**Remarks on Motion to Let the People Decide on**

**The Need for a Cruise Berthing Facility**

The Opposition is calling upon Government to hold a referendum to assess public support for the proposed cruise berthing facility for the George Town Harbour (GTH).

The referendum is necessary because the Government is insisting on pursuing this ill-advised course of action on the false notion of widescale public support.

To the contrary, there is considerable evidence of lack of public support. That evidence includes a demonstration against the cruise berthing facility during the last administration. Also, significantly, the Cayman Islands Tourism Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Watersports Association have not publicly endorsed the project.

Further, during the consultative process for the 2013/14 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study designed to assist Cabinet in its decision-making, 73% of written submissions expressed opposition to the project.

The Opposition has taken note of the disquieting concerns raised in the Environmental Assessment’s Board (EAB) review of the EIA, the disapproval expressed by the public, and the reservation of the relevant special interest groups.

Further to these apprehensions and others, the Opposition makes the following observations:

1. There can be no justification or urgency to build a cruise pier in the face of Government-reported sustained growth in cruise ship and passenger visits year-on-year for the last five years.
2. Further, Cayman currently gets 90% of all cruise passengers on the western Caribbean itinerary and pre-disposing conditions are such that there is no likelihood that that will change in the negative direction in the foreseeable future. To spend more than $200 million to secure a percentage of the remaining 10% is totally illogical and a waste of the country’s resources.
3. One of the justifications for the cruise berthing facilities was faster disembarkation rates. However, the EIA has completely refuted that claim with a clear statement to contrary: “In addition to other disadvantages to passengers, [C]ruise berthing will not result in a quicker rate of disembarkation.”
4. Cayman has other far more pressing development and infrastructural needs, such as education and training for Caymanians, improved and expanded mental health services, and more comprehensive and efficient waste management systems and services.
5. Most concerning, as detailed in the EIA, the resulting loss in goods and services that will be experienced by commercial ventures in the vicinity of the GTH has been estimated at $19-22 million per year.

I Meanwhile, a broad range of impacts have been well identified, studied, and reported upon in the Environmental Assessment Board’s (EAB) review of the EIA.

The impacts of greatest significance during and post-works were noted as:

1. **Major loss of goods and services:** The value of these goods and services, which include cultural services such as tourism and recreation (dominated by watersports) and fisheries, among others, is estimated at CI$19-22 million per year.
2. **Impacts on heritage assets:** The successful consequent re-location of the *Balboa* wreck cannot be guaranteed, and has significant cost implications.
3. **Micro- and macro-economic impacts**: While there is projected positive micro- and macro-economic benefits, estimated at around US$245 million by the year 2036, these must be weighed against impacts such as:
	1. Cessation of operations by tenders at the start of construction, with the loss of livelihood of 40 tender operators, and the consequent business and human resources costs.
	2. Dislocation of watersports and recreational businesses in the immediate vicinity, and those costs and unintended consequences.
	3. Significant negative impacts on retail businesses and restaurants in the GTH area.
	4. “Moderate negative impact” on traffic and transport adjacent to the GTH area, with the increase in heavy vehicles. This will exert wear and tear on existing roadways and contribute to delays and intermitted closures of Harbour Drive and other roads.
	5. Amenity (noise, vibration, dust, poor water clarity, etc.) and visual impact on disembarking cruise passengers.
	6. Potential cruise ship demand for island-based resources, such as for potable water and solid waste disposal.
	7. Exertion of pressure on other areas as businesses and services relocate.

1. **Some major environmental Impacts**: Likely “permanent, irreversible removal of approximately 15 acres of coral reef habitat and a land reclamation exercise involving an area of 7.7 acres, the latter to be filled with dredged materials. Both initiatives and other activities will result in “further loading of suspended sediment” and impact on water clarity.

**II Proposals for mitigation of impacts during and after works:**

1. *Sediment resuspension from cruise ship propellers and increased boat traffic*: The report notes “considerable uncertainty in the modelling results,” while noting that potential mitigation measures have associated cost implications.
2. *Effects on coral reefs and marine resources*: The reports indicate “no measures have been proposed to mitigate these chronic impacts.”
3. *Extreme weather impacts resulting in possible storm surge in GTH*: Conflicting information requires further clarification.
4. *Impacts on tender and watersports operators*: According to the report, “The mitigation measures required to realise (a) reduction in impact are themselves significant and include assisting business operators in recouping losses through some means of compensation and/or alternative business opportunities.” Of note, the report says, “even after implementation of recommended measures” impacts will remain significantly negative.
5. *Increased pressure on other natural resources outside of the GTH*: The report “identifies the need to undertake carrying capacity studies of those natural attractions which will function as alternative sites or locations.”
6. *Impact on character of GTH*: Lasting negative impacts “are difficult to quantify and truly understand until the changes occur,” the report states.

**III Opposition Recommendations**

Taking all these concerns into consideration, the Opposition recommends:

1. retaining tender operations, but supporting the acquisition of better fit-to-purpose vessels and equipment to improve carrying capacity and comfort of passengers.
2. Improving facilities for comfort of disembarking passengers in the port area.
3. ??

**Press Packet**

I draw your attention to the EIA report in the attached press package for details. You will note, by the way, that by and large the proposals for mitigation required further study to identify or clarify, and were either vastly expensive, conspicuously missing from the report, or could not be quantified and understood until after the changes had occurred, when it is too late.

You will also find in your press package a copy of the Private Member’s Motion calling for a referendum that would provide an opportunity for our people to have a say in a project with well documented significant negative commercial, environmental and cultural impacts.