorted fertilizers suitable for use on vegetables, root crops and tree crops. Distribution of fertilizer to farmers is

ongoing. Some of the Family Islands that benefitted from this initiative include but not limited to Cat Island, Eleuthera, Acklins, Cooked Island and Exuma.

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Mr. Speaker, throughout the year 2020 to March, 2021, the Department has seen a steady increase in the amount of permits issued to retail and wholesale importers for plants and flowers, fruits and vegetables, meats, eggs, poultry, dairy and bananas.

Permits Year January 2020 –

December 2020 TOTALS

Plants and Flowers	1847
Fruits and Vegetables	3574
Meats	2565
Eggs	1227
Poultry	2965
Dairy	1945
Bananas	1349

Permits January 2021 – March

2021 TOTALS

Plants and Flowers	592
Fruits and Vegetables	1059
Meats	854
Eggs	341
Poultry	842

Dairy	706
Bananas	370

A) Ongoing initiatives

Mr. Speaker, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Agriculture Veterinary Services Unit (DOA VSU) continues to extend the Veterinary services to importers/ exporters with Permits and certificates involving imports and exports of CITES species, Live Animals, Animal Products, Animal By-Products, and Sanitary Certificates.

Mr. Speaker, the DOA VSU also provides the key service of Veterinary extension to livestock and poultry farmers nationwide, including access to continuous education opportunities in the agricultural sector in national and international platforms; in addition to essential services such as animal control services in New Providence and Grand Bahama; and Government Abattoir ante mortem inspections.

B) Accomplishments during this fiscal year (2020/2021) ▪ Issued

Veterinary permits and certificates in a timely fashion throughout COVID-19 pandemic to date;

- Provided Veterinary extension services throughout COVID-19 pandemic;
- Assisted the Bahamas Humane Society and other local animal rescue agencies in various “freedom flights” for stray animals to the United States and Canada.

- Repairs and equipment replenishment for the Department of Agriculture Animal Control Units servicing New Providence and Grand Bahama;

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- Collaboration with the Bahamas Environment, Science and Technology (BEST) Commission on the island-wide 2020 Cane Toad collection and survey project in New Providence;
- Assisted the Bahamas Agricultural Health and Food Safety Authority (BAHFSA) in all areas of their animal health and production legal functions, including but not limited to border post animal health inspections, export Sanitary certifications, Regulation development, standard operating procedure development, in addition to processing and issuance of animal permits and certificates;
- Assisted BAHFSA in Risk Assessments for various imports and export requests;
- Inspections of Layer Chicks imported for the National Egg Layer Program;
- Veterinary Officers participated in various virtual workshops and trainings through COVID-19 on behalf of the Public Service and personnel continuous education purposes; C)New initiatives/plans for the 2021/2022 fiscal year
 - Acquire basic Veterinary diagnostic equipment and

supplies **which will enable DOS to accurately diagnose health issues in livestock, poultry and apiary animal establishments nationwide.** These critical pieces of equipment will improve diagnostic accuracy and treatment of sick/ infested livestock, poultry and honey bees in The Bahamas for better animal

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health, animal welfare, plant health, food security and trade-related purposes.;

- Establishment of a basic necropsy and sick animal holding-area at GRAC as depicted in March 2020 separate and apart from the quarantine site to prevent environmental contamination of bodily fluids, prevent human-pathogen contact, proper storage of animal carcasses for proper disposal and separation of sick livestock from their healthy counterparts.

Mr. Speaker, the acquisition of vehicles is important to the ministry's ability to perform its mandate to assist farmers and support food security. We propose to purchase of six (6) vehicles for the Department of Agriculture during the 2021/2022 budget period. These include:

- Veterinary extension (2)
- Canine Control Unit (1)
- Family Island Extension for Cat Island, North Andros, and Long Island (3)

Mr. Speaker, the objective of National Swine Breeding Centre (NSBC) is to assist with the development of swine production in the country. This is being accomplished by the coordination of the Breeding Center, Resource Center, Demonstration of Husbandry Care, extension services and Farm Inspections. **Mr. Speaker**, after the passing of Hurricane Dorian last year the National Swine Breeding

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Centre was instrumental in assisting farmers on the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama restart their piggery operations. Farmers were also provided with animal feed to support existing as well as replacement animals. Note, **Mr. Speaker**, that the feed being distributed is an assistance to livestock farmers, the cost of which is incurred by the Government of the Bahamas. The feed assistance was further extended to livestock farmers on all of the Family Islands. This is a monumental accomplishment for the Department as this level of assistance has never been offered to farmers before, but it was necessary to support our initiative to promote our national food security.

Mr. Speaker, to date the Small Ruminant Unit (SRU) has a herd of sheep and goats which numbers over 300 heads and growing; of these, 26 sheep were sent to farmers in Grand Bahama as a part of Hurricane Dorian relief. It is anticipated that within the coming weeks farmers in Abaco who would have been affected by Hurricane Dorian will receive similar assistance from the Government of The

Bahamas.

At the cusp of the COVID19 Pandemic, the Department of Agriculture imported some 36 heads of small ruminants in March, 2020. To date, these have produced 9 purebred Boer goats and 3 Lamancha goats (12 goats in total) and 5 purebred sheep. Our breeding program using the imported rams (male sheep) has yielded some 100 heads of weaned sheep. *In contrast, the*

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imported goats were slower to reproduce and therefore yielded only 8 goats. Therefore, to this date, the SRU at GRAC has some 20 weaned goats which will be made available to our farmers in October 2021 of this year. The animals that the government imported are superior genetics to that which we had prior. As such, Mr. Speaker, this importation is producing animals with significantly improved genetic traits in terms of growth rate and weight gain, which is ideal for local farmers who are producing animals for meat. Although the breeding programme for goats was delayed due to COVID 19 and climatic conditions, the number of weaned goats shows great promise to the overall objective of increasing the goat herd at GRAC. It is anticipated that in the not too distant future, our farmers will be able to produce more meat in a shorter time period for local consumption.

So far, forty acres of pasture land have been re-established with improved forage varieties (Mulatto II and Cobra) to produce feed

and fodder for our herd of sheep and goats. We are currently in the process of preparing some additional twenty acres of land to accommodate the anticipated herd increase.

Mr. Speaker, our international partner CARDI has also supported our small ruminants' project through the delivery of a climate smart SR house, which has been installed at GRAC for demonstration to farmers. The unit, designed to house nine (9) females and one (1) male is a suspended slatted floor structure, with an external feed

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trough, and will be used to show how farmers can provide protected shelter to their animals in an intensive system.

Mr. Speaker, the DOA has recently acquired a number of farm equipment including:

Green Chopper – is essential in the harvesting of fodder for animal which have to be in confinement.

Bush Hog – will be used to maintain pasture fields and roadside verges

Skid Loader – is the driving force of the farm giving us the ability to maintain our fence line and assisting in hole drilling and tree planting exercises as necessary.

We have acquired a new John Deere tractor which arrived the early

part of May 2021. It is a generational piece of equipment with the ability to stand the rigors of our environment. No longer Mr. Speaker will the work of the Gladstone Road Agricultural Center will be hampered by the unavailability or the lack there of; of farm equipment to execute its daily function.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry is putting our best foot forward to create an environment demonstrative of what agriculture is all about. We are providing new technologies to the local farming community so

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that these farmers will be able to increase production and be more productive in their endeavor.

Mr. Speaker, land preparation is important for making farms more resilient, therefore, as a part of the DAO's food security initiative, we propose to assist farmers with land preparation equipment that has proven to work effectively in these soil and climate conditions and drip irrigation technology. We are in the process of procuring five tractors at a cost of \$870,690.00 that will be distributed for use by Farmers on islands with significant farming activities such as Grand Bahama, Abaco, New Providence, Exuma, Andros, Long Island and Cat Island. We are also procuring bush hogs at a cost of \$133,000.00

(to service the New Providence community and Family Islands) that will allow the farming community to prepare their land in a timely

manner as a first step toward an efficient production process. The implementation of drip technology will further equip farmers to combat climate change through water conservation.

Mr. Speaker, also, as part of the Ministry's ongoing initiatives to support and encourage advances in the agriculture sector, we propose to increase investment in machinery and technology and increase the availability of these tools to transform the sector at the farm level. Access to these tools will assist Farmers with challenges related to Climate change, land preparation, natural disasters such as hurricanes, drought and fire; also, predial larceny.

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Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters like Hurricane Dorian in 2019 are reminders of the importance of continuing to invest and diversify our economy. These events are also reminders that investment in the agriculture sector is essential to support food security. The acquisition and strategic use of machinery and technology can mitigate losses and assist in recovery and growth of the sector.

OUTCOME

Mr. Speaker, the expected positive outcomes for the sector include increased acreage under production, extended growing season for vegetables, conservation of water use for crop production, lower cost of production, increased yields and more earning for Farmers.

At the national level, this initiative is expected to contribute to increased food production and food security, employment opportunity in the food supply chain, reduce dependency on imports and diversification in the economy, especially in rural communities in the Family Islands.

Apart of the Ministry of Agriculture's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic is to upscale Food Security Initiatives through direct assistance to Farmers with the aim to support increased productivity in Agriculture Sector. In addition to assistance with land clearing and land preparation, this initiative proposes to make available inputs to promote and encourage the use of innovation and technology to

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increase crop yield, reduce high cost of production and extend the traditional seasonal crop growing season.

The aim of this initiative is to expand the use of innovation and technology in field crop production to improve productivity and efficiency through the use drip irrigation. The use of drip irrigation will assist Farmers with field cultivation by reducing manual labor to supply water and nutrients to plants. We also anticipate that it will be an added attraction for youth and women to the agriculture sector. Drip irrigation technology is an efficient method to supply water and nutrients to maximize plant growth and yield. It

conserves the use of water in agriculture production and require reduced labor input compared to traditional methods.

OBJECTIVE

Mr. Speaker, this initiative proposes to expand the use of drip irrigation technology to supply both water and nutrients to crops. This program proposes to assist selected Farmers with water pump gasoline and solar powered units, and drip irrigation hose.

This spending request will make available inputs required to expand the use of drip irrigation. Mr. Speaker, my Ministry proposes to purchase 500,000 feet of 5/8" irrigation hose with 12" spacing emitter to reduce the cost of inputs required for farmers to access and use drip irrigation technology in crop production.

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This initiative proposes to distribute irrigation hose and water pumps to Farmers on islands of Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, Exuma, Andros, Long Island and Cat Island.

JUSTIFICATION

Mr. Speaker, irrigation in crop production is increasingly important to crop farming due to changing weather patterns as a result of climate change. Irrigation is a tool that can be used to control the water and nutrients plants receive and the growth and yield of

crops.

The use of drip irrigation is a climate smart initiative to conserve water use in field crop production. The timely application of nutrients also support increased plant growth and yields. The efficient use of water and fertilizers with the use of this technology is also expected to have a net positive affect on the impact of Agriculture on the environment.

OUTCOME

The increased use of drip irrigation technology in crop production is expected to have positive impacts on Food Security in the Bahamas by:

- Conserving use of water in field crop productions. •

Increasing acreage under crop production.

- Increasing the yield of field crop.

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- Reducing the cost of production.

- Extending the traditional growing season field crop production.

Mr. Speaker, a chicken layer program was implemented as a part of the ministry's food emergency program within the Department of Agriculture. The aim of this initiative is to assist and encourage table egg production for use as a dietary protein source and to

support

food security. In phase II, 12,000 layer chicks were purchased and distributed to participants in the program. Participants included farmers and backyard gardeners throughout the islands of The Bahamas as well as schools on New Providence and Grand Bahama. Participants also received feed for up to 26 weeks and also bedding, vitamins, and technical assistance. CARDI also assisted in this initiative, through the delivery of a series of virtual training seminars on layer management to support MAMR's initiative of increasing table egg production in The Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative provided a significant increase in the production of table eggs in The Bahamas during the past 10 months. There is increased economic activity in the livestock sector as participants offer fresh eggs for sale. Others are helping family, friends and communities with donations of eggs from this initiative, which is resulting in savings for consumers nationwide at the household level. We are encouraged by the response of farmers and expect further growth in this sector.

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Phase II of this initiative will involve an expansion of assistance offered to support table egg production. Currently the program is distributing an additional 20,000 layer chicks to assist with the further growth of this sector. This phase will target further youth involvement through the inclusion of additional schools throughout the Family Islands. Also, the increased participation of women,

especially in rural communities, will also be a focus. Institutions such as the Bahamas Department of Corrections, Simpson Penn Centre for boys, and Williema Pratt Centre for girls will use layer production as a part of their rehabilitation program for their candidates.

Mr. Speaker, despite the limitations faced due to the COVID 19 Pandemic, the government abattoir remained opened to serve the livestock farming community, including the Social Services emergency food relief program. The abattoir processed the following livestock for the year 2020.

TOTAL NUMBER OF ANIMALS SLAUGHTERED PER SPECIES AT THE ABATTOIR January 2020 – December 2020				
Pig	Goat	Sheep	Cattle	TOTAL
588	39	67	3	697

TOTAL NUMBER OF ANIMALS PROCESSED PER SPECIES AT THE ABATTOIR (Pounds) January 2020 – December 2020				
Pig	Goat	Sheep	Cattle	TOTAL

60,532	1,212	2,859	3,251	67,854
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Mr. Speaker, between March 2020 and March 2021, there were a total of eighteen (18) backyard gardening presentations made. The main groups that benefitted from presentations include churches, constituencies, and schools. We were also extended invitations to various radio talk shows which bolstered further awareness of the program and increased the demand for backyard gardening kits.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry sold approximately 10,317 backyard garden kits at \$10.00 each and distributed 6,948 to schools, churches, locals, NGOs and Members of Parliament for their constituencies. The backyard gardeners that took advantage of the initiative are very enthused and have been proudly growing food in their backyard and for the community, in the case of the churches, thereby increasing food security at the household level. With this initiative being magnified throughout the various islands, there will be a decrease in our food import bill, thereby keeping more money in the local economy and decreasing government expenditure so that Bahamians will have more monies available to address other needs. Also,

through this exercise participants have been developing increased marketable skills and entrepreneurship. In addition to the backyard garden kits, my Ministry introduced the hydroponic systems for farmers and other interested persons.

The Trees that Feed Foundation, USA, made a donation of 1,000 Breadfruit saplings to The Bahamas in order to encourage the planting of more trees as a part of the 100,000 Tree Planting Program and also as a food source. Three (3) varieties were provided. 500 of these saplings are in Freeport, Grand Bahama, and 500 are currently undergoing acclimatization at GRAC. It is anticipated that some of the plants will be kept at GRAC as propagative material, while others will be provided to farmers throughout the Family Islands. Breadfruit can be used as a staple in the diet and as a healthy substitute for rice.

Mr. Speaker, CARDI Bahamas, with support from CARDI Belize, executed an evaluation trial of twelve (12) peanut varieties at the Gladstone Road Agricultural Centre (GRAC). The primary objective was to evaluate the performance of peanut lines with the purpose of determining the diversity and yield capacity of CARDI's germplasm collection for peanuts through the Caribbean region. Twelve (12) peanut varieties were established on raised beds at GRAC. Results from this research will assist in providing the most suitable peanut variety for The Bahamas; thereby supporting the development of a peanut industry for both fresh/roasted and processed products.

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Mr. Speaker, during the fiscal period of 2020/2021 the Food Technology Laboratory (FTL) was returned to the administration of the Department of Agriculture. With this return of administration the

principle objectives of the laboratory remains as follows:

- To provide training in agri-processing for farmer and entrepreneurs to minimize post-harvest losses.
- To conduct research and development with a focus to create additional value added products
- To assist entrepreneurs and processors with technical information with regard to preservation, quality control, food safety, packaging, additives, equipment and other important issues.
- To provide extension services to family island, schools and other request.

Mr. Speaker, this period provided challenges for the food laboratory due to the pandemic. Despite minimal operation of the industry and staff rotations, FTL's first challenge was to implement programs to create value added products with the high volume of pepper on the local market in the midst of relaxed market. In order to assist both BAMSI and BAIC secure their inventories, peppers were dehydrated, milled, packed and marketed through pop-up markets. Additionally, peppers were also placed in a dry salt mixture and cured for later use which is an ideal project when availability of pepper is greater than present market demands. Creation of this pepper paste has a 3 year

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shelf life and can be used in making pepper sauces, hot sauces and other condiments.

FTL's second challenge was a value added project with sweet potatoes and cassava. These products were considered in the Ministry's Emergency Food Plan for product substitution in case of a short fall of starch based products being imported. CARDI supplied more than 8,000 sweet potato slips and distributed approximately 10,000 cassava cutting to farmers with cassava factsheet developed by the Institute. Cassava and sweet potatoes were dehydrated creating a flour that can be used for breads, cakes, pancakes, scones, and as a thickener in soups. Both crops are good sources of fiber, high in vitamins and minerals, they are nutritious and promote gut health, have cancer fighting properties, strengthen the immune system, boosts energy, etc. The cassava root is also used to make tapioca syrup or tapioca starch which is ideal for gluten free baking.

Mr. Speaker, CARDI maintains a repository of three (3) cassava cultivars and five (5) sweet potato cultivars at its GRAC field, to supply planting material to farmers. To date, more than 1 800 lbs of cassava have been harvested from this field, which has been distributed to staff at the MAMR and also converted to flour for organoleptic evaluation as previously stated.

FTL also assisted BAMSI in preserving their production of papayas. Preserves were prepared in 8 and 26 ounce jars and returned to BAMSI to be marketed in their weekly boxes.

Additionally, processors also availed of the laboratory regularly to utilize equipment in the Pilot Processing Plant.

Assistance was provided with co-packaging of preserves and training of several KPMG Junior Achievers while observing all physical distancing protocols.

Furthermore, this period showed an increased interest in food preservation from a number of persons which led to increased sales in of supplies (food grade additives, canning containers, training and technical assistance). This increase being attributed to number of persons involved in backyard production, persons being at home with limited activities and loss of income.

Challenges were addressed by compiling a registry of current and potential agri-processors, coordinate several social virtual groups of individual family island processors and organized informal sessions with processors (one on one) for technical training. This allowed for ease of sharing information, providing technical methods to entrepreneurs and empowering discussion on improving current infrastructure to continue building confidence amongst entrepreneurs. Containers and food grade additives were made available to processors during periods when the Emergency Powers allowed for movements.

The food technology laboratories continues to develop its products of jams, jellies, sauces, seasonings, preserves, pickles, dried root crops and drinks, using produce from both Produce Exchange and BAMSI. This, to help reduce wastage of fruits and vegetables, minimizing post-harvest losses. The Laboratory conducts training to individual and small groups, organizations in food preservation. Scores of entrepreneurs received training last year.

During 2021/2022 there will be much restructuring to the Food Technology Laboratories with the focus to;

- Expand on the staff compliment; 60 years of age being the present average. To ensure adequate training both local and international to meet the demands to trains, regulate, assist and monitor our industry.
- Expansion of the physical infrastructure to provide a more improved equipment and digitized training module.
- Provide extension services to farmers and entrepreneurs to minimize post-harvest losses.
- Provide assistance through Food Security Initiatives for the preparation of community kitchens. To prepare products that are international acceptable for hotels, prison, hospital and local consumption. To provide training in GMP, HACCP, technical assistance in equipment, processes and packaging.

- FTL will operate as test kitchen and a regulatory agency for the food processing sector.

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- FTL will continue to institute programs to encourage food security at a home level thus provide improved methods for bottling, use of solar wire basket for drying of peppers, sweet potatoes, cassava, bananas, etc.
- Continue to provide packaging supplies, container and food grade additive to entrepreneurs at a reason and competitive cost.

Recommendation is made to develop the space around the present facility to include a state of the art training room to accommodate a least twenty (20) entrepreneurs per session. Training to encompass all principles of food processing and access to more modern digital technical equipment. Additional office space to accommodate new staff, changing rooms, and kitchenette. Most of the equipment in the Pilot Plant is old and has served its time; equipment must be replaced to accommodate training.

Mr. Speaker, immediate consideration will be given to the recruitment of technical staff with the relevant skills and qualifications. The staff complement must increase to complete the government's mandate and provide training to ensure that staff members have the capacity and certification required for the job.

Training must be inclusive of GMP, HACCP, relevant ISO Standards and technical programs. Staff will also participate in programmes with IICA, FAO, CARDI, Universities, and other local and international institutes to strengthen their extension capacity. Extension capacity

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must include manufacturing various forms of tomato processing, variety of fruit preserves, candies, fruit wines, fruit juices and drinks, condiments, types of dehydration, processing of vegetables, sea foods, processing of meats, etc.

THE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

THE COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY

NEW FISHERIES ACT 2020

Mr. Speaker, at the outset I wish to speak to the landmark legislation in the ***New Fisheries Act 2020***, which was unanimously passed in this Honourable House in December (2020). The New Fisheries Act 2020 replaces the old Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction and Conservation) Act of 1977. Recall, that I advised this Honourable House during the last budget debate that the New Fisheries Act 2020 is intended to be futuristic, and addresses matters relating to the sustainable use, sustainable development, and management of fisheries resources, and the marine environment. The New Fisheries Act 2020 will ensure The Bahamas fulfils its obligations to the global and regional community being a

signatory to a number of international conventions. The New Fisheries Act 2020 also legitimizes the Department of Marine Resources (DMR); legitimizes the Director of Marine Resources and his officers; and ensures stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process in matters, which impact them and their livelihoods. Further, the New Fisheries

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Act 2020 mandates the development of ***Fisheries Management Plans*** for all fisheries, which will ensure the sustainable and rational development of each based mainly empirical data, and an ecosystem approach to the marine environment and its resources.

I note once again, the work on the New Fisheries Act 2020 began in earnest as far back as calendar year (CY) 2013. I wish to specifically thank the DMR and its entire technical team; Ms. Morlette Johnson of the Attorney General's Office for her tireless work, the

Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC), members of the various fishers organizations including, the Bahamas Commercial Fishers Alliance and the National Fishers Association; members of the NGO community inclusive of the Bahamas National Trust (BNT), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation (BREEF) as well as other government agencies and departments for their yeoman's efforts in completing the New Act.

WORK ON NEW SUBSIDIARY LEGISLATION – FISHERIES REGULATIONS

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to also note that currently, the DMR along with the Attorney General's Office (OAG) are involved in reviewing the ***Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction and Conservation) Regulations 1986***, and the many amendments

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made thereto over the years. Further, all partners will be engaged in drafting the new legislation to fill in the many gaps that have been observed in overall fisheries management, inclusive of aquaculture development and management, which were not previously addressed. It is anticipated that at the end of the exercise, the draft produced will be widely reviewed by all stakeholders. Following this review process, the output will be placed before the National Fisheries Stakeholder Forum and the National Fisheries Advisory Council as stipulated in the Fisheries Act 2020 before submission to the Minister for his action.

Mr. Speaker, during CY2020, the commercial fishing sector saw an overall **18.8%** decrease in total landings and a **1%** decrease in the value of those products landed. Total fishery product landings in CY2020 were **5.2 million pounds** with a total value of some **\$62.1 million dollars**. Crawfish landings accounted for **84.8%** of the

total landings, and **93%** of the total value of the landings. Additionally, **US\$76.8** million of foreign exchange resulted from the export of frozen crawfish tails, conch meat, stone crab claws, scalefish, and inedible marine resources during CY2020. The figure represents an **18.9%** increase in the value of fishery products and resource exports over CY2019. Accordingly, the export of frozen crawfish tails represented some **93.5%** of the value of the exports, as well as a **19.7%** increase in frozen crawfish tails exports over CY2019.

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Mr. Speaker, recall that in September CY2019 Hurricane Dorian wreaked havoc on the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama and destroyed or significantly damaged nearly **80%** of the fishery sector to the tune of an estimated **21.7 million**. You would note Abaco and Grand Bahama were the second and fourth largest producers of fishery products in The Bahamas, and the adverse impact of the hurricane on these islands has had a negative impact on the overall decrease in total fishery products lands for The Bahamas over the last few years.

Both islands have been on the road to recovery. In the case of Abaco, there was a displacement of many of the fishers, which lent to the decrease in total fishery product landings for the island in CY2019 to the tune of some **36.6%** in comparison to CY2018. In

CY2020 there was a further **16.8%** decrease in total fishery products landings in comparison to CY2019. The situation in Abaco has been further exacerbated by the fact the one major seafood processing facility and the main buyer of seafood products on the island, Marsh Harbour Exporters & Importers was destroyed by the hurricane. That in itself has had a major impact on productivity by fishers as there has been no major outlet for them to sell their products.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report in the case of Grand Bahama, where there was an initial decrease in total fishery product landings of some **59%** in CY2019 in comparison to CY2018, the Grand Bahama fishing sector has shown signs of a major rebound, where in

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CY2020 there was an increase of some **79.8%** in total fishery product landings in comparison to CY2019.

Since that time, the Government and my Ministry have continued to work with fishers in both Abaco and Grand Bahama as a part of our recovery assistance programme in providing grants and loans to assist in recovery efforts. In addition to the grants and loans, my ministry has also provided assistance in the provision of fiberglass cloth and resin to assist fishers in the repair of their small fishing boats.

Mr. Speaker, in July 2021, my ministry through the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) will embark on a fisheries training programme designed to teach fishers in the Grand Bahama community how to construct fish pots. I would note it is estimated that losses of fishing gear accounted for some 8.6 million or 39.6% of the total damages to the fisheries sector as a result of Hurricane Dorian. The main objectives of the fish pot training programme would be:

1. Train fishers in the art and techniques of fish pot construction;
and
2. Create an opportunity for an alternative livelihood for some fishers to commence small start-up businesses in fish pot and land crab pot construction.

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Mr. Speaker, I would also wish to note the ongoing work of the Food & Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the UN, which is presently engaged in a \$400,000.00 project designed around ***rebuilding fishers' livelihoods in Abaco and Grand Bahama following the hurricane.*** The project has various components including, replacement of some fishing gear i.e. condos; infrastructural (dock/boat ramp) repair assistance; replacement of small outboard engine parts; and fish house/buying stations repair assistance, designed to help and assist with some of the recovery

efforts. The work of the project has been met with some delays as a result of COVID-19 and the project has been extended to November 2021.

Mr. Speaker, I would also wish to publically thank several non governmental organizations for their unwavering assistance and support to fishers of Grand Bahama. The groups include:

- Friends of East Grand Bahama and Friends of Sweetings Cay;
- Convoy of Hope;
- Global Medic; and

- Bahamas Red Cross

Their assistance have been in the form of small boat replacement, small boat repairs, and small outboard engine replacement.

FISHERIES EXPORT EXEMPTION STATUS

Mr. Speaker, The Bahamas has thus far continued to enjoy the ability to export a number of fisheries products to the USA. There is increasing global economic pressure to protect the environment in order to continue to do business. In this case, the National Marine Fisheries Service in the USA has given a number of Bahamian fisheries exemption statuses in its formal List of Foreign Fisheries.

This comes with the continued rights to export to the USA. This is because The Bahamas has appropriate laws and mechanisms in place to limit or prevent marine mammal by-catch. Implementation of environmental laws is tremendously important.

MARINE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (MSC) CERTIFICATION Mr.

Speaker, The Bahamian lobster fishery obtained Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Certification during August 2018 after a 10-year fisheries improvement project. This certification is still in effect after a number of audits, the next of which is scheduled for July 2021. This independent certification is verification to the international community and us, that the lobster fishery is sustainable. Once quality control standards also continue to be met, MSC certification allows The Bahamas to enjoy excellent market penetration at premium prices, something, that cannot be overlooked amid the economic turmoil caused by COVID 19.

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Mr. Speaker, finally, the potential for the further development of the commercial fishing sector appears very promising. Several Bahamian groups have expressed a keen interest in the development of our pelagic resources i.e. tuna, swordfish, etc. The DMR continues to work on a draft aquaculture policy for The Bahamas to ensure a management regime is in place to govern the development of the sector, which also has tremendous potential. The application process is being streamlined, with standardization

of technical components to be considered. Regular inspections of facilities have already expanded and revised reporting requirements will be rolled out during the next fiscal year. Evaluation of aquaculture proposals will be greatly supported by new environmental impact assessment laws.

Further, as a result of increased governmental emphasis on the development of fisheries, there has been a steady modernization of the fishing fleet. There has also been a vast improvement in the fields of fish processing, quality control and marketing.

FISHERIES ENFORCEMENT – ON THE WATER

Mr. Speaker, Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to be a major problem impacting fisheries management. The DMR is appreciative of the role played by the Royal Bahamas Defence Force (RBDF) in assisting with controlling this activity however, the DMR is legally mandated to address this matter.

During the 2018/2019 fiscal period the DMR acquired ⁵⁷ **two (2) inshore 24ft. Boston Whaler "Justice" marine patrol crafts** to assist in its efforts to provide a sea presence to beef up its enforcement efforts on the water. I noted during the 2019/2020 budget debate it was the intention of the DMR to acquire an additional craft to be deployed in another Family Island. Once

again, during the 2020/2021 budget debate I indicated the intention of the DMR to acquire yet another marine patrol craft. I am happy to report today, some four marine patrol crafts have been over the course of that period at an average price of \$176,000.00. The first of the crafts was commissioned on the **31 January 2019 in Abaco**, and a second on the **5 April 2019 in Eleuthera**. On **26 March this year (2021)**, I commissioned a **25ft Contender Marine Patrol Craft** in Grand Bahama. I am also happy to report we hope to commission another **25ft. Contender Marine Patrol Craft** destined for the island of Bimini in **June of this year (2021)**. In the new 2021/2022 Fiscal Budget we are requesting allocations for the acquisition of two additional crafts. All of the Patrol crafts equipped with GPS, VHF Radios, strobe lights, sirens, and twin 150 hp four stroke environmentally friendly Yamaha outboard engines. All of the crafts come along with a truck and trailer. The crafts are intended to act as deterrents to would be law breakers on the water.

NATIONAL DIVERS TRAINING COURSE

Mr. Speaker, you would recall I reported to this Honourable House last year during the 2020/2021 Budget Debate the first cadre of some

28 young Bahamians graduated in February (2020) from the inaugural National Divers Training Course coordinated jointly by the National Training Agency (NTA) and the Ministry of Agriculture &

Marine Resources. I am happy to report the second training exercise commenced on the 15 March this year (2021). This year has seen a doubling (64) in the number of young Bahamians, who have signed up for the training. Once again the objectives of the training course are:

- Train a cadre of Bahamian Divers for employment onboard Bahamian fishing vessels;
- Train Bahamians as certified PADI divers;
- Train Bahamian divers in the use of air compressors for diving purposes;

- Train Bahamian divers on symptoms related to Decompression Illness;
- Train Bahamian divers in First Aid and CPR; and
- Train Bahamian divers in compressor maintenance and troubleshooting.

Again, The Bahamas Government is funding all expenses related to the training course inclusive of classroom training, training materials, and dive gear.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (MPAs)

Mr. Speaker, we cannot have sustainable growth development

without protecting the environment. Prior to COVID 19, my Ministry was preparing to declare 43 new and expanded MPAs. It remains important for such areas to be established. They will enhance the protection of the marine environment, including added protection from overfishing. I want to emphasize, that not all protected areas will disallow fishing. Some of the proposed areas will still allow recreational or subsistence fishing to the benefit of nearby communities. Some will require no fishing. Ultimately it is expected the protected areas will improve food security and secure the additional benefits that results from a healthy environment. We will keep the public informed of all developments related to the establishment of the system of MPAs.

ONLINE PERMITTING – FLATS FISHING

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise this Honourable House **effective 31 March 2021,** The Bahamas Government's online portal that allows individuals to apply for, pay, and have their flats fishing permits issued through an online process became operational. My Ministry heard the cry and complaint of many visitors that the permit was not easily accessible especially on weekends, when most if not all government offices are closed. You may recall, my Ministry had undertaken to provide e-permits, commencing with flats fishing, and

eventually including others that fall within the ambit of both the Department of Marine Resources and the Department of Agriculture.

THE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES (DMR)

NEW HIRES

Mr. Speaker, there is a tremendous need for the department to continue to build capacity with respect to its human resources complement. I remind the DMR has the herculean task of the management of the marine environment and fisheries resources in The Bahamas.

I am happy to advise the Department of Marine Resources received Cabinet's approval for the appointment of some 37 new staff. In January 2020, 13 new hires joined the department's main office in Nassau. Between March and October saw the appointment of four additional staff; three (3) in New Providence and one (1) in Grand Bahama.

Presently, the department is moving in earnest with respect to the appointment of some fifteen (15) new staff members for its Family Island offices.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2021/2022 Fiscal Budget we have made a request for the appointment of new staff for the departments Seafood Export & Inspection Unit in order to ensure the department

as the "**Competent Authority**" for seafood exports from The Bahamas meets its mandate as it relates to the requirements of the European Union and US seafood quality assurance standards for seafood imports from The Bahamas into those jurisdictions. The appointment of the requisite officers will be crucial to The Bahamas maintaining these markets.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the request for new staff for the department's Seafood Export & Inspection Unit, the department has also made a request for a complement of new staff for its Microbiology and Chemistry Laboratories. The Microbiology and Chemistry Laboratories have been responsible for the testing of samples of seafood products destined for the export market to ensure there is some basic testing on the nutritional content of the seafood as well as analyses on foods for spoilage indicators and preservatives in seafood, and quality indicators. Over the years, the laboratories have been expanding their services to not only include seafood products but other samples inclusive of non-seafood samples, water, and ice. I wish to note, that the laboratories, which are the country's National Labs so far during this current budget period have conducted a total of 362 samples broken down as follows:

- 295 analysis on 59 seafood samples;
- 51 analysis on 17 Water and Ice samples; and

- 16 analysis on 8 Non-seafood samples

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I wish to also advise that the laboratories continue to maintain their accreditation with ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB) until 29 December 2022.

TRAINING

Mr. Speaker, in November 2020 The Nature Conservancy (TNC) assisted the DMR with the Standards of Training Certification & Watchkeeping (STCW) Training for six (6) staff members all stationed in New Providence (NP). Gadities Maritime & Navigation Institute (GMNI) facilitated the training. The purpose of the training was to prepare existing and new staff with the seamanship skills and training necessary to execute their job primarily on the sea. The STCW training involves understanding **basic first aid, firefighting and prevention and survival at sea and seamanship**. There was two (2) days of theory in the DMR's conference room and one (1) day at the Gadities Training Facility, where staff members learned how to fight different types of fires. There was also a swimming (lifesaving) component to the training, held at Goodman's Bay. This course is a prerequisite to the **Class 'B' Captain's** license. All six staff members successfully completed the training.

Mr. Speaker, following the successful execution of the STCW

Training held in November 2020, the TNC agreed to extend their assistance to the DMR, and as a result a second STCW training was held along with a Class 'B' Captain's license training for staff. Seven (7) Family Island (FI) staff participated in the second STCW training

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and five (5) FI staff along with two (2) NP staff members all completed the Class 'B' captain's license training. GMNI again facilitated the training for both training sessions. The Captain's license training included **seamanship skills, rules of the road (channel marker identification), chart reading and basic navigation and plotting**. I am advised that all of the participants successfully completed the course.

Mr. Speaker, finally, as it relates to training for fisheries officers, the Bahamas National Trust (BNT) conducted a series of webinars concerning the subject matter above. An invitation was extended to the DMR for its fisheries officers involved in enforcement activities in New Providence as well as the Family Islands to participate. The presentations were done by members of the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF). Three sessions were held, the first session was held on 4 February 2021, the topic for that session was **Judges Rules, Statement Taking and Arrest and Detention**. The second session was conducted on the 18 February, topics discussed were **Case File Documents and Arrangement** and the third session was held on 4 March 2021, the topic for that session was Court Testimony. As an agency that is involved in the arrest, detention

and securing and labeling of evidence, the webinars was very beneficial to the DMR staff.

WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES (DMR)

BIOLOGICAL DATA COLLECTION INITIATED

Mr. Speaker, during this fiscal year the Department of Marine Resources has for the first time embarked on a long-term biological data collection programme. There has been intermittent attempts to collect this data, which was constrained by staff, equipment and mobility. The DMR is now equipped with the staff, vehicles and equipment needed to begin a regular biological data collection programme that will soon be expanded to the family islands. Biological data simply refers to the collection of individual size data, such as fish, lobster and conch among other measurements. This data is complimentary to but different from other long-established statistical data collection efforts undertaken by the department. The collection of biological data elevates the level of monitoring and stock assessments that the DMR is able to undertake.

NASSAU GROUPE

Mr. Speaker, recall that the Nassau grouper is now considered Critically Endangered by the International Union for the

Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Nonetheless, The Bahamas still has just enough Nassau grouper available to support a commercial fishery if carefully managed. This is unlike the vast majority of other territories that no longer have commercial quantities. This, however, does not mean that business as usual should continue. There are signs of serious strain on Nassau grouper stocks in The Bahamas. Schools with

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aggregations of fish in the thousands seem to be a thing of the past. It indeed has become necessary to revise management measures in The Bahamas. These revisions need to be based on science. They should also be based on wide consultation, which are largely completed, save and except for reporting to a handful of additional communities, and consulting with the Fisheries Stakeholder Forum and the National Fisheries Advisory Council as now mandated under the Fisheries Act 2020. The management of the species will be undertaken via a ***Fisheries Management Plan***. However, until the plan is in place, the following are being proposed:

1. Increase minimum size limit of Nassau grouper to 21 inches
2. Ban the harvest of Nassau grouper by foreign vessels
3. Discontinue the sale of Nassau grouper during the closed season (now fully implemented)

4. Enforcement of protected areas that contain Nassau grouper spawning aggregation sites (greatly improved thus far)

QUEEN CONCH

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry is also considering new management measures for the conch fishery. It is well known that conch stocks throughout the region have seen severe declines as indicated by stock assessments and major reductions in landings. It has also been

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predicted that the conch fishery in The Bahamas could disappear in 15 years (really 14 now because the clock is ticking). A handful of areas with large quantities of conch have been reported in The Bahamas. However, many locations have severely depleted stocks. This means revised management action is needed while there is still time to allow stocks to rebound. We know from our neighbors to the north that conch stocks may not come back if they are too far gone. Similarly, as with other species like the Nassau Grouper, the management of the species will be undertaken via a ***Fisheries Management Plan***. To date, after a national consultation process, and consideration of international obligations, a number of science based measures, informed by public consultation, have been proposed by the DMR. These include:

1. Minimum size limit of 14 mm lip thickness.

2. Continued reduction of commercial exports to zero
3. Ban on harvests by foreign recreational vessels.
4. Conch should be landed in the shell.
5. Exports as personal baggage should be constrained to 10lbs.
6. Disallow the use of compressors for the commercial harvesting of conch.
7. Establishment of New Protected Areas.

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The proposals will be presented to the Fisheries Stakeholder Forum and the National Fisheries Advisory Council as now mandated under the Fisheries Act 2020 for final recommendation to the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, as previously announced, over the last three years my Ministry as a policy decision fully supported by the government embarked on a program to discontinue the export of conch in commercial quantities. I am to advise, commencing January 2022 commercial exports of conch from The Bahamas will be discontinued. It is a considered opinion that this will help to relieve

pressure on conch stocks, while also favoring local supply.

STONY CORAL TISSUE LOSS DISEASE TASK FORCE

Mr. Speaker, I would have announced last year (2020) a coral disease known as Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) was first detected in Grand Bahama in December 2019. This disease affects over 20 species of coral and is known to spread rapidly and cause the complete death of colonies. Corals are very important habitat for a number of sought after fisheries resources as well as prevention of storm surge, mitigation of climate change, and are also a tourist attraction as well as an attraction to Bahamians. In response, the government formed the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease Task Force in June 2020 led by the Department of Marine Resources. Since then

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the disease has been detected in handful of islands, including New Providence. The task force has developed response plans including treatment protocols as well as reporting mechanisms for stakeholders to report sightings of the disease. An educational campaign has also been developed that targets key groups including the shipping and boating industries as well as fishers and the diving industry. There are steps that can be taken by these aforementioned groups to limit or prevent the spread of SCTLD.

I wish to thank the Ministry of Tourism, which has provided a grant

of some \$20,000.00 to assist in underwriting some of the costs associated with addressing the mitigating programs combating the SCTLTD.

SARGASSUM PROJECT - (SEA GRASS)

Mr. Speaker, the Bahamas through the DMR is one of four regional countries (The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize and Jamaica) presently participating in a three year project (2020-2022) under the theme "***Sargassum Products for Climate Resilience in the Caribbean***" funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), and implemented by the New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research Limited (PFR) and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM). For a decade, Sargassum influxes have affected national and regional economies through loss of livelihoods and economic opportunities to fishers, hoteliers and related businesses. Sargassum influxes threaten the health of critical ecosystems such

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as coral reefs and seagrass beds, cause fish and invertebrate mortalities, affect sea turtle nesting and hatching, and impact human health. The Sargassum influxes have also motivated interventions to support entrepreneurship and innovation and can be used as opportunities for revenue-generation. The aim of this project is to mitigate the environmental and economic impacts of sargassum seaweed influx in affected Caribbean countries through the creation of technologies and value-chains for marine biomass.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY TECHNICAL COOPERATION

AGREEMENT

Mr. Speaker, in April 2020, my ministry signed a Technical Cooperation Agreement with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), where TNC would provide the necessary resources in the form of both financial as well as consultancies to assist the Department of Marine Resources in undertaking several projects.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to advise this agreement has already given rise to three projects designed to assist the DMR in meeting its mandate and obligations. These projects include the Marine Action Partnership, the Vessel Monitoring Systems Project, and a project to commence the ground work and preparation on the subsidiary legislation in the new Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction and Conservation) Regulations.

Mr. Speaker,

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I will now provide a synopsis of each project so that all may get a full appreciation of what is intended via each.

MARINE ACTION PARTNERSHIP (MAP)

Mr. Speaker, the objectives of the Marine Action Partnership are as follows:

1. Assess the strengths and areas for improvement in current marine compliance management in The Bahamas.
2. Identify and leverage national and international support for strengthening the capacity of local marine enforcement agencies.
3. Develop and implement an action plan with key enforcement stakeholders and fishing communities to address compliance gaps in five key areas:
 - I. Surveillance and Enforcement
 - II. Policies and Consequences
 - III. Consistent Funding
 - IV. Training and Mentorship
 - V. Community Engagement
4. Monitor and evaluate effectiveness of the action plan put in place, including a follow-up marine compliance management assessment and recommendations for further improvements.

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Mr. Speaker, to date, the MAP has accomplished the following: ■ Completed in-person marine enforcement assessment meetings with Royal Bahamas Defence Force (RBDF), Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF), Bahamas Customs, Bahamas Immigration, and the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) on the islands of Abaco, Bimini, Grand Bahama, Inagua, and

New Providence.

- Drafted assessment report of The Bahamas marine enforcement and shared with marine enforcement agencies for feedback. The report has been edited based on feedback from agencies.
- Facilitated discussions between RBDF, DMR and BNT with Florida State Fish and Wildlife Commission Law Enforcement Division (FFWC) focused on shared interests and opportunities for increased coordination and training. Resulted in FWCC increasing inspections of U.S. vessels returning from The Bahamas.
- Enabled training for RBDF with FWCC on cyber investigations (Feb 2020)
- Facilitated information from industry representatives to RBDF supporting seizure of two Dominican Republic fishing vessels engaged in IUU fishing. (Sep 2020)
- Coordinated with the Canadian government and Vulcan to provide satellite monitoring of The Bahamian EEZ. RBDF is

utilizing this satellite monitoring to assist in surveillance and monitoring of the high seas (Feb 2020 - ongoing)

- Interactions and partnership building with U.S. law enforcement has led to multiple investigations on U.S. citizens for violating Bahamian fisheries law; cases are being prosecuted with outcomes to be shared when possible.

Mr. Speaker,

Current Activities include:

- Circulation of final enforcement assessment report with feedback from enforcement agencies incorporated.
- Determining available dates of enforcement agencies to conduct the virtual action plan development workshop (Objective 3 mentioned above).

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Mr. Speaker, the next steps include:

- Conduct action plan development workshop to create an agreed upon five-year action plan for enforcement agencies to collaborate for improved marine enforcement – estimated

completion by September 2021.

- Formalize and implement the action plan for improved marine enforcement – estimated completion by December 2021.
- Monitor the implementation of activities agreed to under the action plan and support as agreed to and necessary – ongoing activity over the five-year agreement.

VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM PILOT PROJECT (VMS)

Finally Mr. Speaker, the goal of the Vessel Monitoring System Pilot Project (VMS) is to develop a "**White Paper**" that will inform the Bahamian government of potential vessel monitoring systems that can be used by Bahamian fishing vessels in order to help combat illegal fishing, improve enforcement and monitoring of at sea activities, and enhance search and rescue measures.

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Mr. Speaker, the benefits of the VMS are:

1. Combat illegal fishing – able to track licensed fishing vessels, identify those vessels not registered and encourage

compliance;

2. Improve better monitoring and management of at sea activities
– information will help to assess vessels movements, general identification of where fishing activities are taking place and help identify key areas that require increased monitoring and management; and
3. Enhance search and rescue measures – Improve emergency response time and accuracy in identifying where distress vessels are located.

Mr. Speaker, the Pilot Project is in two (2) stages; the first stage will involve testing several VMSs to determine, which one would be best suited to use in stage two, which will be the actual pilot study. The coordinating committee for the project is presently in the process testing three (3) VMS systems to determine, which system would be best to conduct the pilot study. The VMS will be installed on ten small fishing vessels and ten large fishing vessels throughout the country. It is intended the pilot study will begin in earnest in **June 2021** and run for duration of 1 year.

Mr. Speaker, forty years ago, the vision of an entity to stimulate and encourage the creation, expansion and promotion of Bahamian enterprise became a reality.

Today, the Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC) is still playing a vital role in executing its mandate to assist Bahamians to become owners and operators of small and medium sized businesses in farming, fishing and manufacturing as they participate in the development of the national economy of the Bahamas.

BAIC's work over the past forty years has been significant to the growth and development of The Bahamas economy, particularly in the field of agriculture, manufacturing and other related agro entrepreneurial pursuits.

Thousands of Bahamian small and medium sized businesses have benefitted from training, mentorship, land leases, rental spaces, business plan development and practical assistance rendered over the years.

BAIC presently manages four Commercial Entities: the Produce Exchange, Fish and Farm Store, Animal Feed Mill and Packing Houses in North Andros, North and South Eleuthera, Smith's Bay, Cat Island and Clarence Town, Long Island. Additionally, BAIC holds one of the largest portfolios of land in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas with

acreage for lease on the islands of Eleuthera (Hatchet Bay), Abaco (Spring City and Norman's Castle), North Andros and Grand Bahama.

Mr. Speaker, the Corporation also conducts workshops and seminars in food processing and handicraft and entrepreneurship. The Handicraft and Special Events Department has responsibility for coordinating all training in straw, shell craft and conch shell carving to help in the broadening of the country's economic base by developing a thriving handicraft industry throughout the islands of the Bahamas. Congratulations are in order to the successive administrations for their many success stories at BAIC.

BAIC welcomed its new General Manager Mr. Rocky Nesbitt, on July 1, 2020. Since his arrival, despite being in the midst of Covid-19, the Corporation has seen significant changes and improvements, guided by an 8 points strategic plan developed by the GM and supported by his executive team.

Mr. Speaker, just recently, the Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation marked an important milestone in its existence by observing its 40th anniversary under the theme: "Celebrating 40 Years of Entrepreneurial Advancement, Empowerment and Growth". Prime Minister the Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis proclaimed the week of March 21-27, 2021 as BAIC WEEK. During that time, a number of

events were held including a Church Service of Thanksgiving at First Holiness Church of God, Bamboo Town on Sunday, March 21; a Business Empowerment Summit for Entrepreneurs via Zoom on

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Wednesday, March 24; a Mega Market for Bahamian Artists and Artisans on the grounds of BAIC Headquarters from Thursday, March 25 to Saturday March 27; and a Staff Appreciation Day on Friday, March 26. There was also a series of appearances on Radio and Television talks shows and news interviews on ZNS, Bahamas At Sunrise and Guardian Radio on the history and services of BAIC led by Chairman, Bishop Gregory Collie and members of the Board of Directors, along with the General Manager Mr. Rocky Nesbitt and Senior and Middle Managers. A 24-page newspaper supplement, sponsored by several of BAIC's tenants was also printed by The Nassau Guardian on Friday, April 2, 2021 to commemorate the 40th anniversary.

BAIC also plans to recognize 40 long serving staff members in a ceremony later this year.

Beginning in March 2020, the fallout from the COVID-19 global pandemic has been historic, nonetheless and its threats are still very real.

In the midst of the pandemic, a focus on the wellness of its employees has been the priority of the Bahamas Agricultural and

Industrial Corporation. From moving to remote work and implementing safety protocols, the spotlight was on supporting the health and safety of its workforce.

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With the entire world experiencing the collective trauma of illness and grief, lockdowns and quarantine, BAIC adapted swiftly to keep business moving at its Commercial Entities: The Produce Exchange, The Fish and Farm Store and The Animal Feed Mill remained opened for business.

Some of the measures undertaken by BAIC's management included the reduction of the work shift from eight hours to four hours (with full pay); implementing morning and afternoon shifts to ensure social distancing; installing protective glass at the Front Desk and Work Stations at Commercial Entities for the protection of staff and customers; installing hand sanitizers at strategic locations; placing of COVID-19 awareness signage to remind staff to wear face masks and wash hands frequently; deep cleaning of Head Office and Commercial Entities as precautionary measures; paid for staff members to get COVID-19 tests when necessary; made it mandatory for staff who were exposed to COVID-19 to be tested with a clean bill of health before returning to the workplace and created a space as Isolation Room to hold infected staff members until medical assistance was available.

Mr. Speaker, a personal resilience also emerged among staff as

they dealt with unprecedented challenges like remote work and school, isolation from co-workers, friends and extended family and the endless adjustments, minor and monumental, wrought by the pandemic. That ability to adapt, to manage fundamental shifts in the

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way we live and work is at the heart of individual and organizational resilience.

How we fully emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic has yet to be seen. But the common thread of Governments and organizations focusing on wellness of their employees should continue even when life and business return to normal.

A major achievement of the Corporation during this past fiscal year was the implementation of new software and computer programs that move towards a more efficient operation at the Produce Exchange and the other Commercial Entities. A number of improvements have already been made at the Produce Exchange, including the installation of the Point of Sales system and the Royal Bank of Canada's Merchant Credit Card service. This is the beginning of plans for the introduction of an e-commerce platform to improve the distribution of produce from farmers in the Family Islands to a wider customer base in New Providence with orders online.

Mr. Speaker, BAIC continues to serve as that critical component to assist in enhancing food security and sovereignty of the country. BAIC is also working with the farmers in the Family Islands and the Department of Agriculture to guide farmers' production choices to better forecast what is being produced annually to meet food demand that is valued at approximately one billion dollars. Farmers throughout The Bahamas have benefitted from BAIC's diligent work