

8. PUBLIC EDUCATION (AND PUBLIC INFORMATION)

Public education and public information remain key components of the Commission's overall strategy. An informed public, aware of their rights and responsibilities under the law as well as the existence, practice and procedure of the Commission, will be better able to access the services of the Court. In 2006 the Commission continued to pursue this strategy through its traditional means: development and dissemination of informational material, updating the Commission's website, hosting of stakeholder meetings and delivery of lectures and presentations.

8.1 Public Education Forums

On March 29, 2006 the Commission held a public education Forum at the Mount Irvine Hotel, Mount Irvine, Tobago. The event was well attended by the stakeholders of the court and in particular representatives of non-governmental organizations and community based organizations. The meeting provided the Commission with an opportunity for dialogue with the people of Tobago as to how best the court can deliver its services to the members of that community.



His Honour Dr. Eugene Laurent, Member of the Environmental Commission responds to questions from the audience at a public education Forum at the Mount Irvine Hotel

8.2 Brochures, Booklets and DVD

In 2006 the Commission published a fifth information brochure: "Frequently Asked Questions about the Environmental Commission." The Commission also continues to recognize that there is a growing segment of our community for whom Spanish is a first language. This includes not only foreign students attending schools in Trinidad but also representatives of Latin American companies participating in the local market. All of these individuals are potential litigants before the Commission. Consistent with Spanish being designated the official second language of Trinidad and Tobago, in 2006 the Commission completed the process of having its five (5) brochures and two (2) booklets translated into Spanish and introduced same to the public. These include:

- Guía de Mediación en la Comisión de Medio Ambiente;
- Guía de Audiencia de Asuntos con Relación a la ley de Dirección Medioambiental, 2000 y Legislación Subsidiaria Consecuente;
- Guía de Peticiones para Aplazar Decisiones Tomadas por la Autoridad de Gestión Ambiental de Acuerdo con los Artículos 25 y 41 de la ley de Gestión Ambiental, 2000;
- Guía de Recurrir las Decisiones de la Autoridad de Gestión Ambiental de Acuerdo con la ley de Gestión Ambiental, 2000;

- Guía de Entablar Acciones Judiciales Civiles (Acciones Judiciales Directas de Particulares) Contra Otras Personas por Infringir Requisitos Ambientales de Acuerdo Con la ley de Gestión Ambiental, 2000;
- Preguntas Más Frecuentes de la Comisión de Medio Ambiente de Trinidad y Tobago; and
- Guía de la Comisión de Medio Ambiente de Trinidad Y Tobago.

The Commission has also had its informational DVD dubbed in Spanish as well.

All seven (7) documents and the DVD have been circulated internationally through Trinidad and Tobago's foreign missions in Latin America and Europe. Brochures and booklets are available at the Commission's offices as well as in printer friendly format on the Commission's website.

8.3 Website

The Commission's website, which went live in 2004 and was formally introduced on February 23, 2005, continues to be a useful tool for disseminating public information. Within the period under review the site has, amongst other things, been used as a key medium for public circulation of the draft Environmental Commission Rules which are proposed to replace the Environmental Commission Rules of Practice and Procedure 2001.

The Commission continues to monitor and review the website to ensure its currency and that it remains a viable tool for public access to information on the Commission.

8.4 Stakeholder Meetings

The focus of stakeholder meetings during the 2006 calendar year was the development of the Commission's Strategic Plan for the period 2007- 2010. These meetings took the form of both large meetings affording a wide cross section of stakeholders to engage in dialogue as well as small meetings with representatives of specific sectors of the court's stakeholder community to allow for more detailed discussions of their suggestions and concerns. All stakeholder meetings involved the Chairman, Her Honour Sandra Paul as well as Dr. Daniel Straub, Principal Consultant, Straub and Associates, the firm of consultants who spearheaded the development of the Commission's Strategic Plan. In this regard large meetings held over the 2006 calendar year included:

- A Stakeholder Consultation held at Crowne Plaza, Port of Spain on September 14, 2006; and
- A Stakeholder Consultation held at the offices of the Tobago House of Assembly on September 15, 2006.



Stakeholder Consultation held at the Crowne Plaza in September 2006

Smaller meetings were held during the period August 28 – 30, 2006 with certain key stakeholders including:

- Judges of the Caribbean Court of Justice;
- The Honourable the Chief Justice (Acting);
- The Honourable Minister of Public Utilities and senior technical and administrative staff of that Ministry;
- Senior staff and legal personnel of the Environmental Management Authority;
- Attorneys-at-law and in particular those who had previously practiced before the Environmental Commission;
- The Director of Town and Country Planning Division; and
- Senior technical and administrative staff of the Ministry of the Attorney General including the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Solicitor General and Chief State Solicitor.



The Chairman together with the Right Honourable Mr. Justice Michael de la Bastide, President of the Caribbean Court of Justice, and Mrs. de la Bastide

8.5 Freedom of Information Act, 1999

In compliance with Sections 7, 8 and 9 of the Freedom of Information Act, 1999 (the FOI Act) in 2006 the Commission in 2006 published its updated Public Statement in the Gazette (Vol. 45 No. 30 dated February 20, 2006) and one daily newspaper (the Express dated February 27, 2006).

The Environmental Commission continues to seek to comply with the provisions of the FOI Act and all necessary internal arrangements for the fulfillment of the Commission's responsibilities have been put in place. Quarterly returns of requests for information are forwarded to the Director, Public Service Transformation Division. However, during the period under review the Commission received no requests for information pursuant to the FOI Act.