

World Oceans Day 2021

Message from

Premier & Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency

Hon Wayne Panton, JP, MP

Today, on World Oceans Day, the words of our National Song Beloved Isle Cayman come to mind:

“O sea of palest em'rald,
Merging to darkest blue,
When 'ere my thoughts fly Godward,
I always think of you...”

As Caymanians have known through-out time, humanity's connection to the sea is vital for prosperity and survival. Today, we join with the rest of the world to celebrate the ocean, our connection to the sea, and to find ways we can work together to help protect it.

Amid the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, and the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease impacting the reefs of Grand Cayman, this year's theme - 'The Ocean: Life and Livelihoods' – rings truer than ever as a call to action.

People around the world who depend on the ocean for their livelihood have had a front-row seat to dire and unprecedented change, and we in the Cayman Islands have not been spared in this regard.

While we know that many areas of our local waters have suffered and been degraded, our marine parks which were established 35 years ago have served us in good stead by ensuring that we have been able to mitigate the effects of some of the threats to our marine environment. Globally, the expansion of Marine Protected Areas is now being actively promoted as a way to halt or even reverse the evident decline in marine resources, with international targets being set at 30% of national waters protected in no-take zones by 2030. It might be shocking to know that only 4.8 percent of the global

oceans are protected and only 2 percent of that total is designated as fully protected areas.

Here in Cayman we want to do our part to help increase this global figure and ensure our waters remain one of our greatest features, which we are doing through the enhanced marine protected areas comprising 45.2% of coastal shelf in no-take marine parks. While this is actually less than 30% of all of our national waters, this level of protection is able to allow more local fishing and other resource uses in the remaining 54.8% of our coastal shelf. There is also much work being done under the surface as well to help fight against Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease.

Often as we head out to the beach with our families or “out fishnin” with our friends we do not immediately realize all the benefits the sea provides for us. Here are a few facts we do not always think of, but are worth remembering as we mark World Ocean day today:

- **The air we breathe:** The ocean produces over half of the world's oxygen and absorbs 50 times more carbon dioxide than our atmosphere. That is carbon dioxide that is then prevented from directly contributing to climate change!
- **Climate regulation:** Covering 70 percent of the Earth's surface, the ocean transports heat from the equator to the poles, regulating our climate and weather patterns.
- **Food:** The ocean provides more than just seafood; ingredients from the sea are found in surprising foods such as peanut butter and soymilk.
- **Medicine:** Many medicinal products come from the ocean, including ingredients that help fight cancer, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, and heart disease.

I want to thank my teams at the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency and the Department of Environment for their tremendous work in moving the country forward so far, but I also note that the Government cannot do this alone. I look forward to each and every one of us doing our part to help protect our precious oceans.

This year, even more than normal because of the pandemic, international public events to celebrate and encourage the protection of our oceans will be organised online. To learn more visit: <https://oceanic.global/>. You can watch an interesting video “Know Your Ocean” here: <https://oceantoday.noaa.gov/fullmoon-knowyourocean/welcome.html>

World Ocean Day is truly a touching reminder that “He hath founded it upon the seas.” I encourage everyone to take a moment to recognize, and value, the role that the oceans play in our life and livelihoods, and the role that each one of us plays in ensuring this continues into the future.

Thank you and God Bless our beautiful isles.