

OECS Countries target Priority Areas for more effective Environmental Management

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OECS Secretariat, Castries St. Lucia, January 29th 2008: OECS member countries have identified several potential priority areas to help embrace all issues that lead to effective environmental management.

The recently ended 11th session of the OECS Ministerial Environment Policy Committee (EPC) identified environmental impact assessments, renewable energy and waste recycling among the possible priority areas.

Speaking to the OECS NEWSLINK on the just ended meeting, Permanent Secretary in St. Lucia's Ministry of Planning Donovan Williams said potential priority areas will be addressed according to the needs of OECS Member States; "The idea was that the individual countries would look at the range of concepts and perhaps agree on a priority for them. We will be exploring possible support from our development partners to further conceptualize and develop the proposals for each of the Member States, but the onus actually in on the individual member state to tailor the priority to their actual needs.

Williams added that the OECS EPC is considering approaches that will lead towards a broader scale of support from the international donor community. He said this will facilitate continuous approaches towards effective environmental management.

The Chairman of the OECS EPC, St. Lucia's Minister of Planning Senator Ausbert d'Auvegne emphasized the urgency of pursuing avenues that can further help to sustain a balance between environmental conservation and development. He also noted the need to consider options that can help to buffer the impact of the increasing price for fuel: "Contrary to the belief of many, we can find a balance between physical and economic development and environmental sustainability. Indeed, we have no choice but to achieve such a balance, as this is the only guarantee of our survival."

The Environment Minister also identified the OECS Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (OECS ESDU) as the agency that could best represent the sub region in strategic discussions at the international level. Assessing the impact of development on the environment was a recurring theme of the recent EPC meeting. To this end, head of the OECS ESDU Keith Nichols has advised that an institutional framework to continuously inform and sustain the management of environmental impact assessments must be in place with the constant backing of government: What happens is that if the information or the expertise resides in persons who are highly mobile within their careers then we need to re-invest in that knowledge base on a regular basis. In the absence of an institutional framework it will be difficult to do so. From the OECS perspective, we need to develop a comprehensive framework for EIA management so that the process remains an instrument and that whosoever comes on board will fit into and sustain that process."

The 15th meeting of the OECS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on the environment preceded the 11th meeting of the Ministerial EPC. The 12th OECS Environment Policy Committee Meeting is slated for November in Antigua-Barbuda.