

# The Issue: Are we treating our beaches as a vital economic resource?



AT THE CRANE, St Philip, Crane Beach, North and South will be linked through submerged breakwater and shoreline protection devices. (P)

## Disappearing sand sparks fear for future

IF BARBADIANS never appreciated the economic value of their beaches, the point has hit home forcibly with the rapid destruction of the natural resource that has attracted millions of visitors to the country for decades.

On the south and west coasts, the damage was unbelievably swift – where mounds of white sands once existed, there are now only rocks.

A recent report from Professor Julia Horrocks, director of the Barbados Sea Turtle Project, suggested that the island needed to “allow some natural coastline reformation – instead of armouring the coastline, using sediment-trapping devices and replacing sand to keep the existing beaches”. She basically advised just leaving it to nature.

However, the director of the Coastal Zone Management Unit, Dr Leo Brewster, argues that intervention was necessary in many cases because of the economic significance of the shoreline, particularly on the west and south coast of the island.

Moreover, as Barbados prepares to host two world sporting events in the coming months, concern is growing about what visitors will see when they trek to the beaches to see the paradise they expect our shorelines to be.

### Shoreline stabilisation

“As part of our work, we prioritise areas of concern and then develop the option best suited for shoreline stabilisation and enhancement. While property protection is paramount, it is becoming clear that there is greater need for emphasis on structure designs that cannot only protect property but, more importantly, can stabilise and enhance an area.”

Putting things in perspective, Brewster said his agency's response was the systematic approach they had taken over the years, not a “knee-jerk” reaction.

He explained that since the passage of Hurricane Ivan two years ago, Barbados had suffered almost continuous erosion.

“We have gone through two very bad winter seasons with higher than normal winter swell waves occurring between September and April. The winter (December to April) is our main tourism season, and unfortunately it coincides with the period when the beaches are at their narrowest.

“In addition, the island has experienced some

periods of out of season swell waves which occurred during normal beach recovery period (April to August). This sort of wave activity has reduced the amount of time for natural beach recovery therefore, even in the current summer months they are very narrow, when they should be at their widest,” he explained.

The problem of disappearing sands has become so critical that beach operators, businesspeople in the tourism industry, residents in affected areas as well as visitors have sent out an S.O.S. to authorities.

Manager of the Caspian Beach Apartments on the west coast, Daniel Warnock-Smith is fearful of the future of his business.

### Nothing to keep back sea

Warnock-Smith said some trees in the area had been uprooted recently, leaving the sea wall opposite the beach apartments exposed.

Since then, rough seas have forced a large crack in the sidewalk, which has separated from the road, and cracks are also appearing in the road.

“There is nothing to keep the sea back from the road, and I am concerned that the next big wave could threaten the foundation of our building,” he said.

The CZMU team defended their response to the situation which was based mainly on the economic significance of the area.

Brewster said priority locations targeted since the 1990s included Welches, Christ Church, and Rockley to Coconut Court, where beaches were created and “anchoring headlands” constructed to hold the nourished sand.

Along Holetown, St James, from Villas on the Beach towards Sunset Crest, a similar arrangement would be implemented. Also in Holetown, there is a plan to improve flood mitigation at the Holetown Lagoon.

At the Crane, St Philip, Crane Beach North and South will be linked through submerged breakwater and shoreline protection devices. In Tent Bay, St John, a slipway is being constructed for fishermen to haul up their boats.

According to Brewster, the rate of development was expanding again along the coasts of Barbados. We therefore have to manage that development in a controlled sustainable manner.

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Two sides of this issue on Centre Pages

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