

REMARKS BY HON. DARYL VAZ M.P.
MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO
MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOB CREATION
AT THE
LAUNCH OF THE ALLIGATOR HEAD FOUNDATION
AND
EAST PORTLAND FISH SANCTUARY
AT TURTLE CRAWL
ON
SATURDAY MARCH 19, 2016
@ 2:15 P.M.

I am excited and happy to be here today at Turtle Crawl for the Launch of the **Alligator Head Foundation** and the **East Portland Fish Sanctuary**. I am particularly pleased to be a part of this special occasion which signals that the months of hard work and planning have now borne fruit.

Naturally, I feel even more at home in Portland in my dual role as Member of Parliament for West Portland as well as a resident of the Parish. As Francesca knows, my interest in your efforts goes beyond my Ministerial or political duties and responsibilities.

I wish to once again commend the **Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21)** Academy for this timely and notable initiative which is aimed at revitalizing the fish stock in Portland as well as preserving the livelihood of our fisher folk and tourism interests in the Parish. The TBA21 Academy has collaborated with the Alligator Head Marine Laboratory with regard to the creation of this fish sanctuary which has also given rise to a new Non-Governmental Organization, the Alligator Head Foundation.

Indeed, Jamaica has come a long way in terms of how we view and treat our Environment. We need still however to increase public awareness of issues relating to the environment and climate change and so I applaud the tremendous efforts of our environmental lobby groups who have remained steadfast in their various educational

campaigns over the years. I believe that these campaigns have now begun to show signs that Jamaicans have a greater appreciation of the hazards associated with climate change and degradation of our environment.

Unfortunately, for many of our citizens, they have learnt painful lessons as they have helplessly watched their homes which they built on coastal lines or river banks precariously threatened or have been demolished in times of devastating natural disasters. Our people have also learnt too that the environment is not the business of environmental groups such as yours alone but every citizen.

Yet another lesson is that erosion and depletion of our environment, whether land, sea or air, are not easily repaired or reversed. Such is the case with our over fished waters. It is safe to say that fish is an equal staple to chicken in the Jamaican diet and as a result, much of our fish stock has been depleted. What this means is that because our fish stock is over-exploited, a threat to our food security looms. This fish sanctuary is therefore one of our hopes of correcting this situation.

Greater attention must now be paid to the health of our coral reefs. We must stop the destruction of marine species and other natural ecosystems that live along the coastline.

When our reef systems decline, so too does marine life which impacts our fishing industry as well as the livelihood of the thousands of Jamaicans employed within the industry. We cannot afford to ignore the signs. While we each have a key role to play as citizens of this island and the parish of Portland, your most valuable stakeholder is the fishermen who should be brought fully on board with this initiative. Let us through partnership with our fishermen hasten to preserve what we have and make every effort to restore what we have lost.

That is why I am grateful to the TBA21 for this fish sanctuary as well as the formation of the Alligator Head Foundation which will empower the residents of Portland to move toward a more sustainable livelihood, through education and training.

I understand that one of the goals is the development of an ecological stewardship programme for the area which will preserve what is most beautiful about Portland - that is its lush vegetation and pristine waters.

In fact, Portland is one of the best fishing areas in the island. It has some of the best deep sea recreational fishing, and indeed, hosts one of the three (3) largest sport fishing tournaments, which is the ***Annual Port Antonio International Marlin Tournament***, at the Errol Flynn Marina.

We welcome anglers from all over the world to the tournament each year who compete to land the biggest blue marlin. They provide a boost to Portland's tourism product and bring with them well needed foreign exchange to Jamaica's shores.

Beyond the obvious eco-tourism appeal of the fish sanctuary, the initiative will also contribute to Jamaica's climate change adaptation efforts.

The development of the fish sanctuary can only serve to add to the appeal of Portland as a prime destination for sports fishermen and other visitors who are seeking adventure as well as those who want to explore its exquisite natural resources. We must now look to the opportunities and benefits which lie ahead and not let them pass us by.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is an achievement to be proud of. This is an investment in the lives of our people of which we can be proud.

I implore our environmentalists not to be daunted in any way by the feeling that their invaluable contribution over the years is never appreciated nor respected. This administration of which I am proud to serve is inclusive. We realise that partnership is one way to get Jamaica moving in the right direction. We realise that it is not just a vibrant economy which is important to us as a people but other areas such as the environment which too has a tremendous impact on people's lives. Technology has shown us that we are a global village but equally has climate change. All together we must find solutions to combat it.

Friends, I close by emphasizing that I am heartened by the development of this fish sanctuary and by the inauguration of the Alligator Head Foundation. Again I commend the TBA21 for these initiatives and look forward to hearing the success stories that emerge.

Thank you.