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Climate change taskforce established

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Members of the new Climate Change working group representing the Governor's Office; Ministry of Tourism; Department of Environment; the Department of Tourism; the Department of Agriculture; the Ministry of District Administration; the Weather Services; Hazard Management Cayman Islands; Lands and Survey; the Government Information Services (GIS); the Planning Department; Mosquito Research and Control Unit; and the Water Authority.

A multi-sectoral working group has been established to drive the Cayman Islands' effort to adapt to climate change. The group, the National Climate Change Adaptation Working Group, is spearheaded by the Department of Environment (DoE) and comprises representatives from some 10 government departments.

The group met on Tuesday, 11 December at the DoE to work out its terms of reference and its structure.

Minister for Environment Hon Charles Clifford said that the establishment of the taskforce is a key move in charting an integrated approach, which strengthens the connection between climate change and the policies being pursued by the Government to promote sustainable development.

"Warmer sea temperatures and rising sea levels caused by climate change are expected to impact Cayman's environmental resources and sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and tourism, with ripple

effects felt in the entire economy. It is therefore critical that we begin to take active steps to adapt," Mr Clifford said.

The development of the taskforce follows commitments at a recent workshop of Caribbean Overseas Territories (COTS) hosted by the Cayman Islands in November under the Enhancing the Capacity for Adaptation to Climate Change in the Caribbean (ECACC) project. This project is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the five COTS – Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, Montserrat, British Virgin Islands and Anguilla – participated.

Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Head of the Department of Environment, explained that the taskforce is aimed at guiding Cayman's process towards developing a national strategy on climate change. The taskforce will also be seeking to remove roadblocks by strengthening inter-agency co-operation and dialogue at the various levels of government.

She explained that at the recent ECACC workshop each country agreed to have a national strategy in place by the end of 2008. Further, she said the countries committed to focus on some important sectors, including tourism.

In addition to fulfilling its commitment under the ECACC project, Mrs Ebanks-Petrie said the establishment of the taskforce would enable Cayman to meet its obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to which the Cayman Islands has been party through the UK since March 2007.

According to a DFID report, UK Overseas Territories, together with their independent neighbours, are vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate variability and climate change including severe weather events and sea-level rise.

Key climate change issues for the territories are more frequent as well as severe coastal erosion and flooding; changes in rainfall patterns leading to inland flooding as well as droughts, warmer air and sea surface temperatures; and incidences of extreme weather, including increase in the intensity and possibly the frequency of hurricanes.

At Tuesday's meeting, Lisa-Ann Hurlston, DoE Sustainable Development Coordinator, gave an overview of the ECACC Project and other regional climate change projects.

She also outlined the main areas of focus under the ECACC project. These include monitoring programmes, climate change scenarios and impact studies, vulnerability assessments, sectoral adaptation strategies and national policies, regional strategies, public education and outreach and national project management.

The taskforce comprises representatives of the Governor's Office, Ministry of Tourism, Department of Environment, the Department of Tourism, the Department of Agriculture, the Ministry of District Administration, the Weather Services, Hazard Management Cayman Islands, Lands and Survey, the Government Information Services (GIS), the Planning Department, Mosquito Research and Control Unit and the Water Authority. Membership will likely expand to include other agencies or stakeholders as the group's work plan progresses over the next three years, the taskforce said.

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