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News from the Caribbean for Thursday February 14, 2008

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Turks and Caicos Islands launches Year of the Coral Reef

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GRAND TURK, Turks and Caicos Islands: The Ministry of Natural Resources, Fisheries and the Environment in the Turks and Caicos Islands has declared 2008 as the Year of the Coral Reef under the theme: "Achieving the Right Balance: Protecting our Reefs- Prosperity for our future".

This declaration is expected to bring attention to one of this country's most prized assets, the Coral Reef; to which an official launching ceremony was held on Friday, February 8, 2008 in Providenciales.

The Turks and Caicos Islands are home to coral reefs worth some \$47.3 million to its economy and supports the second largest export market of conch in the world.

The Ministry of Natural Resources has planned a number of activities in celebration of the Year of the Coral Reef. They include: a public Awareness campaign, the use of literature and the creation of programs aimed at creating awareness of coral reefs and their associated systems such as mangroves and seagrass beds.



Turks and Caicos Minister of Natural Resource, Fisheries and Environment, McAllister Hanchell

Minister of Natural Resources, McAllister Hanchell, in declaring 2008 as the year of the Coral Reef noted that his ministry will host underwater cleanups in April for Earth Day, and a delegation from his Ministry will also be attending the International Coral Reef Symposium scheduled for this coming July. This symposium is expected to allow officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources to network and learn of new monitoring methods and ways to protect coral reefs.

Hanchell added that along with other government ministries and departments, there will be an increased focus on land-based sources of pollution including non-functioning sewage plants.

"Already we are working on mitigating where impacts have occurred on our reefs; artificial reefs reduce the pressure on natural systems allowing them to recover, and two such projects have been the

BioRock project in Grand Turk and the Beaches Reef Ball Project in Providenciales," stated Hanchell.

He continued: "The year 2008 will be challenging. We have

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February 14

This date in the Caribbean

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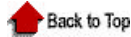
demonstrated to the world our commitment to the environment so therefore we must be ready to put these words into action to manage the country's natural resources: the mainstay of our economy."

According to Hanchell, the Ministry of Natural Resources has already prepared a road map for the future and will introduce a number of initiatives aimed at promoting environmental awareness. They include:

1. No plastic bags campaign - through a collaborative effort with the private sector promote public awareness about the detriments of plastic bags
2. Increasing Public use of Protected Areas - The Ministry of Natural Resources through the DECR will enhance and highlight the opportunities to use these areas
3. Greening of Businesses - The MNR is working with consultants to increase the opportunities and expertise needed for increasing the use of green technologies in both residential and commercial developments.

Deputy Premier and Minister for Finance, Floyd Hall, reiterated the government's commitment to protecting the environment.

"Last year was tremendous for the Turks and Caicos Islands as we celebrated the Year of the Environment which culminated with a speech by former US President al Gore. The environment is our most important resource and we must do all we can to protect it," noted Hall.



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