

**OFFICIAL VERSION**

**PRESS STATEMENT**

**Response by Minister of Water Resources Management, Hon. Dr. David Estwick**

**Hon. Mia Amor Mottley Q.C., M.P.**

**Leader of the Opposition**

We thank Minister Estwick for addressing the people of Barbados on the medium and long term plans being undertaken by his Ministry and the Barbados Water Authority.

It is unfortunate that the Minister has confused representation with partisan politics. However, I will leave that ball outside of the off stump. There is nothing to be gained by the two political parties fighting in Bridgetown while people cannot get water in the Scotland District.

That is why I have not addressed this issue in partisan fora.

That is why I have not gone on the road to call a March as others have been agitating, and indeed has been done by the former DLP candidate for St. Joseph.

That is why I have not dwelt on accusing this Government of misplaced priorities or failing in the last 8 years to act with despatch as they increased rates by 60% or in completing the Northern Upgrade Project or in carrying the production at IONICs to maximum capacity while still paying for it.

Instead, we thank Minister Estwick for having the BWA urgently publish the request for expressions of interest to build the two desalination plants in the north and for having the Infrastructure Committee of Cabinet settle, just yesterday, a national water policy which we look forward to reading. We do have some questions, for example, as to whether the temporary solutions of the packaged desalination plants can in any way be converted into a permanent solution. But these can be addressed in the next few weeks.

What is important is that the immediate needs of the people be met.

There is one area that we did not hear the Minister address before VOB stopped broadcasting. This is the short term measures. This is more so given the discussions of the possibility of an immediate prolonged drought. In the letter I wrote to the Minister on behalf of the affected residents, I indicated that there was basically consensus on the long term solutions. However, there was urgent need as well to address the short term solutions, for the daily challenges of people are heart wrenching. The Barbadians affected need to know that people care

In the interim the infirm, aged or disabled have no assistance to lift containers of water to their houses. They need help and the BWA should help organize the assistance by having someone also on the truck to help.

The 5 tankers that we have in Barbados are insufficient to service the distressed areas. The immediate connection of all community tanks to the existing mains so they may be filled whenever there is water will allow the 5 tankers to be more effectively deployed and to focus on those who are not near the community tanks or, for whatever reason, cannot reach the community tanks.

Equally, the water tankers should be deployed on a 24 hour basis especially to service commercial establishments.

There are also concerns related to fair and equitable access of water from the community tanks. We may want to consider appropriate supervision of the community tanks by the Department of Emergency Management and members of the community to address this issue.

The broadcasting and Publication in newspapers and on social media of the daily routes for distribution of water in all affected communities cannot be beyond us in a twenty first century Barbados. This will go a long way in allowing people to plan out their affairs.

A strong Public Education programme is needed for conservation of water and to educate people as to the need to boil all water being stored in households before usage for drinking or cooking.

The Government needs to urgently facilitate the purchase of water tanks and pumps for the most affected communities through a combination of grants, low interest loans and tax incentives. This approach is necessary given the lack of disposable funds of most households and businesses after years of economic decline.

And finally it cannot be business as usual for the BWA. The time taken by the BWA to commission mains when they have been replaced has to be significantly reduced. Further, where possible, a 24 hour workday ought to be introduced in the deployment of tankers and the repair and replacement of critical mains.

We are happy that refund of payments will be considered for residents who have been paying their water bills but have been proven to be victims of chronic water outages. This is only but fair.

If our walking in the Scotland District caused Minister Estwick to talk, we are glad we walked. If our community meetings have led to this action, we are glad that we held these meetings. If there will finally be action on the Reverse Osmosis plant and the new Zonal Policy after these expressions of interest were published in 2007, we are glad.

We look forward to these outstanding issues being addressed urgently.

**We remain focused on the improvements that can come about in the short term to ease the plight of tens of thousands of Barbadians.**

**We remain committed to playing our part in assisting however we may to facilitate urgent execution and deployment of resources to remedy this national crisis.**

**13th January, 2016**