



Tour of Waste Management Plants and Future Plans

Honorable Osbourne Bodden, MLA, JP

Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to update the Members of this Honorable House on the progress my Ministry is making in the procurement of an Integrated Solid Waste Management System for the Cayman Islands.

As the Premier has already noted in his statement, the issue of solid waste management is one of national importance. Madam Speaker, we have reached the point where we simply cannot afford to maintain the status quo - many believe that we have now reached a crisis point in regards to our solid waste management, and the urgency of the situation has been underscored by the recent fires at the George Town Landfill, and one only needs to drive past the landfill here in Cayman Brac to see that it appears to be approaching its capacity. Madam Speaker, these problems have not arisen overnight - they are the result of many decades of population growth, increased consumption, and the lack of an integrated and strategic approach to the problem.

As Members of this Honorable House will be aware, our Government has started the procurement process for an Integrated Solid Waste Management System for the Cayman Islands. I have appointed a Steering Committee for the project, which is chaired by my Ministry's Chief Officer, and they have been working hard to progress this project of national importance through the procurement process.

Madam Speaker, as I am sure you can imagine I do not purport to be a technical expert in solid waste management. I am learning a great deal about it, and I believe it is important to be as informed as possible on the subject as we move forward with this important project. While I have the benefit of having a Steering Committee that has a number of technical experts who, I am confident will provide me with excellent advice and guidance as we move through this process, I believe that as the Minister responsible I should also avail myself of every opportunity to learn more about this subject. To that end, Madam Speaker, I went to the Tampa area last week to visit a number of waste management facilities to see first-hand what some of the possible solutions might look like. As the Premier mentioned in his earlier statement, we visited four waste-to-energy facilities, two landfills, and one recycling processing centre. We had the opportunity to see the waste-to-energy process in action and learn more about how it works and the different governance structures that we might want to explore as part of our assessment of options in our procurement processes. It was an incredibly informative trip, Madam Speaker, and I feel that it has given me an enhanced understanding of waste-to-energy technology, and its possible role in the integrated solid waste management solution for the Cayman Islands.

Some detractors have commented that the trip to Tampa was a waste of time, particularly as the processing capacity of the facilities we visited far exceed the waste generation levels of the Cayman Islands. Madam Speaker, the waste-to-energy facilities we visited were indeed much larger than we would need in the Cayman Islands, however the technology is modular and easily scaled up or down to fit the needs of the situation. In our case, with approximately 233 tons of waste per day, we would need a much smaller-scale facility than the ones we visited in Tampa that process in excess of 1,000 tons per day. However, these larger facilities process their waste using three or four modular systems - from my discussions with the people we met with at the various facilities I believe that if our Integrated Solid Waste Management System calls for a waste-to-energy component then we will be able to scale the technology to easily meet our needs.

The facilities we visited had different governance arrangements - one was owned by the government and operated by a private company with the regulator sited full-time at the plant. Another facility was owned and operated by the company, under a 20 year contract with the local government. The other facilities were owned by the local government and operated by the private companies, but the regulator was not located on-site. We also learned more about the possible different arrangements for the collection and processing of waste, including privatised collection and processing, and public-private partnerships for these as well. Madam Speaker, I was able to see first-hand what a waste-to-energy facility looks like, experience the conditions in its vicinity, and see the smoke stacks that do not appear to be belching smoke.

I also noted, with great interest, the proximity of other types of development to these facilities - one of the largest facilities that we saw was adjacent to a large suburban housing community, another was closely adjacent to other industrial and commercial uses. I was able to see for myself the potential impacts of these large waste-to-energy facilities on their neighbours, and it is my perception that these impacts are much less than one would experience with a traditional landfill. While there is vehicular traffic from the trucks bringing the waste to the facilities, and some noise from the machines operating the facilities, I noticed that there was a remarkable absence of odour outside the facilities. In fact, within the facilities it seemed that the only place where your nose would alert you to the fact that you were in a waste-processing facility was on the tipping floor itself where the trucks deposited the waste that was brought to the facility.

The other feature that I noted, Madam Speaker, is that while the waste-to-energy facilities reduced the volume of waste by nearly 80%, and there was recovery of ferrous and non-ferrous metals from the ashes, there is still a need to landfill the residual ash. I noted, with great interest, that the landfill sites were located on a site separate, some quite distant, from the waste-to-energy facilities, and at the landfills we visited the ash was being used as cover material for the landfill. The cost of fill material to cover the landfill is not an insignificant cost for us, Madam Speaker, so if waste-to-energy is part of our Integrated Solid Waste Management System then we may have the benefit of creating cover material for our landfill as part of the process.

Madam Speaker, while I was very excited by what I saw and the information I gathered on my trip to Tampa, and I was very impressed with the waste-to-energy facilities we visited, I want to be very clear that I am not committing us to that technology at this time. As I mentioned earlier in my remarks, I have convened a multi-sector steering committee that is charged with researching and advising my colleagues and I on the best solution for the country. The process which they are undertaking is a requirement under our finance law, and it requires careful assessment and consideration of the various components of a project, including financial, environmental, and legal implications and requirements. The process takes time, but I believe that the approach is well-founded and will result in a better project, with an increased chance of success, for the country.

There have been many detractors who have spoken out against the approach we are taking, and the time they believe it will take to get through the process. Madam Speaker, many who are not involved in the situation and do not have the benefit of knowing in detail what obtains have called for our Government to do something immediately and forget about the prescribed procurement process - some have suggested that surely we have already studied this subject enough and we already know what we need to do and really ought to just get on with doing it.

Madam Speaker, I believe that there is no one here today who would like to be able to get the necessary solution in place more than I do. As the Minister responsible for this area, and a man of action, there is nothing that would please me more than to be able to stand here today and advise the country that we have the answer and we are moving full-steam ahead on putting it in place. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, that is not the case, and with your indulgence I would like to take a few moments to explain why this is so.

Members of this Honourable House are already aware of the Framework for Fiscal Responsibility which has been enshrined in our public finance management law, and the process that is required for large projects. The stages have been outlined in other statements on this project and the cruise berthing facility, however I will take a few moments to speak to them again. The first stage is the production of the Strategic Outline Case, which we refer to as

the "SOC", which gives a situational overview and identifies a number of possible project options. This SOC is the basis for an RFP for consultants to review and assess the project options and identify the preferred option based on a multi-component analysis, which is presented in the Outline Business Case, or "OBC". This process results in the identification of a preferred project option that has been subjected to a financial analysis to determine its financial feasibility, an environmental review to delineate its potential impacts and mitigation of those impacts, and a review of the legal implications and requirements. In short, Madam Speaker, the process should result in the identification of a preferred project option that not only meets the identified needs for the project, but has the greatest chance of successful implementation.

Does this process take time, Madam Speaker? Yes, it does - there is no question about that. However, I do not believe the process represents unwarranted delay, as has been suggested by some. I believe it is time well-spent that will help us to ensure we have a project that not only meets our needs, but has identified and considered potential issues, obstacles, and project impediments, and identified ways to address these prior to project implementation. This should mean, Madam Speaker, fewer delays, cost over-runs, and unintended consequences once we reach the project construction and implementation stages of the process. It is effectively "front loading" some of the time, but I am confident that we will see the benefits down the road.

There has already been one impediment to moving forward swiftly that has been identified by myself and the Steering Committee, and that is the lack of a national strategy or policy for waste management. Normally, when identifying the project options for the SOC the Steering Committee would start from the basis of the identified priorities and / or strategies for the issue. While we have provided the Steering Committee with our broad policy guidance, there is no overall waste management strategy to guide them in the identification of project options. For example, is it our goal, as a country, to pursue a certain percentage of recycling of the waste stream? Or is waste reduction our primary national focus? Without knowing the

answers to these questions and others, it is very difficult to define the project options for consideration in the Outline Business Case.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I have decided that the next step in this process will be the drafting and approval of a national strategy for waste management as I believe it is a critical step to help ensure that we move forward in the right direction and get the right solution.

To that end, Madam Speaker, the Steering Committee has been working on the SOC for the project that will be submitted to Cabinet shortly. It is my intention to release the SOC to the public once it has been reviewed and approved by Cabinet. The SOC will form the basis for the first consultancy RFP that we expect to go out in the next 4 - 6 weeks. This first RFP will be seeking consultants to deliver services in two stages - the first being the delivery of a national waste management strategy that will help to better identify the project options for assessment, and the second stage will be the delivery of the Outline Business Case that will identify the preferred project option and form the basis for moving into the procurement of project construction and implementation.

I want to assure Members of this Honorable House that we are not sitting back idly while the procurement process is going on. The Department of Environmental Health has worked hard to make improvements to the George Town Landfill, and they are working on identifying and implementing some short-term improvements at the landfill here in Cayman Brac as well. The Department will continue to make every effort to ensure that the service they provide, and the management of their landfill sites on all three islands, are optimised. Obviously we need to make sure that any measures we take in the short-term will not negatively impact our ability to implement the long-term solution once it is identified, so we are carefully assessing the improvements as we go to ensure they meet our short-term objectives without unintended long-term consequences.

Madam Speaker, the Premier made it very clear in his statement that this is an issue of national importance, and I want to assure the Members of this Honorable House and the residents of

the Cayman Islands that I am taking this issue very seriously. My Ministry, the Department of Environmental Health, and the project steering committee, are working assiduously to identify and implement an integrated solid waste management system for the Cayman Islands, and as part of this process we will, for the first time, have a national solid waste strategy to guide them in their work. I believe, Madam Speaker, that we are on our way to finding the best solution for the Cayman Islands, and I want to thank the Members and the public for their continued support as we move this project forward.

Thank you Madam Speaker.