

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 2nd, 2023

'Don't stop the EIA' say environmental groups

Amplify Cayman, The Cayman Islands Mangrove Rangers, CPR Cayman, Protecting Paradise, Sustainable Cayman and Plastic Free Cayman

A consortium of Cayman community and environmental organisations is extremely concerned over the Parliamentary motion brought by MP McKeever Bush to remove the legal requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment to study the East-West Arterial extension's ('EWAE') environmental, socio-economic and health impacts. The groups include: Amplify Cayman, The Cayman Islands Mangrove Rangers, Cruise Port Referendum Cayman, Protecting Paradise, Plastic Free Cayman and Sustainable Cayman.

This decision undermines the commitments of this government to rely on scientific integrity and public participation in the evaluation and development of major infrastructure projects. The groups say the government can and must follow international good governance practices to ensure major infrastructural projects like the EWAE, that may have significant social and environmental impacts, undergo robust scrutiny before they are allowed to proceed. Our Island's recent experience with the proposed cruise berthing facility, highlighted locally the important information an EIA provides a community to help with informed and inclusive decision making.

While we are greatly concerned about the protection of the Central Mangrove Wetlands (CMW), the largest remaining contiguous mangrove wetland in the region, we also recognise the urgent need to alleviate the traffic congestion which is negatively impacting the quality of life of residents of the Eastern districts. We are greatly invested in ensuring an urgent and effective long term solution to the traffic problem is implemented, however we are concerned that if the EWAE is started without properly understanding the hydrological dynamics of the area, a critical opportunity will be missed to design and construct the road in a manner that not only effectively reduces traffic congestion, but also minimizes impacts on the CMW, and avoids the potential to cause flooding to communities along the EWAE corridor in Bodden Town, such as those experienced by the people in Belford Estates, Randyke Gardens and Windsor Gardens who know the damaging effects that heavy rain events can cause.

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Our groups are also concerned about the impact on our Island's water and food security. With the increasing number of vehicle imports and the fact that the development of this phase of the EWA Extension would open up land for development, the new highway could see more than 30000 vehicles per day on average streaming through an important agricultural and wetland area. This land, which is zoned agricultural/residential, contains rich soil capable of producing home-grown affordable crops for homesteads.

Without identifying proper mitigation options, there is a real concern that the general flow of water will carry contaminants, runoff, construction debris, oil, gas and other emissions from automobiles such as litter into the wetlands and the surrounding community as well as the North Sound. Flash-flood events, as recently seen in Ft Lauderdale, pose a threat to life and property without proper modeling assessments. Presently, the southern wetland basin acts as a natural solution for storm water drainage and filters the water that replenishes our nationally important water lens in Savannah.

While we recognize a Climate Change Policy is being worked on now, our current adaptation policy comprises mainly symbolic measures that are *ineffective* in improving resilience to the major climate change-related issues of coastal erosion and increased storm intensity. The lack of formal adoption of policies is resulting in dangerously slow progress for climate change adaptation. Changes in the planning regulations provide opportunities for improving resilience to climate change, but these have yet to be realised and we submit that building a six-lane highway through sensitive land areas contributes to the climate change problems we are trying to mitigate, especially when we have not fully assessed who is most at risk and how to prepare.

The above are just some of the reasons, fully detailed in the Terms of Reference, why we are collectively asking that the Government **continue** with the full scope of works for the Environmental Impact Assessment and that the respective authorities carry out their duties in accordance with the legal directive issued under S43 of the National Conservation Law, so that informed decisions can be made. It is essential that sound environmental and climate impact assessments inform decision making with respect to the largest intact mangrove system in the Cayman Islands and Caribbean.

Statement: *"We care deeply about our home and we are angry with this unprecedented attack and dangerous course and we urge EVERYONE to use your voice today as we are tired of feeling these islands are no longer for us- write to the Governor and Premier, write to your MP, contact the Roads Authority, contact the Department of Environment, call the radio, share this message"* .

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Quote: *"This makes me so sad and angry and I feel for our youth and their "NON EXISTENT FUTURE HERE" if there is no plan to fix all that is badly broken in this country. Sadly, it seems like many who are in charge and have the brains and will to make the changes are also in a bucket of crabs with others who are using all they have to gain more for themselves instead of working together to make a better Cayman for all of us instead of leaving Generational Caymanians completely out. I did not vote for this"* Shirley Roulstone
ends

About Amplify Cayman

Community grassroots organization formed in 2021 in support of the Cruise Port Referendum movement. Our mission is to empower our community to participate in their democracy and advocate for sustainable policy which supports a balance between economic growth and environmental preservation.

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About Cayman Islands Mangrove Rangers

Environmental conservation organisation. We monitor the ecological health of the mangrove ecosystems and seabeds. Our mission is to help establish a conservation ethic to protect and enhance mangrove ecosystems worldwide.

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About Cruise Port Referendum Cayman

A registered not-for-profit organisation who are interested in a democratic approach to decision making and ensuring the voices of Cayman people are heard by the government.

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About Protecting Paradise Cayman

A podcast on all things environment here in the Cayman Islands. A science communication platform aimed to give people a foundation of knowledge from which they can build upon.

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About Plastic Free Cayman

Established non-profit since 2018. We work to spread awareness of plastic pollution on our islands by conducting educational outreach, monthly clean ups and single-use plastic awareness campaigns.

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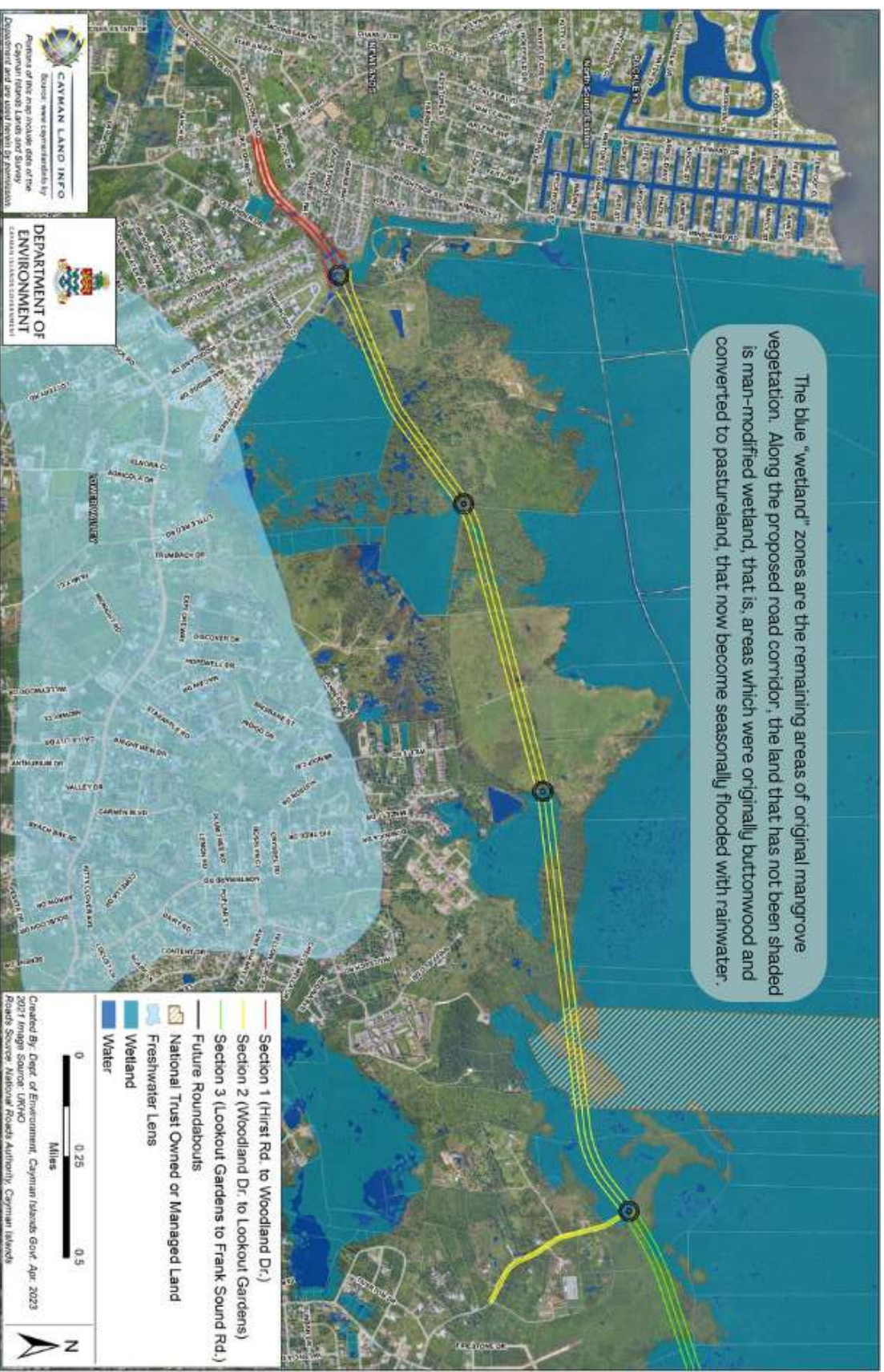
About Sustainable Cayman

Established non-profit 2022. Our mission is to promote sustainability and conservation in the Cayman Islands to create healthy communities and a flourishing natural environment.

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The blue "wetland" zones are the remaining areas of original mangrove vegetation. Along the proposed road corridor, the land that has not been shaded is man-modified wetland, that is, areas which were originally buttonwood and converted to pastureland, that now become seasonally flooded with rainwater.



CAYMAN LAND INFO
 Source: www.caymanlandinfo.com
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DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT
 CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT