

# LEFT OF CENTRE



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# Value of beaches taken for granted

*"DA BEACH IS MINE, I gwine bade anytime . . ."* Perhaps Gabby needs to give us the 2K version that says: *"Da beach is mine, I gwine tek care of it all de time . . ."*

In response to the question posed to me when I was asked to submit this article – has Barbados paid enough attention to the economic importance of its beaches – the answer is that Barbadians have NOT paid enough attention to the importance of beaches, economic or otherwise. We have taken them for granted much as we take most aspects of nature – air, water, trees – for granted.

When "de high wind comes" with accompanying storm surge and blows or washes beaches away, then we realise what we have lost. There is no longer a place to have a picnic; the tourists cannot sunbathe; the fellows cannot play beach cricket. . . de beach gone. What to do? LEARN!

There is no underestimating the economic importance of beaches in Barbados. They are critical to our tourism product – a substantial component of the gross domestic product. Year after year the Caribbean Tourism Organisation and other regional and national organisations confirm statistically that our beaches remain one of the primary attractions for persons when deciding where to go on holiday.

So imagine their great disappointment if they do not get a beach when they arrive. It is like going to France and discovering that the Eiffel Tower is gone.

But beaches are more than economics. They provide a habitat for many plants and animals; while the average person would not recognise them or could not possibly name them, they too are important and need to have their home protected.

Even more fundamental, the beach defines us – we are island people. We can see, hear, smell a beach daily without travelling very far, so we have grown to believe that beaches will be there, God willing, all the time.

Sadly, this is not true; while for us it is beauty and recreation and a means to economic wealth, a beach is



first and foremost a natural phenomenon and, yes, believe it or not, they build up (accrete) and erode seasonally.

Now we have something called "sea-level rise" and, more importantly, human activity that has hastened the process of erosion: sand mining (taking sand from beach for

construction and other purposes); removal of beach vegetation (just because you do not think the natural vegetation on the beach is pretty does not mean it was not serving the purpose of stabilising/holding together the grains of sand); and poor construction practices (beaches are

dynamic systems which respond and adjust to waves, tides, currents and storms, so any actions by humans that prevent the beach from responding to dynamic forces – like building groynes and other structures without proper understanding of the possible impacts – can lead to increased erosion).

What should we do instead of continuing our foul practices and then hoping that Dr Leo Brewster at the Coastal Zone Management Unit (CZMU) can fix the problem? He is a doctor but not an MD; he cannot fix beaches by applying a few antibiotics and a cough syrup.

We should re-vegetate with appropriate plant species – there are many experts around Barbados who can tell you what to plant, for example, Professor Sean Carrington at UWI. We

should adhere to what the CZMU and the Town Planning Department say about building on the coast.

And if we truly love the beaches, we should keep them clean – stop littering, provide more garbage cans on the beach, in the City and everywhere else, for that matter. And empty the cans when they get full, please.

If we want the dollars from tourists who come for our beaches, or we love our beaches just because, we have to stop taking them for granted, understand their dynamic, and work to conserve them for now and the future.

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