



# National Environment & Planning Agency

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Website: <http://www.nepa.gov.jm>

## **STATEMENT FROM THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING AGENCY**

We write in response to recent media reports concerning the role of the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), in an alleged agreement among government agencies to refrain from prosecuting each other for breaches. Those reports were the subject of two newspaper editorials and were ruminated on by talk show hosts and commentators. In the editorial published by the Jamaica Observer newspaper on Emancipation Day, Friday, August 1, 2008, entitled, 'We need to be free.....of outrages like NEPA', the Agency was taken to task for seemingly being the hub of this alleged agreement. In this most bellicose piece, which was unfortunately framed against our country's celebration of the end of the slave trade, the writer made unsubstantiated claims while dismissing the Agency as one that should no longer be respected.

It is more than unfortunate that the reports were interpreted to mean that NEPA is indeed guilty of failing to act against other government agencies which commit breaches. This is NOT how the Agency operates. Where the prosecution of sister government agencies is concerned, NEPA has operated under a clear procedure which was articulated at a Permanent Secretaries' Board Meeting in April 2005. That procedure which was communicated in writing to the Agency by then Cabinet Secretary Carlton Davis says:

- Where government agencies are found to be in breach of the Natural Resources Conservation (Permits & Licences) regulations of 1996, NEPA should send the information directly to the Permanent Secretaries of the respective Ministries, for them to deal directly with the delinquent agencies.
- In this regard, NEPA should give the Agencies twenty one (21) clear days to respond from the effective date stated in the letter.
- Failure to comply will result in NEPA taking the necessary enforcement action.

One of the few media outlets to make reference to this procedure was the Sunday Herald newspaper, in its editorial published on August 3, 2008. And although the Sunday Herald spoke to the Cabinet rather than the Permanent Secretaries Board as being the body through which NEPA would seek recourse, it, unlike its counterparts, did not seek to tar and feather the Agency, especially in the absence of proof

While we do not wish to engage in a war of words with any media entity, we must take issue with the attack on NEPA's staff in the Observer's editorial. We believe that the writer was quite out of order in dismissing the Agency's staff as being comprised of people who cannot see the difference between right and wrong and who should be handed their P45s. That demonstration of unjustified broad-brushing and acerbity is ratcheted up even further when the writer goes on to suggest that the moral stance of NEPA's staff on



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environmental issues is influenced by economic hardships and their own penury. The longer this piece went on the more it became obvious that the writer may have some long held grouse against NEPA. How else could this attack on all employees within the Agency be explained?

NEPA is staffed by hardworking and dedicated people of integrity who deserve better than to be rounded up and shot on the back of unsubstantiated claims by the editorial published by the Jamaica Observer. It is sad that such dedicated staff have to suffer the indignity of having their characters and moral values called into question by such a powerful media entity. But sadder still, is the implied comment that staff members at NEPA are accepting payments under the table from interest groups, including those bent on harming the environment.

We will not dare to ask an entity with the power and clout of the Jamaica Observer to apologize to NEPA's staff for calling them morally corrupt. Rather, we humbly ask that the paper resort to the tenets of responsible journalism and publish only what is factual. To that end we are sincerely requesting that the newspaper publish the names of any member/s of staff who, with the attendant proof, has been known to engage in acts of corruption. Additionally, given the clear inferences made in the editorial piece, it would be prudent for the newspaper to also publish those instances in which the Agency has been involved in corruption. We await a response, but we won't hold our breaths.

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