28.04.2015

WETLANDS - SURVEY

(No. B/323) Mr S. Rughoobur (Second Member for Grand’ Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the flood prone areas, he will state if his Ministry will consider –

(a) carrying out a survey of all the wetlands and introducing legislation for the protection against the illegal exploitation thereof;

(b) urgently appointing a team of experts to evaluate the extent of the wetlands which have been developed for residential or industrial purposes over the past ten years and to -

(i) assess the immediate and future repercussions thereof, and

(ii) propose remedial measures therefor, and

(c) appointing a full inquiry on the award of development permits on wetlands by the local authorities, over the past ten years.

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, Mauritius is a Contracting Party to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance also known as the Ramsar Convention, the objective of which is the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation. Hence, we have an international obligation to protect all our wetlands.

As regards part (a) of the question, my Ministry does not propose to carry out a survey of all the wetlands as such an exercise was already carried out by the Ministry of Environment in 2008. That study included a demarcation and inventory of all wetlands in Mauritius and Rodrigues. The report is available at the Ministry of Environment for consultation.

Regarding the legislation on the protection of wetlands, a Wetlands Bill is being prepared and will be introduced into the House in due course.

As regards part (b) of the question, the National Ramsar Committee which operates under the aegis of my Ministry examines applications and makes recommendations for all development near or within wetlands. This Committee comprises representatives of relevant Ministries and Departments as well as non-governmental organisations. It normally assesses all implications before granting a Ramsar clearance for any project together with conditions. I shall request the National Ramsar Committee to compile a list of all projects for which Ramsar clearance has been granted and the extent of wetlands developed for residential and industrial purposes during the last 10 years. I shall, thereafter, table the information. As the National Ramsar Committee comprises of experts in the field of wetlands conservation and management, the question of appointing another team of experts does not arise.
With regard to part (c) of the question, the number of development permits issued by local authorities over the past 10 years in respect of projects on wetlands is also being compiled with a view to determining whether the recommendations of the National Ramsar Committee have been complied with. In the light of this exercise, a decision will be taken as to whether any inquiry needs to be carried out or not.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Rughoobur!

Mr Rughoobur: Will the hon. Minister confirm that almost every three years there are conferences on this whole issue of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands? Will he as well confirm that in November 2008 one such report was prepared by Government? I am going to table this report, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Minister confirm that almost all the recommendations in this report which I would like to list very quickly, that is –

(i) establishment of a Wetland Bill;
(ii) comprehensive survey of all wetlands;
(iii) nomination of more Ramsar sites of international importance, and
(iv) conservation and management of wetlands and awareness for the public in general.

all these four recommendations, I see that nothing has been implemented since 2008 which is in this report, and I’m going to table a copy of this report. So, I urge the hon. Minister to please ensure that these recommendations are put in place and that the Bill comes before the House as early as possible.

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, like I have said in my reply, a Bill is being prepared at the moment and will be soon in this House. As regards the new site, I would like to inform the House that there are two sites that have been identified, namely –

• the Midlands Dam, and
• the Caverne Patate of Rodrigues

that would soon be recommended for recognition within the Ramsar Convention.