



HON. ADRIAN GIBSON, MP,

EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN OF THE WATER AND SEWERAGE CORPORATION

UPDATE TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 9TH 2019

Good Afternoon Mr. Speaker:

I thank God for the opportunity to return to this place yet again.

I am proud to rise on behalf of the great people of Long Island, a people from whence I came.

Mr. Speaker:

I would like to wish a happy belated birthday to the greatest woman I know—my grandmother, Lenora Gibson. I grew up with her. She turned 87 on the 29th September. Happy birthday mammy!

During the recess, a few Long Islanders passed on. I would like to extend sincerest condolences to Shirley and Martin Turnquest, Agnes Turnquest and family, Guild Wells and the entire Wells family on the passing of Mrs. Edna Wells; condolences are extended to Bonnie (who has been a wonderful supporter), Jan, Mary, Pamela, Burton and the entire Moree family on the passing of Captain Archie Moree; I also wish to extend condolences to the Frances Cartwright (her daughter, who has been one of my most vocal supporters and who is someone I greatly appreciate) and to the entire Treco, Cartwright and Turnquest on the passing of Mrs. Theresa Treco-Turnquest (a school mate of my grandfather).

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to extend sincerest condolences to the family of the late Hon. Tennyson Wells—his wife Stephanie and their children, to his dear mother Mrs.



Wells (who still resides in Deadman's Cay), my former teacher Mrs. Rosena Pyfrom (his sister), my campaign co-manager and supporter Mrs Iris Pinder (former Director of Education), his brothers Richard and Charlie and his wife, my cousin, Edyra Wells...and the entire Wells family.

Mr. Wells was a proud Long Islander. He was also one who spoke his mind. He made notable contributions to our national development as a MP, Minister, businessman, attorney and in all of the other capacities he served. I remember, as a grade 9 student, coming to Nassau on a field trip. He welcomed us to his office—I believe he was the Attorney General at the time.

I was grateful and honoured to have had his support during the last general election.

May their souls rest in peace!

Mr. Speaker:

Before I speak to the Bill at hand and the activities of the WSC post-Hurricane Dorian, I would like to extend condolences to all those who lost family and loved ones during the passage of Hurricane Dorian.

I took an assessment team to Abaco shortly after the passage of the storm. We met some staff members and members of the community and heard harrowing accounts of their struggle to survive during this most traumatic experience. Desperation and despair is in the air. Some people were also taking advantage of a very unfortunate situation. Many people were, frankly, in survival mode.

People were desperate to leave. When night fell, there was complete darkness. Complete.

We observed the destruction of structures and noted landmarks. Ive been to Abaco a few times before.....I did not recognize it this time.

Mr. Speaker:

I have seen hurricane damage before. I have seen the effect on people. I have been personally affected. My family has been. I have never seen this.....

This is a very sad, heart wrenching, gut churning, unforgettable experience.



Mr. Speaker:

I support both the amendment to the Disaster Preparedness and Response Bill and the Hurricane Dorian (Replacement of Government Issued Documents) (Exemption from Fees) Bill, 2019.

Mr. Speaker:

The government is demonstrating its care, support and concern for the Bahamian people in exempting residents from the payment of fees for the replacement of lost documents. No doubt, thousands of people lost passports and other documents during that time. Given the losses of valuable documents, even I have determined to procure ziplock bags and/or water proof and fire proof safes. This can happen to anyone of us.

Mr. Speaker:

I have heard stories of persons abusing the process, persons who are not even from Abaco and Grand Bahama capitalizing on Hurricane Dorian, on the relief efforts....even going as far as re-selling items, of travelling to the United States, of taking advantage of people's kindness.

Frankly, I believe that its high-time that we begin to generate driver's licenses or some identification card for each island. Each state in the United States has its own driver's license, which also serves as an identifier of residents in those particular states. As such, going forward, we must seek to generate driver's licenses that also highlights the island on which a person resides.

Mr. Speaker:

I support the Disaster Preparedness and Response amendments.

However, I do so noting that there is a need for purpose built shelters. During my visits to both Abaco and Grand Bahama, I noticed that several NEMA designated shelters were badly damaged or decimated. Immediately after the storm, WSC was asked—by NEMA—to use its backhoe to assist in the removal of bodies from a church. The church wall fell on top of persons who sought shelter therein and their bodies were found trapped under the rubble.



In my mind's eye, this Bill ensures the safety and security of Bahamians during a national emergency and allows for the government to take special temporary measures that may not be appropriate in normal times. This Bill also brings our emergency planning into the 21st century.

A further suggested insertion would perhaps relate to the potential award of reasonable compensation to any who suffers loss, injury or damage as a result of anything done or purported to be done that may adversely impact them. Such a person should also sign a release, freeing the government of any further potential legal action.

Given the debate here today, and the expected passage of this Bill, I would recommend a subsequent public relations campaign, sensitizing people to the new law and what is expected going forward. Public consultation is key here.

WSC WORKS

WATER SUPPLY OPERATIONAL UPDATE

Mr. Speaker:

The Water and Sewerage Corporation has been working assiduously to restore services in Abaco and to assist our sister water company, the Grand Bahama Utility Company, as best as we could.

Mr. Speaker,

The Corporation operates 11 different water supply systems as a part of our Abaco Operations. Of the 11, partial or interim water supply has been restored to 8 systems and 3 remain offline.

The daily average water production for Abaco Operations is approximately 2.4 million imperial gallons. Approximately 100K imperials gallons is produced daily from reverse osmosis plants.

1. The Grand Cay Water Supply System which supplies this northern cay is presently offline. The desalination plant which serves this community was



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repaired yesterday and a WSC team is in route to Grand Cay today to confirm the water quality and once confirmed, the water supply for that community will be immediately restored.

2. The Sweetings Cay Water Supply System which supplies the community on this cay off east Grand Bahama is presently offline. WSC is working in conjunction with various non-governmental agencies (NGOs) who are attempting to get a small desalination plant operational to supply the remaining residents on Sweetings Cay with basic water supply.
3. The Cedar Harbour Water Supply System which supplies the settlements of Cedar Harbor, Wood Cay, Mount Hope, Fox Town and Crown Haven is now partially operational.
4. The Blackwood Water Supply System which supplies the settlements of Blackwood, Fire Road and Coopers Town is now partially operational
5. The Treasure Cay Water Supply System which supplies Treasure Cay and Green Turtle Cay via an underwater line is presently off. Our team hopes to partially restore some water supply to this community by this weekend.
6. The Marsh Harbour Water Supply System which supplies the Marsh Harbour, Spring City, Dundas Town, Murphy Town, Central Pines, Pedican Shores and Eastern Shores communities is now partially operational.
7. The Casaurina Water Supply System which supplies this community is now partially operational.
8. The Cherokee Water Supply System which supplies this community with water from the Winding Bay Development Desalination Plant is now operational.



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9. The Crossing Rocks Water Supply System which supplies this community is now partially operational.
10. The Sandy Point Water Supply System which supplies this community is now partially operational.
11. The Moores Island Water Supply System which supplies this southern cay is now fully operational.

RESTORATION OF INTERIM WATER SUPPLY

Mr. Speaker,

Power supply at all facilities are still based on standby power generation with the exception of those in South Abaco where power supply from the Bahamas Power and Light Company Limited (BPL) has been restored. However, even that supply is experiencing some challenges.

Our restoration teams are made up of personnel from the Abacos, New Providence and other islands with additional vehicular and standby generator resources shipped in to bolster their efforts.

While WSC has been successful in restoring an interim supply for many communities in the Abacos, it must be highlighted that there will be periods of low pressure and/or no water given the fragility of our power generation, water production, pumping and distribution systems.

In Marsh Harbour, the restoration efforts have been focused on providing water supply for critical governmental buildings and those housing relief and restoration teams to aid the clean-up and restoration activities. In summary, interim water supply has been restored for most of the city center, Spring City and parts of Central Pines with teams now commencing work to restore supply to Dundas Town and Murphy Town.



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Two (2) water tanker trucks, a 2,500 gallon tanker and a smaller 900 gallon tanker, are also being utilized to tanker water to critical locations on the mainland – this includes filling bladder tanks that have been set up our various strategic locations and providing water to governmental agencies and NGOs providing relief and restoration services.

SEWERAGE OPERATIONAL UPDATE

Mr. Speaker,

WSC is extremely concerned that both of our sewerage systems in Abaco, namely:

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1. The Treasure Cay Sewerage System and
2. The Spring City Sewerage System.

Experienced substantial damage during the passage of Hurricane Dorian and with no electricity supply and 17 different sewage lift stations in Treasure Cay, we are facing a substantial sanitation challenge. Both of these system remain offline and our teams are working to provide some immediate short terms solutions commencing with an initial clean-up of all sites in the coming days.

DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

Mr. Speaker,

Immediately following the passage of Hurricane Dorian, WSC dispatched teams to the Abacos. On Wednesday September 4th 2019, I led the initial WSC assessment team that landed in Sandy Point and journeyed up to Marsh Harbour. All WSC operational systems have now been assessed and the initial damage estimate is in the \$15Mn to \$20Mn.



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As an aside, kindly also note that the loss of revenue from our Abaco Operations will have a serious financial impact upon the Corporation. Abaco represents our second largest revenue stream.

The damage to WSC's Marsh Harbour and Treasure Cay water and sewerage systems is particularly severe. Both the 500,000 and 250,000 imperial gallon storage tanks in Marsh Harbour were severely damaged and the 500,000 imperial gallon storage tank in Treasure Cay was totally destroyed. Thus far, our team in Marsh Harbour has repaired well in excess of 200 distribution system leaks as they attempt to restore an interim water supply for that community.

The Treasure Cay and Spring City sewerage systems sustained substantial damage to all of their above ground infrastructure such as control panels, etc.

Water storage tanks on Green Turtle Cay and Moores Island also sustained structural damage and the storage tanks on Grand Cay and Sweetings Cay were destroyed.

Many of our buildings suffered varying degrees of damage as a result of both flooding and wind related damage to their roofs.

Flooding also damaged many of our electrical/mechanical systems including our pumping station pumps, wellfield pumps and standby generators. Similarly, our entire vehicular fleet was damaged ranging from major to total destruction as a result of flooding and flying debris.

An assessment of our underwater main between mainland Abaco and Green Turtle Cay is being planned for the coming days.

WSC's commercial office in Treasure Cay was totally destroyed and the commercial offices in Marsh Harbour, Green Turtle Cay and Coopers Town sustained varying degree of damage.



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STAFFING

Mr. Speaker,

WSC employed twenty-five (25) employees as part of our Abaco Operations prior to Hurricane Dorian. Unfortunately, many of them suffered extensive damage to their homes, vehicles and personal belongings during the passage of Hurricane Dorian. WSC has taken a series of steps to assist our staff in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian including but not limited to paid leave, financial assistance, care packages and counselling. Some employees have opted to temporarily relocate to New Providence or other islands and some have returned to Abaco to assist with the restoration and rebuilding. Of the twenty-five (25), ten (10) have opted to remain in the Abacos including eight (8) on the mainland and one (1) each on Grand Cay and Moores Island. Of the fifteen (15) who have opted to relocate, one (1) our Sweetings Cay employee, has been temporarily assigned to the Grand Bahama Utility Company on Grand Bahama.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Speaker,

Given the devastation in some of our wellfields and the surrounding communities, Marsh Harbour in particular, WSC Laboratory technicians have collected samples and continues to collect samples for thorough testing ensuring that all local and international water quality parameters are met prior to recommissioning any water supply source. These tests include water chemistry, microbiology, trace metals and hydrocarbons with testing done both at the WSC Laboratory in New Providence and at an international Laboratory with the assistance of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

WSC is cognizant of the importance of potable water, particularly in the wake of such a catastrophic event; however, our priority is also to provide safe water. Our



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initial tests in Marsh Harbour yielded very troubling results. Subsequent daily testing have been undertaken and, since that time, the all-clear has been given.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES (NGOs)

Mr. Speaker,

I am pleased to confirm that The Bahamas has been greatly assisted by NGOs who have provided tremendous assistance to the people of Abaco in this time of immense crisis.

The Water Mission Group has four (4) desalination plants operational on Abaco, a 30,000 gallon per day plant in Marsh Harbour and three (3) 1,000 gallon per day plants operational at the Treasure Cay Clinic, the Green Turtle Cay Dock and the Green Turtle Cay Club,

The Samaritan Purse Group has a 2,500 gallon per day desalination plant at the Treasure Cay Government Dock and a similar size plant at the school in Coopers Town.

These desalination plants have accompanying bladder tanks provided by the NGOs which are facilitating customers who walk up or drive up to fill bottles, bucks and tanks with potable water.

These are just a few examples and I am extremely thankful for the many formal and informal bodies and groups that have offered to help and those who have actually provided assistance in one form or another.

THE WAY FORWARD

Mr. Speaker,



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With the aid of a Contingent Loan for Natural Disaster Emergencies between the Government of The Bahamas and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), WSC hopes to shift its focus from restoration to major reconstruction this week commencing the procurement for the reconstruction of its water and sewerage systems utilizing its \$15Mn allocation of this Contingent Loan (\$6m of which we received on Monday). This reconstruction includes but is not limited to: -

1. Desalination plants
2. Storage tanks
3. Wellfield and distribution pumps
4. Standby generators and electrical switchgear works
5. Pumping station buildings
6. Water treatment systems
7. Distribution system repairs
8. Sewage lift stations and wastewater treatment facilities
9. Offices
10. Fleet vehicles and heavy plant

Mr. Speaker,

I am pleased to note that the first component of procurement works will commence this Friday with a visit of short listed tank companies visiting Abaco and the Cays to view sites where new tanks are required due to the total destruction of the former tanks for these communities. These new tank proposals are expected within a week.

Similarly, by early next week, we expect to launch the sewerage component procurement exercise. This is critical to maintaining the good health and sanitation of the Treasure Cay and Spring City communities where our existing sewerage systems will require extensive rehabilitation works.

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It is our plan that we will substantially complete most of our procurement works during the month of October and that contractors and additional WSC personnel will soon begin mobilizing to restore and reconstruct our water and sewerage systems across the length and breadth of the Abacos.



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