

# BAHAMAS MANGROVE ALLIANCE

## Focus Group Rapporteur Report

Prepared By :

**Organization for Responsible  
Governance**



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# Sign in Sheets

| EIA Permitting Graphic Focus Group Sign In Sheet (Morning 10:00AM-12:30PM) |                                                        |                                 |                                                                                                                                          |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Full Name                                                                  | Organization                                           | Email                           | Would you be open to being contacted for future opportunities, feedback, or recommendations related to the graphic/white paper? (Yes/No) | Signature |
| Lynton Pinckley Jr.                                                        | Bah. of Local Gov.                                     | lyntonpinckley@bahamas.gov.bs   | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| DEBONAIT D. SM                                                             | BCA                                                    | contemporarybuildings@gmail.com | YES.                                                                                                                                     |           |
| SHANIQUE FRAZIER                                                           | PIU DEPARTMENT MIN. OF WORKS                           | shaniquefrazier@bahamas.gov.bs  | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Casuarina McKinney Lambert                                                 | BREEF                                                  | casuarina@breef.org             | YES                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Jewel Boneby                                                               | TNC The Nature Conservancy                             | jewelboneby@tnc.org             | YES                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Desirée Cornille                                                           | BahWEN                                                 | desiree.cornille@bahamas.gov.bs | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Meagin Bullard                                                             | Forestry                                               | meaginbullard@bahamas.gov.bs    | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Shontes Hall                                                               | Forestry                                               | shontes.hall@bahamas.gov.bs     | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Leo V. Rolle                                                               | Bahamas Chamber of Commerce & Employers' Confederation | lrolle@thebahamaschamber.com    | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| O'NEIL LEADON                                                              | BAHA MAR                                               | O'neil.Leadon@bahamar.com       | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Tarcom Simar                                                               | MBF/Baha Mar                                           | tarcomsimar@satintek.com        | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| CHARLOTTE COLLE                                                            | PIU/MOWFIA                                             | charlottec@bahamas.gov.bs       | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Karen Pantow                                                               | BPA                                                    | Kpantow@bahamasprojectd.com     | Yes.                                                                                                                                     |           |
| 13                                                                         |                                                        |                                 |                                                                                                                                          |           |

| EIA Permitting Graphic Focus Group Sign In Sheet (Afternoon 1:30PM - 4:00PM) |                |                                     |                                                                                                                                          |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Full Name                                                                    | Organization   | Email                               | Would you be open to being contacted for future opportunities, feedback, or recommendations related to the graphic/white paper? (Yes/No) | Signature |
| SHARON FARRINGTON                                                            | BHTA           | sfarrington@bahamashotel.com        | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| LINDY KNOWLES                                                                | BNT            | Lknowles@bnt.bs                     | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Garnell Deal                                                                 | BNT            | Gdeal@bnt.bs                        | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Edward Sumner                                                                | SSC            | edward@sumnerstrategiespartners.com | YES                                                                                                                                      |           |
| R. Whitney Cartwright                                                        | PIU            | rachelcartwright@bahamas.gov.bs     | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Alexis Brown                                                                 | PIU/PIU        | alexisbrown@bahamas.gov.bs          | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| Tom Arnette                                                                  | Business Trust | info@bvastrade@gmail.com            | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| SUZANNE PATTUSCH                                                             | BHTA           | spattusch@bahamas hotel tourism.org | Yes                                                                                                                                      |           |
| 8                                                                            |                |                                     |                                                                                                                                          |           |

## **Introduction**

The Northern Bahamas Mangrove Restoration Project (NBMRP) is a critical initiative aimed at restoring mangrove forests on Abaco and Grand Bahama following the devastation of Hurricane Dorian. Since its inception, the project has successfully planted over 200,000 mangroves, progressing toward the ambitious goal of restoring one million mangroves nationwide. As the project advanced, stakeholders identified a broader challenge: a lack of clarity in the development permitting process and environmental requirements. Many individuals and businesses seeking to undertake construction projects have faced difficulties navigating the legal and regulatory framework. This issue is particularly pressing as unregulated development and land clearings continue to threaten mangrove forests and other vital ecosystems. Recognizing the need for more accessible information, the Bahamas Mangrove Alliance (BMA) convened a legal and policy team to review key environmental laws, resulting in the development of a comprehensive white paper. This resource consolidates essential legal and regulatory information, serving as a guide for developers, policymakers, conservationists, and the public.

To further this effort, a focus group was convened on February 27, 2025, at the New Providence Community Church by the Bahamas Mangrove Alliance, in partnership with the Organization for Responsible Governance (ORG). The session aimed to gather feedback on a newly designed graphic intended to explain the process of obtaining environmental approvals in The Bahamas, specifically regarding the Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC), Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), and Environmental Management Plans (EMP). The primary objective was to critique the graphic, ensuring it was clear, accessible, and useful for a diverse range of stakeholders engaged in environmental planning and development. By improving public understanding of these processes, this initiative supports informed decision-making and promotes stronger environmental stewardship across The Bahamas.

## **Format**

The focus group was divided into two sessions: a morning session aimed at establishing a baseline for feedback and an afternoon session designed to test and validate the insights gathered earlier in the day. Stakeholders were invited from a curated list representing government, the private sector, civil society, academia, media, and the community—specifically individuals who were likely to have had some exposure to the permitting process. The sessions followed a structured format in which ORG and BMA first provided background on the graphic before guiding participants through a series of pre-developed questions. Once the groups were introduced to the graphic, discussions naturally became more dynamic, with participants offering feedback and raising key questions. The facilitator adopted this organic flow to navigate predetermined topic areas, as ORG and BMA found that this approach encouraged critical insights and surfaced essential issues. In the afternoon session, participants were presented with key insights from the earlier discussion, and there was broad concurrence on many of the observations and questions raised, reinforcing the validity of the feedback collected.

**SESSION 1****Participants - Session 1**

| <b>Attendee</b>     | <b>Designation</b> | <b>Organization</b>             |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Rashema Ingraham    | RI                 | Bahamas Mangrove Alliance       |
| Ranique Forbes      | RF                 | Bahamas Mangrove Alliance       |
| Matt Aubry          | MA                 | ORG Bahamas                     |
| Steffon Evans       | SE                 | ORG Bahamas                     |
| Lynton Pinder       | LP                 | Local Government Representative |
| Deborah Deal        | DD                 | Bahamas Contractors Association |
| Shanique Frazier    | SF                 | Ministry of Works               |
| Casuarina M Lambert | CML                | BREEF                           |
| Jewel Beneby        | JB                 | The Nature Conservancy          |
| Desiree Corneille   | DC                 | BahWEN                          |
| Meagin Bullard      | MB                 | Department of Forestry          |
| Shontez Hall        | SH                 | Department of Forestry          |
| Leo V Rolle         | LVR                | Bahamas Chamber of Commerce     |
| Oneil Leadon        | OL                 | Baha Mar                        |
| Tarran Simms        | TS                 | MBF/Baha Mar                    |
| Charlene Collie     | CC                 | PIU Ministry of Works           |
| Karen Panton        | KP                 | Bahamas Protected Areas Fund    |

**Feedback and Insights****Stakeholder Involvement and Vetting Process**

LP raised the question of whether the Department of Environmental Protection and Planning (DEPP) was considered part of the vetting process. RI responded that feedback from focus groups would be collected before final feedback could be provided to DEPP. TS asked if this was a result of the policy analysis, and RI confirmed it was. DC emphasized that the sector is currently over-regulated but under-enforced and suggested that the Lands and Surveys Department, along with the Port Department, should also be part of the discussion. This was echoed by other participants who lacked clarity regarding the involvement of different regulatory bodies.

**Accountability and Clarity in the Process**

DD raised a concern about the lack of awareness among contractors regarding environmental laws, suggesting that property owners should be clearly informed of their responsibility. She proposed placing a large, obvious sticker on properties that would clearly indicate the owner's responsibility for ensuring compliance with environmental laws. LP clarified that while the onus is technically on property owners, challenges arise when ownership is not easily tracked, complicating enforcement efforts. The group agreed that more clarity was needed regarding

property ownership and accountability, particularly when it comes to tracking who is ultimately responsible for environmental compliance.

### **EIA and EMP Confusion**

A recurring issue was the confusion around when an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required versus when an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) will suffice. CML pointed out that the current graphic does not offer enough clarity about which projects require an EIA or an EMP. CC explained that the decision is often discretionary and based on the specifics of the project, but this left participants wanting a clearer explanation. SE expressed concern that the graphic's inclusion of discretionary clauses leaves too much room for subjectivity, making it unclear and potentially undermining the process. It was agreed that the graphic should clarify the distinction between EIA and EMP requirements, perhaps by indicating specific criteria that trigger the need for an EIA, and by providing examples of projects that would only require an EMP.

### **Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement**

The issue of public consultation was another key point of discussion. CML questioned why public consultation is sometimes required and sometimes not. The group agreed that more clarity was needed on which projects necessitate public consultation. RI asked how public consultation should be conducted, and CC mentioned that the Ministry of Works (MOW) currently uses email blasts, Survey Monkey, direct outreach, and town meetings to engage stakeholders, but noted that Bahamians are often reluctant to speak up. SE suggested that focus groups might be more effective for gathering honest feedback in a less public, more anonymous setting. However, MA questioned whether this approach would yield enough feedback and expressed concern about the lack of broader public consultation.

CML proposed that public consultation didn't necessarily need to be a town meeting; instead, online surveys or tools like those used in the Cayman Islands could provide a more accessible alternative. This suggestion was generally well-received, as it would allow broader participation, especially for those unable to attend in-person meetings. The group also agreed that digital tools could be helpful for providing more consistent and wider-reaching engagement across the Family Islands, which have an additional layer of local government involvement.

### **The Graphic's Usability and Clarity**

***NB: Feedback collected in this section was not reflective of expanded definitions and information presented in the full brochure.***

When it came to the graphic itself, participants generally felt that the graphic needed more clarity in order to be fully useful. The main criticism was that key terms like Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC), EIA, and EMP needed better definitions and explanations. CML pointed out that the graphic doesn't do enough to explain the difference between baseline environmental assessments and full-scale EIAs. The group agreed that these terms should be clearly defined to avoid confusion.

The lack of clarity about the processes for obtaining various permits also came up. There was a consensus that the graphic needs to better explain the legal requirements for obtaining a CEC, including when it is necessary, which processes it triggers, and the penalties for non-compliance. DD emphasized the need for the graphic to include stronger visual elements, such as bold highlights or red boxes, to call attention to the most important information, especially the legal repercussions for failing to follow the rules.

Several focus group participants also suggested that the graphic should include clickable links to relevant environmental laws and regulations, which would allow users to access detailed information easily. JB suggested incorporating all necessary documents in one place, making it clear which forms and approvals are required, and emphasizing the importance of understanding the full range of environmental laws rather than relying solely on the CEC. The idea of adding a checklist was also widely supported, with CC and the DC suggesting a sustainable development checklist to help differentiate between small- and large-scale projects.

### **Enforcement and Oversight**

Enforcement was a major topic of discussion, particularly regarding contractors and the use of heavy machinery. DC emphasized that tracking contractors and construction equipment is critical to prevent environmental damage. They suggested a more stringent oversight system, including requiring permits to be displayed on machinery, with hefty fines for non-compliance. The group agreed that this oversight could be more clearly addressed in the graphic.

The lack of coordination between agencies was another concern. Several participants highlighted that agencies like the Department of Public Prosecution, the Department of Physical Planning, and the Port Department need to be more actively involved in the process. This could ensure that enforcement is more consistent and that the roles of different agencies are better understood. There was also concern about developers bypassing regulations. DC noted that some developers create budgets to cover fines and continue to operate in non-compliance, which points to a weakness in enforcement that needs addressing.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

In terms of improvements to the graphic, the group suggested incorporating more dynamic, interactive features. JB proposed an online, interactive version of the graphic with a decision tree to guide users through the process, especially regarding which approvals are required for different projects. CC also suggested adding a QR code or a link to a website where the information could be accessed in real-time, ensuring that updates and changes to regulations are reflected quickly.

The group also emphasized that the graphic should be designed with the public in mind, as it will need to be easily understood by a wide range of people. There were discussions about creating a version that could be printed, handed out to developers, contractors, and other stakeholders, and a more detailed digital version that could be accessed via government websites, with direct links to relevant laws and documents.

Finally, the need for a robust system to track developers, contractors, and environmental compliance was emphasized by DD, who noted the challenges posed by the absence of a licensed contractor system. The group agreed that this issue should be addressed in future iterations of the graphic, possibly by incorporating a licensing system or regulatory framework for contractors to ensure higher standards across the industry.

## **SESSION 2**

### **Session 2 - Participants**

| <b>Attendee</b>           | <b>Designation</b> | <b>Organization</b>       |
|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Sharon Farrington         | SF                 | BHTA                      |
| Lindy Knowles             | LK                 | Bahamas National Trust    |
| Gammell Deal              | GD                 | Bahamas National Trust    |
| Edison Sumner             | ES                 | SSE                       |
| Rashad Whitney Cartwright | RWC                | PIU Ministry of Works     |
| Alexio Brown              | AB                 | PIU Ministry of Works     |
| Trey Arnette              | TA                 | Black Tide Media          |
| Suzanne P                 | SP                 | BHTA                      |
| Matt Aubry                | MA                 | ORG Bahamas               |
| Steffon Evans             | SE                 | ORG Bahamas               |
| Ranique Forbes            | RF                 | Bahamas Mangrove Alliance |
| Rashema Ingraham          | RI                 | Bahamas Mangrove Alliance |

### **Feedback and Insights**

#### **Clarification on DEPP's Role and Public Consultation**

A key question from AB was whether the Department of Environmental Protection and Planning (DEPP) was involved in the process from the beginning. RI clarified again that DEPP would be involved only after the initial steps, indicating that DEPP's role comes later in the process. LK raised concerns about the practicality of the graphic, asking whether DEPP could determine when public consultation is unnecessary. RI confirmed that DEPP exercises discretion in deciding the necessity of public consultation and what reports (EIA vs. EMP) are needed. ES further emphasized that the timeline for these reports isn't fixed and DEPP doesn't commit to a specific timeline for review, though RI suggested that applicants could check back within 45 days as an example.

A key discussion point involved public consultation: the graphic should clarify that public consultation is discretionary, based on the scope of the project and DEPP's decision-making process. SP questioned the purpose of public engagement at the certificate level, asking whether it's truly necessary for smaller projects like home repairs. AB concurred, arguing that the EIA process should be separate from public consultation and that it often occurs after the EIA. AB also proposed that the graphic should include a definition of public consultation, noting the frustrations of stakeholders, particularly at the Ministry of Works (MOW), who face unnecessary consultation requirements due to a lack of clear definitions.

### **Feedback on Terminology and Process Flow**

The graphic's terminology was also a point of contention. Key terms like "CEC," "EIA," and "EMP" were seen as essential but needed more explanation. AB suggested that DEPP and the graphic should work to differentiate between the environmental baseline and the EIA, as the baseline is often mistakenly treated as an EIA. RI acknowledged this ambiguity and suggested that they would address it later in the session.

TA also noted that the flow of information in the graphic could confuse a general audience. He recommended organizing the content into separate columns for approval and disapproval and using clearer visual markers to indicate the decision pathways. LK proposed adding more arrows to the flow chart, particularly in the middle section, to better visualize the connections between stages. The consensus was that the graphic could benefit from clearer visual cues and a more straightforward flow.

### **Improvement Suggestions**

Several participants noted that the graphic should be more user-friendly, particularly for government officials, developers, and the general public. SP suggested that instead of cramming all information onto a single fold, the process could be broken down into multiple slides or a series of flowcharts to make the information clearer. She also emphasized the importance of providing detailed definitions for key terms, and aligning these with relevant legislation, such as the DEPP Act.

TA echoed this concern, saying that the average person would struggle to understand the graphic as it stands. He advocated for clearer, more structured information, such as a decision tree that explains what steps to take depending on whether a project is approved or not. The group also agreed on the need for an asterisk to indicate that public consultation is subject to DEPP's discretion, providing clarity about which projects are subject to consultation and which are not.

### **Addressing Stakeholder Concerns**

The conversation expanded to include concerns about stakeholder involvement, particularly consultants and lawyers, who often benefit from the current lack of clarity in the process. ES pointed out that the complexity of the current system drives people to hire consultants to

navigate the approval process. However, he noted that simplifying the process could eliminate this need and level the playing field for smaller developers and the general public. AB also discussed the frustration with consultants being sent to gather feedback from the community only to have DEPP ask for additional consultation. This cycle can lead to stakeholder burnout, especially when public consultation isn't needed for small projects like home repairs.

LK also mentioned that the law doesn't always hold the government accountable to its own timelines, adding to the ambiguity. AB stressed that DEPP should provide a clearer system for developers to know exactly what permits are required at each stage, as there are many other agencies (e.g., the Department of Marine Resources) that need to be involved, but the process is often unclear and costly.

### **Visual Design and Usability**

The visual design of the graphic came under scrutiny as well. Participants agreed that the graphic needed to be more than a brochure—it should be a comprehensive, easily accessible resource. SP suggested drawing inspiration from more detailed guidance documents, like the one used in the tourism industry, which is longer and more in-depth. TA supported the idea, proposing that a video explainer, lasting 3-5 minutes, could be an effective supplement. The idea of using a website as a hub for all relevant materials was also proposed, as it would streamline access to information and provide real-time updates.

The group expressed interest in creating a more interactive platform where users could access relevant laws, videos, and documents in one place, tailored to the scope and scale of their specific projects. TA emphasized that while an app might not be the best solution, a centralized website would make the process more accessible, especially for those actively seeking out information.

### **Trends and Recommendations**

The focus groups highlighted several key trends in stakeholder concerns regarding the environmental permitting process in The Bahamas, particularly in relation to the clarity and usability of the graphic. A recurring theme was the need for better communication of regulatory requirements, especially concerning the roles of different agencies, the enforcement of environmental laws, and the criteria for requiring Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) versus Environmental Management Plans (EMP). Participants emphasized that the graphic could more effectively illustrate these distinctions and serve as a practical tool for guiding stakeholders through the process. Additionally, there was consensus on the need for improved public consultation methods, with the graphic playing a role in educating both developers and the general public about engagement opportunities. The complexity of the current system disproportionately benefits consultants while making compliance more difficult for smaller developers and the public. Addressing these concerns through a more intuitive, well-structured

graphic—potentially supplemented by digital resources—would help create a more accessible and equitable permitting process.

### **Takeaways and Recommendations for Graphic Improvement:**

1. **Clarify Agency Roles and Enforcement Measures** – The graphic could offer more detailed definitions of CEC, EIA, and EMP and explicitly define the responsibilities of key regulatory agencies, such as DEPP, the Port Department, and Lands and Surveys, to ensure stakeholders understand which entity oversees different aspects of the permitting process. It should also highlight enforcement mechanisms, ensuring users recognize the consequences of non-compliance and the agencies responsible for oversight. An asterisk should be added to indicate that public consultation is at DEPP's discretion, and the graphic should include a definition of public consultation to prevent ambiguity.
2. **Improve Public Consultation Methods Through Clearer Guidance** – The graphic should clearly outline when public consultation is required, which projects necessitate it, and how stakeholders can effectively participate. Including a decision tree or a timeline for public engagement would help developers and the public better understand consultation requirements, reducing confusion about discretionary consultations.
3. **Enhance Graphic Clarity and Usability** – The visual design should be refined to better distinguish between EIA and EMP requirements, using clear, structured pathways, color-coded sections, and simple explanations of when each applies. Definitions of key terms should be prominently featured, and common project examples should be included to illustrate real-world applications.
4. **Consideration for Stakeholders to Increase Accountability Through Visual Cues** – The graphic should feature a well-structured, step-by-step breakdown of developer and contractor responsibilities, with a dedicated section on compliance and enforcement. To improve clarity, key compliance steps should be reinforced using bold icons, highlighted warnings, or other visual cues that emphasize legal obligations and potential penalties for violations. A checklist system could help ensure that developers are aware of all necessary approvals, and there should be a mechanism to track project compliance. Additionally, the graphic should strike a balance between facilitating business operations and ensuring environmental protection, addressing the needs of various stakeholders, including government agencies, consultants, developers, and the general public.
5. **Enhance Accessibility Through a Centralized Information Hub and Public Display** – To maximize usability, the graphic should include a QR code or website link directing users to a comprehensive online platform with interactive resources, such as a decision-tree tool, downloadable regulatory documents, and explanatory videos. This would ensure that stakeholders have access to up-to-date information and additional guidance beyond the static graphic, allowing them to navigate the approval process based on their project's scale and scope. Additionally, the graphic should be displayed in

public spaces such as Family Island Local Administrator's offices, community centers, and relevant government offices. This would serve as an easily accessible reference for both government officials and the public, ensuring wider awareness and more efficient compliance with permitting requirements.

### **Conclusion**

The Bahamas Mangrove Alliance's leadership in convening these discussions has been instrumental in mobilizing a diverse group of stakeholders to address the critical gaps in environmental permitting processes. Their efforts have not only highlighted the challenges within the system but have also laid the groundwork for meaningful partnerships among government agencies, private sector entities, civil society organizations, and the broader community. By working collaboratively, these groups can develop clearer, more effective approval processes that prioritize the protection of The Bahamas' natural resources while also promoting responsible development.

ORG recommends that these focus groups serve as the initial step in an ongoing engagement process. As the white paper is further developed and shared, it is essential that attendees have the opportunity to provide continued input, fostering a sense of ownership over the use of the graphic and the implementation of key recommendations. Through this sustained collaboration, stakeholders can help ensure that environmental regulations are both transparent and enforceable, leading to a more accountable and conservation-focused permitting framework.

ANNEX

1. Focus Group Session 1



2. Focus Group Session 2



3. Focus group in session



4. Focus group in session



5. Rashema Ingraham speaking



6. Rannique Forbes speaking



7. Matt Aubry Speaking, Steff Evans speaking

