



For Immediate Release
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Cockpit Country Communities to GOJ: Stop Mining in Cockpit Country!

Cockpit Country communities are voicing their objection to continuing bauxite mining and prospecting activities near to the designated Cockpit Country Protected Area (CCPA). At a meeting with representatives of the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) and the bauxite industry in Kingston on Thursday, October 25, community leaders from Cockpit Country and civil society groups reiterated their position that there should be no mining allowed within or near the boundary of CCPA. The Cockpit Country stakeholder meeting was hosted by the Jamaica Environment Trust (JET), through its 'Advancing the Protection of Jamaica's Cockpit Country' project.

Bishop Robert Clarke, Chairman of the Gibraltar All Age School in St Ann expressed grave concern about the health impacts dust from the bauxite mining is having on students and teachers at the school. "There are open bauxite pits in the area measuring over 100 feet deep. We are afraid for the safety of our children as they travel to and from school past these pits," he continued. Linsford Hamilton, a resident of Madras in St Ann also pointed to the impact mining will have on agriculture, "This is not just about farming in St Ann," he said "mining in this area will impact food supply for the entire country. We want no bauxite mining or prospecting in or around Cockpit Country"

A new Special Mining Lease issued to New Day (Noranda) Aluminium in August 2018 received by JET through an Access to Information request to the Mines and Geology Division (MGD) of the Ministry of Transport and Mining was presented at the meeting. The new mining lease covers an area adjacent to the north-eastern border of the designated CCPA.

Cockpit Country community leaders present at the meeting raised concerns about the impact bauxite mining has on rainwater catchment and underground water resources, sentiments which were echoed by Dr. Susan Koenig, Director of Research at the Windsor Research Centre in Trelawny. In her presentation to the meeting Dr Koenig illustrated how removal of soil by bauxite mining would affect the ability of Cockpit Country to act as a water reservoir. "The proposed Cockpit Country Protected Area boundary does not protect all the water resources of Cockpit Country" said Dr Koenig. "The government should not be allowing any activity in the area which will affect the quality and quantity of water stored in the Cockpit Country aquifer; it becomes increasingly important as we observe changes in rainfall patterns associated with Climate Change. We must protect Jamaica's resilience to Climate Change," she said. The Cockpit Country accounts for 40% of Western Jamaica's water resources.

Dr Koenig, JET and other civil society representatives including Cockpit Country community groups are advocating that the GOJ should establish a buffer zone around the CCPA to ensure that important groundwater reserves in and around Cockpit Country remain intact; activities which will damage the natural environment, important cultural and historical sites, and local livelihoods should be restricted within the buffer zone. These restrictions would include, but not be limited to mining and prospecting. Several of the communities represented at the meeting – Madras and Gibraltar in St Ann, Kensington and Cambridge in St James, and Elderslie in St

Elizabeth, lay very near or just outside the CCPA boundary and remain adamant that their exclusion from the designated protected area should not exclude their communities from protection from mining.

GOJ representatives at the meeting representing the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), Water Resources Authority (WRA), the MGD, Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT), Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation reiterated that no mining would be allowed in the CCPA; however, none were aware of any discussions within government about a buffer zone for the protected area.

Among the other issues raised by JET at the meeting was the slow pace at which ground-truthing of the CCPA boundary by the Forestry Department was progressing. "It has been almost a year since the Prime Minister's announcement of the boundary in Parliament in November 2017," said Terri-Ann Guyah, JET Legal Director during her presentation to the meeting "but we are told by the Forestry Department that only 75km of the boundary has been ground-truthed by their team, and the certified land surveyor needed to verify their work has not yet been contracted." The length of the designated CCPA boundary is estimated to be approximately 200 - 220km. Ms. Guyah also spoke to the lack of detailed spatial information on the boundary being provided by the Forestry Department.

"JET will be releasing a joint statement in partnership with the Cockpit Country communities and other civil society representatives at the meeting in the coming weeks," said Suzanne Stanley, JET CEO. "The statement will outline in detail the numerous concerns which have been raised at this meeting about the process to declare Cockpit Country protected under law."

On November 21, 2017, Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Andrew Holness announced the designated CCPA boundary in Parliament. In his announcement, Prime Minister Holness said the area would comprise of approximately 74,726 hectares and will include existing forest reserves, significant hydrological and ecological features and cultural and heritage sites. Through the Advancing the Protection of Jamaica's Cockpit Country project, JET continues to advocate for an expedited ground-truthing of the CCPA boundary, establishment of buffer zones and the involvement of civil society and local communities in management planning for the protected area.

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Photos of an open bauxite pit in Madras, St Ann (taken June 28, 2018) estimated to be approximately 100 ft across and 70 ft deep:

