

Matola warns Rotary

Director of the Belize Zoo, Sharon Matola, was guest speaker at last Wednesday's weekly Rotary Luncheon held at the Radisson Fort George. Ms. Matola was there to speak on the work of the Zoo and the Tropical Education Research Centre. But, according to our sources, Ms. Matola also used the opportunity to read excerpts of the Reid Report highlighted in last week's issue of this newspaper. Readers will recall that the report, prepared by International Consultant John Reid for the local alliance of conservation organizations known as BACONGO, condemns the government of Belize's proposed Chalillo Dam Project as, among other things, "not economically viable" and likely to "impose a loss of U.S. 10.37 million dollars on BEL and the utility's ratepayers."

Ms. Matola, who has long since acquired a reputation for being an environmental heavy hitter, reportedly stunned her Rotary audience with the Reid revelations. The hard-nosed businessmen that make up the bulk of Rotary's membership, understand the language of both economics and the environment. And these captains of industry were obviously greatly nonplussed at Government's determination to proceed with a project that will actually hurt Belize's overall business climate by uselessly increasing the national debt while raising already high energy costs.

Meantime Government's Chalillo P.R. watchdog Norris Hall, on Thursday last weighed in with a Belize Times frothing at-the-mouth attack on Consultant Reid.

But *the Guardian's* exposé and Ms. Matola's presentation, produced some noticeable momentum in the public opinion interest over Chalillo. Reportedly a number of business persons are now seeking access to additional information, including the various analyses done by local consultant Kimo Jolly for the Macal River Valley Initiative. Those studies also reached negative environmental and economic conclusions, including the following: the Chalillo Project could result in a 70 percent increase in the cost of Belize' raw energy, which cost would be passed on to the consumer public; and once the dam is in place it would have the physical potential to cut off and distort as much as 71 percent of the Macal Riv-

er's flow, helping to precipitate an environmental tragedy by drying up or flooding areas particularly sensitive in sustaining natural habitats for Belize's precious and unique wildlife.

Also as a consequence of last week's media developments, BACONGO is reportedly bestirring itself to take a more active role, notwithstanding key member Belize Audubon's foot-dragging, in disseminating public material about the Chalillo disaster-in-the-making. And some Audubon Board members are cussing a blue streak at the delaying tactics of their president Pepe Garcia and Executive Director Osmany Salas. *The Guardian* has in fact been told that these two might actually have kept the Reid Report from a number of other directors who were considered "politically unsafe."

As for the Government and BEL, the more information that becomes available, the more their actions will be condemned. Already their ruthless power plays are drawing withering international scrutiny. The attempt to silence Harry Lawrence after his Reporter Newspaper published uncomplimentary articles about Chalillo, has produced a flood of support offers from media associations worldwide. And an earlier effort by a PUP separator to intimidate the crusading Sharon Matola, has set alarm bells ringing all over the global environmental community.

As well, all this focus on dams has revisited attention on Mollejon. Since the declared purpose of constructing Chalillo would be to assist Mollejon, Government and BEL would need, if they are to proceed with Chalillo, to buy Mollejon and so own the whole shebang. But according to the experts the price that the PUP agreed for the buy out of Mollejon, is a ridiculous one at U.S.\$75 million. The true value of Mollejon, they say, is no more than U.S.\$25 to \$35 million.

Double whammy! It now therefore appears that the same government that shafted the country with overpriced non-viable Mollejon, will shaft the country with overpriced, non-viable and environmentally disastrous Chalillo. Unless, that is, the Sharon Matolas, the BACONGOs, the international community and the Belizean people can band together to end this greed and corruption motivated plan to destroy the Belizean ecological patrimony.