

STATEMENT

SHORT TERM MEASURES TO MANAGE JET SKI OPERATIONS IN MARINE RECREATIONAL AREAS

BACKGROUND

Over the years, there have been growing concerns expressed about the number of accidents which occur in our marine recreational areas. Some of these accidents have resulted in fatalities, serious injuries, and damage to vessels. Many of these accidents were caused by operators of Jet Skis otherwise referred to as Personal Water Craft (PWC).

In response to these concerns, from as far back as 1995, the Ministry, with the agreement of a number of agencies, imposed a moratorium to regulate commercial Water Sports operations along the Seven- Mile Beach in Negril, the UDC beach in Ocho Rios and the Black River. The moratorium restricted the number of operators and the size of the fleet per operation. In 2004, the moratorium was extended geographically to cover the entire island. As a result no new licences have been issued to Jet Ski operators and no increase in existing fleets has been allowed since then.

On August 17 and 21, 2013, two Jet Ski accidents occurred in Ocho Rios and Negril respectively. Arising from the Ocho Rios accident, one child died and four persons were injured; while in Negril, one person was injured. In the case of the Ocho Rios incident, the client repeatedly and deliberately disobeyed the operator's instructions to return to base, and eventually ploughed through the demarked swimming area and eventually stopped about five meters up onto the beach from the shoreline. In the Negril incident, the client was using an illegally operated craft which caused a collision with a non-motorized craft resulting in the severe injury to a female visitor.

Unfortunately, there are other concerns, solicitation, harassment and drug peddling by illegal PWC/Jet Ski operators are at uncontrollable levels; there is a high density of marine traffic, in the marine recreational area of Negril's seven mile beach and at the UDC beach in Ocho Rios.

There are also serious concerns regarding the oil discharge from these vessels as well as the levels of noise pollution associated with them.

The Ministry recognizes, that there is on one side of public outcry that has been advocating for a ban on the importation of Jet Skis, while on the other side, there is the reality that people's economic livelihood as legitimate commercial jet ski operators has to be protected. We have therefore to look at the balance.

CONSULTATIONS

A series of meetings was convened by the Ministry with key regulatory and enforcement agencies such as the Jamaica Defense Force Coast Guard, and Marine Police as well as with representatives from the Jamaica Tourist Board, Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association, Resort Boards, Chamber of Commerce and the Watersport Association of Jamaica to improve water sport operations.

In addition, we are working closely with the Maritime Authority of Jamaica, and consultations were held in Ocho Rios and Negril on September 12 and 19 to get on the ground feedback to inform our decisions on the way forward.

WAY FORWARD

Cabinet vide Cabinet Decision No 35/13 dated October 7, 2013 approved the following short term measures for the oversight of Jet Ski operations in Marine Recreational Areas:

1. The imposition of a six (6) month suspension on the importation of all Jet Ski (Personal Water Craft) for commercial purposes.
2. Clamp down on all illegal commercial operators of Jet Skis in all areas.

3. The strengthening and enforcement of regulations guiding the safe usage of Jet Skis in the harbours and bays
4. In order to facilitate the clamp down of illegal operations, the following efforts have been taken:
 - a) We have met with the Marine Police, the Jamaica Defense Force Coast Guard who would conduct concentrated enforcement activities to seize and detain the illegal vessels.
 - b) We also, through the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) will be strengthening the enforcement capacity of the Marine Police Outposts in the North East Region (Ocho Rios, Falmouth, Montego Bay and Negril) by :
 - i. Supplying engine and spare parts to ensure that there is at least one (1) fully operational vessel, each for the outposts of Ocho Rios, Falmouth, Montego Bay, and Negril.
 - ii. Upgrading facilities for the Marine Police personnel at each of these outposts.
 - iii. Constructing and or repairing of launching ramps for the vessels as required at each marine post.
5. In terms of strengthening the regulation in consultation with the Maritime Authority of Jamaica we have determined that :
 - a) The activities in all the resort areas will be conducted beyond the swimming areas and away from the ships and piers.

Jet Ski operators will not be allowed within a certain distance from the shore. Three (3) zones which will be a minimum of 30 meters apart will be introduced, namely: i) the swim zone, ii) the non-motorized zone and iii) the general operating zone for motorized craft, including PWC/Jet-Skis. The non-motorized zone would be an effective buffer / safe zone for swimmers. The recommendations will be implemented on a trial basis as agreed by all parties.
 - b) Jet Ski operators are to launch from designated locations and observe basic rules of transit including speed for entry and exit from these locations. To this end, a comprehensive brief must be provided to the clients by the operators, including a demonstration ride before the client operates independently.
 - c) The Maritime Authority of Jamaica will introduce special training and certification courses for commercial Jet Ski operators.
 - d) We will ensure that all commercial jet skis will have visible identifications and all operators will be required to display their licenses.
 - e) No child under 18 years of age will be allowed to operate commercial jet skis without an accompanying adult.
 - f) The Maritime Authority will be taking a look at the regulations that govern the use of private jet skis with a view to updating them.
6. Some of these measures have already been enforced and we intended to conduct a progress review in six (6) months to determine whether these measures have been effective.

The Honourable House is asked to note the foregoing.

Wykeham McNeill
Minister of Tourism and Entertainment
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