



## MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER RESOURCES

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44-46 South Quay, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, W.I.

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

#### ***Update* – Entire Grand Riviere Beach was under threat from coastal erosion – Over a million turtles saved.**

*11 July 2012, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, W.I.* — On Tuesday 10 July 2012, a team from the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, led by its Minister the Honourable Ganga Singh, toured the Grand Riviere Beach and hosted a press conference. Minister Singh was accompanied by experts from the Forestry Division, the Drainage Division, the Environmental Management Authority (EMA), local conservationists and residents, all of whom answered questions from the media in order to clarify numerous false reports which were fed to the international media stating that over twenty-thousand turtle eggs and hatchlings were destroyed because of work conducted by the Drainage Division of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources.

Chief Executive Officer of the EMA Dr. Joth Singh clarified that there was extensive coordination between agencies and divisions throughout the entire remedial exercise. “In essence the action which was taken by the Ministry was informed by local conservation experts and fishermen in the Grand Riviere area and our technical experts.” Dr. Singh added that together with the Director of Drainage Mr. Shamshad Mohammed, the area was surveyed and the best course of action determined. Based on these discussions and together with the local conservationists, it was determined that the entire Grand Riviere Beach and a much larger nesting area would have been destroyed if this action was not taken. Mr. Mohammed also reported that the area that was reclaimed was waterlogged. “We truly regret the slaughter of these magnificent sea creatures but when our excavators went onto the area marked for remedial works, more than eighty percent of the eggs were already destroyed. Our workers reported that the area was not habitable for any eggs that were deposited there,” added Mr. Mohammed.

Also addressing the media was Dr. Allan Bachan, Director of the Turtle Village Trust. Dr. Bachan stated, “Our organisation has worked for many years with the Forestry Division and on this occasion we had to go with the facts. This area was determined to be the best place in order to save the remaining 97.9 percent of the eggs, which is estimated to be over a million eggs.”

In October 2011, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago responded to the increasing call for conservation of turtles and amended its Fisheries Act which prohibits the killing, harpooning and sale of turtles. Minister Singh noted, “It is our international obligation and our duty to provide a safe haven for turtle nesting. We have done so very effectively. In fact, we have moved from 500 in the 1980s to over 10,000. Protection of these animals is becoming a second nature to us as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.” The Minister added that Trinidad is signatory to five international treaties that promote the sustainability of turtles. “We regret that any killing of eggs or hatchlings has taken place, and we have come out today with all the members of the media, environmental experts, fishermen and villagers to tour the area and to explain the reasons for issuing the order to conduct these works.” During the press conference, Minister Singh further noted “The Ministry is working with all partners to save the entire area which is currently under threat. Not only the entire stretch of Grand Riviere Beach itself, but also the communities it supports - the fishing communities, the tour operators that depend on a successful turtle nesting season and the many hotels and guest houses that have developed in the area.”

Also present at the press conference was Minister in the Ministry of State the Honourable Ramona Ramdial and the Minister of Tourism, the Honourable Stephen Cadiz. Work is expected to continue and be completed in the area by the end of the week.

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