

(OECS Secretariat, Castries, St Lucia) The OECS Secretariat will host 23 media persons from St Vincent, Saint Lucia and Grenada on a tour of the Tobago Cays Marine Park this Friday April 8, 2011.

The visit to the Cays – a marine reserve located in the Southern Grenadines – comes approximately one month following the final of six media seminars which climaxed in Grenada on February 11.

The OECS Secretariat is hosting this media tour as part of ongoing efforts by its Environment Department to promote the strategic importance of protected areas to the media, in an effort to lobby their support for environmental conservation and preservation and in order to strengthen their capacity to serve as conduits of public education on the subject.

During the day long tour, Friday, the media will receive presentations on the Role of Marine Protected Areas in Biodiversity Conservation, the management and operations of the Park, and an orientation to its sustainable livelihoods approach and community involvement. Following the presentations, the media will have a walk through the Tobago Cays Interpretation Centre before they are taken via catamaran on a guided tour to the Cays. The tour will be hosted by local marine biologist, Mr Orlando Harvey and will be joined by several other local experts who work in the field of environmental management in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Media persons who have confirmed for the tour include a mixture of senior and young journalists representing various print, radio, television and internet agencies from the three most southern States in the OECS.

The visit to the Cays is another step in deepening the relationship between the OECS and Media Operatives in region.

The Tobago Cays is one of six protected area sites supported by the OECS Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods (OPAAL Project) – a 5 year project aimed at biodiversity conservation which is now in its final stages of implementation. The OPAAL Project is funded by the World Bank, acting as the implementing agency for the Global Environment Fund (GEF) and

the Fonds Francais Pour l'Environnement Mondial (FFEM).

The Tobago Cays comprise a 50 sq. km sand-bottomed lagoon, a medley of islands surrounded by shallow waters and is protected by the largest horseshoe reef in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Other characteristics of the marine park include a small mangrove, a turtle sanctuary, a salt pond and sea grass beds. The park is currently used as a major spot for recreational activities by tourists and locals and provides livelihoods for fishermen and vendors of the area.

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