

ADDRESS BY

THE HON. DIANNE SUEKERAN  
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE  
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

AT THE

**STAKEHOLDERS' MEETING OF  
THE FISH AND FISH PROCESSING INDUSTRY**

8:00 AM  
TUESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> March 2005  
CENTRE POINT MALL, CHAGUANAS

Honourable Jarette Narine, Minister of Agriculture,  
Land and Marine Resources,  
Permanent Secretaries  
Fish and Fish Processing Industry Stakeholders  
Members of the Media  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

- Let me first thank the members of the Fish and Fish Processing Industry Team for their diligent work in preparing this Draft Strategic Plan for the sector, and also for inviting me to address you this morning.
- As you all are aware, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has repeatedly stated its goal of attaining developed country status by the year 2020. While all macroeconomic indicators show that we are well on our way, we recognize that this growth has been led mainly by the energy industry.

- This puts into question not only the quality but also the sustainability of this growth, given the fact that these energy resources are non-renewable. Given this scenario, as a responsible Government, we have placed the diversification of our economy as a major priority of our policy initiatives.
  
- To this end, the Prime Minister has established a Standing Committee on Business Development, which is intended to serve as an Advisory Committee to Cabinet. One of the initiatives under the Standing Committee is the identification of seven industries in the non-energy sector, which have been targeted for further development. These industries are:
  - i. Yachting
  - ii. Merchant Marine
  - iii. Music and Entertainment
  - iv. Film
  - v. Printing and Packaging
  - vi. Food and Beverage and of course
  - vii. Fish and Fish Processing
  
- Essentially, through this process, the Government is now going micro in its role as a facilitator for economic growth. At the same time, we also believe that public-private sector

cooperation is the most effective mechanism to pursue the twin goals of diversification and industry development. As such, Development Teams for each specific industry were established with representatives from the private sector, officials from relevant Ministries, and Government agencies such as the Business Development Company, the Tobago House of Assembly, and TIDCO; with the Ministry of Trade and Industry acting as Secretariat.

- The key objective of these teams is to conduct surveys of the specific industries, and prepare Strategic Plans for their further development.
  
- The fish and fish processing sector were included in this program for a number of reasons. First of all, it is common knowledge that domestic food security and stabilization of food prices are key priorities for the government, and the fishing industry has a key role to play in meeting these mandates. On the social front, fish is one of the healthier sources of protein and currently plays an important role in meeting basic nutrient requirements for our citizens.

- As a critical part of the commercial sector, the Fish and Fish Processing Industry provides business opportunities, foreign exchange earnings and perhaps most important employment opportunities, to a large number of rural communities.
  
- Finally the industry represents a vital link to other complementary industries such as the tourism sector, through recreational game fishing and the supply of fish and fishery products to many hotels and restaurants in both Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, the owners/operators of fishing vessels and fish processing firms utilize parts, equipment, fuel and machinery from businesses throughout the country.
  
- I must say to you that this development process could not have come at a better time, as we are all faced with the yearly increase in fish prices associated with the Lenten season. In fact, it appears that the price of fish is even higher this year and some reports indicate that there is perhaps a shortage of popular types such as carite and king fish. Rest assured however that while our expertise and focus is to address the industry side of the equation, we are working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine

Resources, who are addressing the marine based issues through their relevant authorities.

- The fish and fish processing industry, therefore is of strategic importance to the long-term diversification of Trinidad and Tobago's economy.
- Because of this industry's importance to our development strategy, we must address those significant challenges facing it, as identified by you, the stakeholders. Of course, the most obvious issue is the depleting level of fish stocks, not just in our waters, but worldwide. Then there are the less-than-satisfactory conditions of work in the industry, which can be a strong disincentive to embark upon a career in fishing; and the overall low profile of the fishing community.
- We believe that the draft strategic plan we present to you today will be one of the most important steps in addressing these challenges. We will not only discuss the findings of the Industry Team with you, but also tap into your wealth of experience to formulate appropriate solutions, and a way forward.

- We are aware this will be no easy task, and indeed we will not solve all the problems of the industry by the end of today. The process of drafting a comprehensive development policy will require cooperation, comprise, and communication among all our stakeholders to make this vision for our fish and fish processing industry a reality. Without this level of commitment the industry will not be able to compete, much less survive into the next millennium. We must understand that we share a common goal and that the survival of all your firms and enterprises is inherently linked to the development of this industry.
  
- Our government remains firm its commitment to capitalize on this current opportunity for the development and diversification of the non-energy sectors; of which the local fish and fish processing industry represents a component of key strategic importance.
  
- The Fish and Fish Processing Industry Team, having worked for almost a year, is now at a stage where they are ready to have a public consultation on the plan.

- Let me assure you that these team members have worked relentlessly in the development of this plan. They have sacrificed time away from their families, businesses and employers, to work towards the completion of this plan, for the development of their industry.
  
- Finally, I would like to thank all of you stakeholders for taking the time out of your busy schedules to provide us with input here today. We look forward to a vibrant and exciting session, where the views expressed will add immense value to our final document.
  
- Good luck in your deliberations. I thank you all.