

# **THE LAUNCH OF TURTLE SEASON 2011**

## **OPENING REMARKS**

**DR. ALLAN BACHAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Today we are here in the spirit of collaboration and celebration to launch turtle season 2011, a National initiative to promote turtle conservation at the community and national levels.

We are here, in the recognition that, together, we can strengthen the National conservation efforts to increase the numbers of sea turtles in our waters; to ensure their

existence for future generations and the preservation of our heritage and traditions.

The Vision of the TVT is to make Trinidad and Tobago a premiere turtle tourism destination globally. To attain this vision we pursue our mission of fostering and strengthening strategic partnerships to optimize the benefits of the Natural Resources through sound science and management.

This requires a balancing of multiple community needs specifically livelihood issues with a focus on ecosystem drivers and interests in the sustainable benefits and use of natural resources, without compromising the long-term biological integrity of land, coastal and marine ecosystems.

TVT recognizes the fact that the communities that host our nesting beaches are rural villages with low levels of development and limited sustainable employment opportunities.

Understanding that conditions and incentives for effective conservation by local communities need to be created and conservation of our Biodiversity cannot be successful unless local communities receive their fair share of benefits and assume a greater role in managing local biological resources.

Also understanding that the human capacity for conserving and sustainable use of biodiversity must be greatly

strengthened since conservation can only succeed if people understand the distribution and value of biodiversity, understand how it influences their own lives and aspirations, and learn to manage areas to meet human needs without diminishing biological diversity.

**Therefore our goal is linking communities, ecosystem services (ecotourism and Agritourism), conservation and sustainable development. This framework forms the basis of our Business Plan and strategically guides us toward the realization of our Vision and Mission.**

The experience of community-based conservation groups has shown clearly that sea turtles are worth much more alive than dead.

Understanding the interrelationships that exists are critical towards understanding the micro and macro impacts and economic benefits.

We have seen this realization reflected in the community of Grand Rivere the community of my friend where the development of conservation initiatives targeted at a product namely sea turtles and the environment has led to the parallel development of ecotourism and agriculture.

The inflow of visitors to Grande Riviere, expanded from 6,507 in 2005 to 21,000 in 2009: (300%)

**REVENUE is RECEIVED BY GOVERNMENT from the sale of permits**

**TOUR GUIDING :** Tour Operators mainly from outside the community and Tour Guides from the community derive livelihoods during turtle Season..

### **HOTELS/ GUEST HOUSES**

The major revenue earner in the community is accommodation. The value of sea turtles at Grand Rivere can be seen by the investment in accommodations in this community. Ten years ago there was one major hotel and a couple of guest houses. Today there exists 5 small resorts and 12 Guesthouses with a total of 150 rooms. There also exist 4 small food establishments.

The hotels and guesthouses employ 92 persons during the season.

### **AGRICULTURE**

Ten years ago in this community the agricultural sector had declined and was deemed to be non existent owing to a lack of available ready markets, distance and costs to access the existing markets. Owing to the development of Turtle watching over the last 5 years transitional farming has increased and continues to grow. Over the last two years growth has been over 35%. This has been due to the synergy between the farming community and the hotels and guesthouses. There now exist ready markets for crops as these establishments currently purchase all crops so as to service the needs of the visitors The sector currently employs around 70 farmers.

### **Transportation**

The transportation system in the area is very weak in term of serving the needs of the locals. However with the increase of visitors to the area this has created a demand for tourist mobility. A taxi service now exists.

### **Employment**

Employment has been created among residents in the community. There is employment of approximately 194 (66% of adults) persons from the community.

Unfortunately this economic activity is seasonal that is six months for the year. Also the distribution of economic wealth is skewed in favor of the bigger businesses. Outside of Turtle season employment drops to around 31% and residents are forced to find alternate income sources. To counteract this there is need to develop alternative income generating activities especially during non peak periods.

Understanding this it would be remiss of me if I did not take this opportunity to publically condemn the statement made by Mr. Watson Duke telling visitors to stay away from T&T. This is reckless and irresponsible. For someone who is fighting for the rights of the working man and woman this is unfortunate. We should expect better from leaders. His cause should not jeopardize the livelihoods of thousands of community persons who depend on the foreign visitors that would be coming for turtle season

We stand at a crossroad in conservation where a new paradigm is required to achieve the next level in our development future. Conservation no longer stands alone and must now be developed to support the National Agenda for diversified economic development through economic drivers of eco and agro tourism

To realize this vision what do we need?

1. There is the need to continue to provide support in the area of conservation and the protection of the environment and green infrastructure development so as to protect and enhance the product so that visitors would not be disappointed with our product offering;

2. We need More effective Marketing of the Product, All Global ecotourism initiatives are sustainable because of the marketing strategy; I urge the Honourable Minister of Tourism through the TDC and MOT to support a call to develop a marketing strategy to support Turtle tourism.
3. We need to Develop the capacity of communities through training, infrastructure development;
4. We need to Identify the opportunities that are unique to communities
5. We need Good science, Education and Awareness to support the development and permit me to elaborate.

The Sea Turtle Recovery and Action Plan (STRAP) for Trinidad and Tobago has finally been completed by WIDECAST (**Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network**) and handed over to government.

The STRAP calls for Scientific study to guide efficient and effective Policy and management strategies.

In 2007 with the assistance of WIDECAST and Dr. Eccart The National Monitoring Programme was developed in keeping with the STRAP. At present five groups participate in the NMP.

It has been unfortunate that more groups could not have been included due to funding considerations. At this time I would like to acknowledge and thank Atlantic LNG for their steadfast commitment towards funding this programme over the last two years especially in the

absence of Government funding. This shows the commitment of the private sector and Government needs to step up to the plate. I hope with the support of the Honourable Minister and Mr. Ramnarine that we would be able to expand it to include all the other groups;

6. We need Partnerships among stakeholders

7. We need COMMUNICATION which I cannot stress enough given the overlap especially among Government agencies in this new paradigm

8. and We need Appropriate legislation

Current legislation for the conservation of sea turtles is embodied in the Conservation of Wild Life Act (Chapter 67:01) and the more recent Fisheries Act (Chapter 67:51). Unfortunately, there are serious conflicts between these two pieces of legislation. We take hope in the Honourable Vasant Baharat's statement that new legislation is coming later this year.

Today, I see the future of accomplishment through cooperative effort. The synergy that will be created by working together will help advance our common goal – to restore the sea turtles to their ecological roles. This will ensure healthy marine ecosystems and help protect and develop our economy. You can count on Turtle Village Trust to be a willing partner in these ongoing efforts.

In closing, I leave you with the simple formula

1. Point with pride.
2. View with concern.
3. Close with hope.

**I point with pride** to the people especially those in the communities who I have gotten to know through our work.

**To view with concern,** all you have to do is pay attention to the magnificent variety of wildlife in our backyards and see the delicate balance we must maintain between our needs and the necessities of the creatures with whom we share our land and waterways.

**I close with the hope** that all of us will strengthen our collective resolve and commitment to this beautiful place and the species we seek to protect.

Let us respect our elders

Thank you.