



# THE ANGUILLA NATIONAL TRUST

## Preservation For Generations

### Eco-Corner

#### Coastline Development: Where to draw the line

##### **Sustainable Development and Empowerment**

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development published the book *Our Common Future*. In this publication, the authors defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

In essence, sustainable development demands that the ways of living and working should allow all people of the world to lead healthy, fulfilling, economically-secure lives without destroying the environment and without compromising the future welfare of people and the Earth. It implies continued exploitation of natural resources, protection of the natural environment, economic development, and social justice. Moreover, it calls for an *empowered population* to help shape the direction that national and international policies and activities take. An empowered population is one that has the knowledge, skills, resources, and confidence to actively participate in the decision-making and management processes. Participation cannot be token – individuals should be included because their involvement is important and the processes through which they are involved tend to be just as important as the actual results of it.

Over the last few months, there has been much talk about the direction that development on the island has been taking, the rights of Anguillians as landowners, and the concept of an empowered population. Just a couple of weeks ago, a three-day conference was held. The theme of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial National Development Conference was “Empowerment of a People.” *Transparency, communication, participation, and sustainable development* were terms that were commonly used by presenters throughout the Conference. The Editorial of the 16 November edition of *The Anguillian* reiterated the importance of Anguillians using their voices – both as individuals and as a collective – to make their views and positions heard and understood. But it is also important that Anguillians use their voices to address issues, activities, and development initiatives that affect not only themselves as individuals but also their communities and the island as a whole.

##### **Coastal Land Development**

Land use, land rights, the draft land use plan, and the draft Physical Planning Bill have been on the minds of many Anguillians in recent months. Issues of property ownership, however, should not be limited to personal property. Equally important are issues relating to the use of and access to Anguilla’s coastline.

Anguilla’s beaches are public. This means that all Anguillians have the right to use and access any beach on the island, regardless of whether there is any coastal development – in the form of private homes, villas, resorts, or other built structures – adjacent to it. What constitutes “access” to these areas is not as well defined and it could range from a narrow footpath to a paved road and parking facilities. Regardless, as was raised at a Town Hall meeting in The Valley on Saturday 19 November, access to beaches may no longer be enough; Anguillians should have guaranteed access to the actual *coastline* – whether it be sand, rock, or any other substrate. Recently, though, use of and, in some cases, access to, parts of the coastline has been restricted due to built structures.

Approximately six months ago, a dock-like structure was built on the rocks in front of a private home in Little Harbour. Local residents reported the dock to the Department of Physical Planning, stating that access to a favourite fishing spot was being prohibited. After the Department visited the site,

representatives agreed that not only was shoreline access being restricted by the structure, but the dock also posed security risk as boats could by-pass customs and immigration and land directly at the jetty. While the Department of Physical Planning agreed with the local residents and recommended that the dock be removed, the structure remained – the Department did not have the jurisdiction to physically remove it. After conferring with the Attorney General’s Chambers, the Chamber decided that the structure could remain as it deemed the matter trivial and the legislation on coastline development weak.

Last month, two new beach structures were built on the sand at Shoal Bay East. A “boardwalk” approximately 15 metres long and 2 ½ metres wide was built in front of what used to be Shoal Bay Villas. A restaurant close-by soon followed suit and extended their restaurant veranda onto the sand. Neither development initiative was approved by the Department of Physical Planning. Indeed, applications to construct the platforms for either site were not submitted to the Department, thereby making them both illegal.

The dock construction at Little Harbour and now these wooden platforms *on the beach* at Shoal Bay are disturbing developments. Coastal developments that once required setbacks from the beach and shoreline have now spilled onto them. The reason for setbacks is to prevent coastal erosion (the loss of sand, rocks, and beach, in general) by protecting the vegetation that holds the coastal substrate in place. This, in turn, protects the buildings that are built near the coastline by ensuring that the sea does not eventually wash away the very land on which they were built (seen at Maunday’s Bay after Hurricane Lenny in 1999 or at properties built at Mead’s Bay after Hurricane Luis in 1995). Development directly on the beach or coastline can disrupt this very delicate balance and can have profound and lasting negative environmental impacts.

Despite this, precious coastal areas are being encroached upon by built development – and mistakes are not being learned from. This should concern all Anguillians – the coastline is supposed to be unrestricted by built structures – unless approved by the Department of Physical Planning. Now, part of Shoal Bay Beach has been removed because of the wooden platforms and a jetty/dock prevents locals from using part of Anguilla’s rocky shoreline.

Anguilla is pursuing and promoting a type of tourism that is based on sea, sand, sun, culture of the people, and the attributes of the natural environment – both marine and terrestrial. Clean, healthy shorelines are essential. While the beaches and the shorelines are being used as a selling point for the island, it is critical to remember that in the end, these areas belong to *Anguillians*.

Coastal development can be done in a sustainable and appropriate way. But building directly on the beach (even wooden platforms) is neither sustainable nor appropriate. By allowing such structures to be built on the beach or rocks – while they may be considered by some to be small or insignificant (*what is a 30m<sup>2</sup> boardwalk when there is a mile of beach?*) – it, in fact, is not. It also raises questions of privatisation of the actual coastline – the individual or individuals who had the structure built (illegally) are expressing ownership over the area because they are presuming that they have the right to do as they wish with the area without being accountable to anyone – not even the public who actually owns it.

This sets a bad and dangerous precedent. And once this precedent has been set, it is very difficult to go back – if going back is even possible. Anguillians must ask themselves what they want their beaches to look like. Do they want permanent structures on a beach that would otherwise be speckled with beach chairs, umbrellas, and the occasional palm tree? Where should the line on coastal development be drawn?

Anguillians have shown that they do care about the way decisions are made, that they do have a voice and are not afraid to use it, and that they do care about the island and the natural environment on which they are so closely connected to and dependent on. Anguillians should also use this awareness and voice to protect what is rightfully theirs – unrestricted access to and through this island’s beautiful coastline.

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