



OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

10th June 2016

Hon W McKeeva Bush, OBE, JP, MLA
Leader of the Opposition

Dear Sir,

RE: MRCU's Oxitec Project – release of genetically modified *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes

I am writing further to your letter of 8 June 2016 expressing your concerns regarding the release of the Oxitec genetically modified *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes; asking the Government to put the project on hold to get “scientific answers to scientific questions.”

The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is an invasive species that has become established in locations around Grand Cayman. It is the vector for many of the major vector-borne diseases – dengue, yellow fever, chikungunya, and now Zika. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that there are over 390 million dengue infections per year, resulting in hospitalization of nearly half a million people annually, of which approximately 2.5% (over 12,000 people) die. Yellow fever has seen a recent re-emergence, with the WHO reporting more than 30,000 deaths in 2013. Chikungunya, which leaves some affected people with agonizing and debilitating joint pain for several months, swept across the Caribbean region in recent years with one million suspected cases reported in the Pan American region alone in 2014. You will have read that the WHO has declared that Zika virus is a “public health emergency” due to its explosive spread and the very concerning link that has been established between Zika virus and microcephaly and Guillian-Barre syndrome. These four vector-borne diseases, with their significant global burden, all have the potential to impact the residents and visitors of the Cayman Islands because we have the *Aedes aegypti* established here.

The MRCU has done an outstanding job in controlling the *Aedes aegypti* population here, however they are finding it increasingly difficult to do so. The *Aedes aegypti* are showing resistance to many of the available insecticides, and their ability to lay their eggs in very small quantities of water around houses makes it virtually impossible to eliminate all of their breeding sites. These are challenges that are not unique to our situation here; they are being faced around the world wherever the *Aedes aegypti* is found. As a result, there is an urgent need to identify and employ new tools in the control of this disease vector.

The Oxitec genetically modified mosquitoes are one such tool. The use of genetically modified sterile males will be an additional tool to be used in an integrated way with all other feasible methods to combat the public health danger posed by this mosquito. This is being done as a proactive measure, and is therefore a preventative approach to public health protection. The government has endorsed the Oxitec project as we believe we have an obligation to protect our residents and visitors from these vector-borne

diseases, and we believe that this project will help us improve that level of protection.

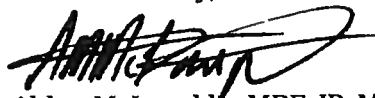
In your letter to me you expressed your concerns about the need for further risk assessments and “scientific answers.” You should be aware that the World Health Organisation recommends the use of this technique, following a thorough review by an independent group of renowned scientists from around the world. In addition, in March 2016 the United States Food and Drug Administration published a preliminary Finding of No Significant Impacts (“FONSI”) which concluded that a planned Oxitec trial in Key West would not have a negative impact on human health or the environment. The public consultation phase on this preliminary finding has recently finished and the final position of the FDA will be issued in due course. There was a tremendous amount of information and research submitted to the FDA as part of the process leading up to the preliminary FONSI, and I believe that, combined with the endorsement from the WHO and the results from Oxitec’s work in other jurisdictions, represents a robust body of “scientific answers” to support the project.

I am of the view that the Cayman Islands stands to benefit tremendously from Oxitec’s collaboration with MRCU. It represents a new and innovative tool that the MRCU can add to their arsenal to help reduce the *Aedes aegypti* population and, therefore, protect our people. It also gives us an opportunity to make a contribution to public health on a global scale, by being part of finding solutions to this global health problem.

With the rainy season recently started, we are already seeing increasing mosquito population numbers, including the *Aedes aegypti*, so time is of the essence if we want to ensure our people have the best possible protection from dengue, chikungunya, and Zika. With that goal in mind, I regrettably cannot accede to your request to put the project on hold, as I do not believe it would be in the best interests of the Cayman Islands.

I have asked the MRCU and Oxitec Cayman to continue their public education efforts, and I encourage you, and the people of the Cayman Islands, to continue to engage with MRCU and Oxitec and learn more about this important and innovative project.

Yours Sincerely,



Alden McLaughlin MBE, JP, MLA
Premier

Cc: Capt. Eugene Ebanks, JP, MLA
Mr. Bernie Bush, MLA