

For Immediate Release
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Cockpit Country, Jamaica

ONE YEAR FOLLOWING THE PRIME MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COCKPIT COUNTRY BOUNDARY: *Residents and civil society are dissatisfied with the progress towards its protection*

On November 21, 2017, Jamaican Prime Minister the Most. Hon. Andrew Holness announced the designated Cockpit Country Protected Area (CCPA). Prime Minister Holness described the protected area as approximately 74,726 hectares of Cockpit Country, including existing forest reserves, significant hydrological and ecological features and cultural and heritage sites. In his address to Parliament the Prime Minister also announced that the CCPA would be closed to mining; however, one year following his announcement bauxite mining and prospecting continues to take place just outside the designated CCPA boundary, and progress towards Cockpit Country being protected under law is slow.

At a recent stakeholders meeting on October 25, 2018 hosted by the Jamaica Environment Trust (JET) in Kingston, residents of several Cockpit Country communities and civil society representatives expressed their dissatisfaction with the process towards the declaration of the CCPA. On behalf of the Cockpit Country residents and civil society groups present at the meeting, JET outlines the following concerns related to the declaration of the CCPA:

1. Lack of transparency surrounding the ground-truthing process.

Requests for information from the Forestry Department on the specifics of the ground-truthing process have produced limited results. The Forestry Department has not confirmed any details on which sections of the CCPA boundary which have been ground-truthed to date, other than to say, "work is being undertaken in the eastern section of the area". When asked which sections of the boundary will be assessed next, the Forestry Department indicated they would be working in a southerly then westerly direction in the upcoming weeks. When asked when the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) CCPA community sensitization meetings which were announced by Senator Ruel Reid in August this year are to take place, no dates were given, only a timeline of "before the end of this calendar year." Following the October 25 stakeholders meeting, JET was told that some community sensitization meetings had been scheduled for this year by the Forestry Department, but it remains unclear to stakeholders where or when these are to take place.

A schedule of the CCPA ground-truthing activities by the Forestry Department should immediately be made available to the public (and widely publicized), including dates, times and locations of field work and community sensitization meetings. Regular updates should be provided to communities in and around the designated boundary. Community sensitization meetings should include details on what activities will and will not be allowed in the CCPA once it has been declared, as residents are concerned about possible restrictions on their farming livelihoods.

Additionally, there has been no decision forthcoming from the Access to Information Tribunal on JET's appeal against the Forestry Department regarding its failure to disclose the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) shapefiles of the CCPA boundary. The appeal was heard by the ATI Tribunal on May 31, 2018, but to date, no decision has been made as to whether JET should be granted access to this detailed spatial information on the designated boundary.

At the October 25 stakeholders meeting the Mines and Geology Division (MGD) of the Ministry of Transport and Mining and Jamaica National Heritage Trust also indicated that they are not in possession of the GIS shapefiles of the designated CCPA boundary. This is of particular concern as it relates to the MGD, as it is one of the lead agencies coordinating the amendment of existing mining leases which overlap the CCPA boundary.

The decision of the ATI Tribunal regarding JET's request for the CCPA boundary GIS shapefiles is urgently needed. Additionally, all detailed spatial information on the CCPA boundary should be provided freely within the GOJ and its agencies.

2. The slow pace of the ground-truthing process

According to the Forestry Department, who is leading the CCPA ground-truthing process, as of October 24, 2018 approximately seventy-five (75) km of the eastern boundary had been "physically identified on the ground" by their field staff¹. It is estimated that the boundary is approximately 200 - 220km in total length, meaning that only a third (34%) of the boundary has been assessed by the Forestry Department since the ground-truthing exercise began earlier this year.

JET has also been informed that the Forestry Department is still "in the process of hiring an entity to provide commissioned land surveyor services to verify the boundary". The verification of the Forestry Department's field work by a certified land surveyor is a necessary step in the ground-truthing process, but this remains undone since our last update from the department in early July 2018. The Forestry Department asserts that "lack of or limited resources will not significantly impact the completion of the ground-truthing exercise". If that is indeed the case, then it is unclear why it has taken this long for the requisite certified land survey to be contracted.

An updated timeline for the completion of the ground-truthing process has been given by the Forestry Department as the 2019/2020 financial year; however, given the current status we are very concerned that this deadline will not be met.

The certified land surveyor should be contracted immediately. An updated timeline for completion of the ground-truthing process based on this agreement should outlined in detail to the public.

3. Bauxite mining and prospecting continues to take place near the designated boundary, and new licenses have been issued next to the boundary.

In early September 2018, it was reported in the media that the GOJ had signed a new agreement with New Day Bauxite Jamaica for mining in St Ann. Access to Information (ATI) requests for copies of the agreement and mining leases were subsequently submitted to the Mines and Geology Division (MGD) of the Ministry of Transport and Mining by JET. JET has since received a copy of a new special mining license - no. 173 - which delineates the new area to be mined by New Day. This new mining lease lies immediately beside the CCPA designated boundary, comprising of approximate 120 square kilometres of land in St Ann and Trelawny including sections of Stewart Town, Trelawny and Barnstaple and Gibraltar in St Ann.

Residents of Gibraltar and Barnstaple in St Ann are concerned about the expansion of bauxite mining activities in their area, and the impact it is already having on their rainwater catchments, public health and safety. In Gibraltar, residents are worried about the disruptions and health impacts dust and noise from nearby bauxite mining are having on students and teachers at the Gibraltar All Age School. Elderslie and Catadupa residents have similar concerns about bauxite prospecting activities in their area. Concerns were also raised about the impact mining will have on food security, and cultural and historical sites.

¹ The Forestry Department was not present at the stakeholders meeting, but sent updates to JET ahead of the meeting via email on October 24, 2018

We also remain concerned about the impact of bauxite mining on water resources in and around the Cockpit Country. In her presentation to the October 25 stakeholders meeting Dr Susan Koenig, Director of Research at the Windsor Research Centre, 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, therefore the GOJ should not be allowing any activity in the area which will affect the quality and quantity of water stored in the Cockpit Country aquifer. This becomes increasingly important as Jamaica observes changes in rainfall patterns associated with Climate Change. The impact the large-scale soil removal associated with bauxite mining will have on both agricultural productivity and the natural environment is also a notable concern.

A buffer zone should be established 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 not be allowed within the buffer zone. These restrictions would include, but not be limited to, quarrying, mining and prospecting.

A broader discussion is also needed at the national level to determine the true costs and benefits of bauxite mining for Jamaica, particularly in the context of the threats presented by global Climate Change.

Signed,

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