

Wade on BACONGO misinformation

THE DIRECTOR OF GEOLOGY AND PETROLEUM RESPONDS TO SKEWED REPRESENTATION MADE BY BACONGO AT A RECENTLY HELD WORKSHOP ON DAMS AND DEVELOPMENT

RURAL COMMUNITIES DESERVE ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY TO IMPROVE EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDARDS

A highly regarded and respected Belizean professional, the Director of Geology and Petroleum, Ms. Evadne Wade has responded to skewed and negative remarks about Belize, Belizeans and the proposed development of the Chalillo Dam made by the Director of the Belize Zoo at a recent workshop on Dams and Development held in Costa Rica.

The Director of the Belize Zoo, who represented the Belize Association of Conservation NGOs, was seriously embarrassed and challenged in her attempts to distort the facts about the Chalillo Project. She also tried to present a bogus resolution which was rejected by the World Conservation Congress (WCC) which was held in Amman, Jordan in October of last year.

In a letter to the Zoo Director, the Director of Geology and Petroleum expressed her opinion that the workshop on the *World Commission on Large Dams* was timely and productive. She also continued by making reference to the IUCN draft Resolution which was discussed in Amman at the WCC.

Ms Garcia pointed out that the "circulation of any issue on Belize to NGO's only, and to the exclusion of other stake holders, including officials of the Government of Belize for input can only result in a skewed, incomplete and hence flawed document" recalling the Zoo Director's expressed and stated concern with regards to access to data on Chalillo.

The letter to the Director of Zoo from the Director of Geology and Petroleum continues:

"In Costa Rica, recall that I enquired of you as to what were your concerns and hence opposition to the Chalillo Project?

Recall that you identified four (4) areas:

- (a) Access to all data relevant to the Chalillo project;
- (b) Environmental- including 1,000 Scarlet Macaws that visit the area part of their Central American habitat;
- (c) Chalillo, the project was uneconomic; and
- (d) You could see "no benefits" from Chalillo.

Recall also, that the responses from the Belize Audubon Society and the Director of the Geology and Petroleum Department addressed your stated concerns?

We indicated that:

1. Under "a", since you represented BACONGO at the WCD workshop, access to studies should not be a problem. BACONGO is a member of the National Environmental Assessment Committee. All data generated under Chalillo and submitted to NEAC should be available to its members, inclusive of BACONGO.

2. Under "b", Environmental Concerns, the *rare* species-tapir, crocodile may be confined to Central America but crocodiles and the spores/tracks of tapir are encountered along all the waterways of Belize: the Caves Branch Tributary between Belize City and Belmopan, for example. Furthermore, the map circulated in Costa Rica by yourself shows that the area of habitat of the "1,000" macaws tends to trend West/South West of Belize, from the site of Chalillo.

3. We explained that the *economics* of any project is dependent on the viability of the project. No private investor(s) will take a project if her/she/it believes that a profit is not guaranteed. Recall that one of the presenters at the WCD workshop indicated that the acceptable internal rate of returns (IRR)

for dams is greater than 10%?

4. Our consternation was to you stated concern under "d" above. You stated that Chalillo would provide "no benefits" to Belizeans.

We believe that you were genuinely unaware that 18% of Belizeans have no access to electricity.

We believe that you were genuinely unaware that consequently, the majority of those impacted tend to live in rural villages where our *indigenous* peoples are found.

We believe that you would wish that 18% of Belizeans should be treated with due regard to health, safety-education; all attendant to access to electricity. in the 21st. Century. That no one Belizean should be without light and potable water.

We further believe.....that you would wish to see villages, like Rancho Dolores, Monkey River and others being able to access electricity, not only for a few hours each day but for 24 hours.

Ms Garcia's letter to Ms. Matola, notes that the Director of Geology and Petroleum, "spent her formative years in rural Belize. Consequently, she knows first hand about floods, conservation of nature and our wonderful Belizean countryside. She also knows about access to light from hurricane/ker-

sene lanterns and/or pine torches only.

She concluded by saying that: "Let us remember that life is about *social equity* in an atmosphere of *environmental equilibrium* and that without access to educational opportunities there can be no social justice" adding that "there will always by *cost(s)* and *benefit(s)* associated with any

action. The challenge for Belizeans is to strive for a balance acceptable in the interest of all.

ED NOTE: It will be recalled that it is the present PUP Government that in February of 1999, invited views from the public and opened the debate on the Chalillo project.



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