

FIFTEENTH

REPORT
FROM

THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
(ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE

EXAMINATION
OF

The Audited Financial Statements of the Tourism
Trinidad Limited for the Financial Years 2018-2020.

Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee

The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee (P.A.(E).C) established under Section 119(5) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is mandated to consider and report to the House of Representatives accordingly on:

- “(a) the audited accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements of all enterprises that are owned or controlled by or on behalf of the state; and*
(b) the Auditor General’s Report on any such accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements.”

Current membership

Mr. Wade Mark	Chairman
Mr. Rushton Paray, MP	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal	Member
Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP	Member
Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing	Member
Mr. Keith Scotland, MP	Member
Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP	Member
Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye	Member

Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms. Keiba Jacob	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Darien Buckmire	Researcher
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Researcher
Ms. Anesha James	Administrative Assistant
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Publication

An electronic copy of this report can be found on the Parliament website: www.ttparliament.org

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Members of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee



**Mr. Wade Mark
Chairman**



**Mr. Rushton Paray
Vice-Chairman**



**Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye
Member**



**Fitzgerald Hinds
Member**



**Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal
Member**



**Mr. Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing
Member**



**Mr. Keith Scotland
Member**



**Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie
Member**

Executive Summary

The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee (PA(E)C) is the Parliamentary Financial Oversight Committee tasked with the responsibility of examining the audited accounts of all State Enterprises that are owned or controlled by the state. The Committee conducted an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Tourism Trinidad Limited for the Financial Years 2018-2020 and produced this report. This report details the issues, endorsements, and recommendations made by the Committee to improve TTL's performance.

The Report focuses on the following issues:

1. **Transition from TDC to TTL;**
2. **Status of the Marketing Plan;**
3. **Challenges faced by the TTL;**
4. **Withdrawal of Airlines from Trinidad;**
5. **Measurement of the Return on Investment; and**
6. **Status of TTL's Strategic Plan.**

In light of the Committee's findings, the following recommendations were made:

- *TTL should provide a copy of its Marketing Plan to Parliament by January 29, 2024 for the Period April 2023 to September 2024;*
- *TTL should provide a copy of the completed Calendar of Events to Parliament by January 29, 2024;*
- *TTL should submit an update to Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the areas of its Marketing Plans that have been implemented, highlighting: successes, challenges and the lessons learnt;*
- *TTL should submit an update to Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the status of the resumption of the operation of airlines listed as at January 29, 2024;*
- *TTL should submit a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the review of the organisational chart and job descriptions to be executed to better align the Company's mandate;*
- *TTL should submit a report on how the receipt of releases in regular intervals has positively impacted the company's fulfilment*

- *of its mandate and project implementation;*
- *TTL should conduct a comparative study of institutions in other Caribbean countries with similar roles and functions as TTL to determine whether the return on investment indicators used by TTL are industry standards. The findings should be submitted to Parliament by January 29, 2024;*
- *TTL should submit to Parliament by January 29, 2024 the total cost spent on the procurement of a consultant; and*
- *TTL should submit a status on the progress made with the training of TTL's staff, indicating the following:*
 - *areas and subject matter covered;*
 - *number of persons trained;*
 - *results of evaluations conducted on trainees post-training; and*
 - *training schedule for newly recruited staff.*

Introduction

Establishment

The PA(E)C of the Twelfth Republican Parliament was established by resolutions of the House of Representatives and the Senate at the sittings held on Monday November 9, 2020 and Tuesday November 17, 2020 respectively.

Mandate

The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago mandates that the Committee shall consider and report to the House on the audited accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements of all enterprises that are owned or controlled by, or on behalf of the State.

In addition to the Committee's powers entrenched in the Constitution, the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives and Senate also empower the Committee (but not limited) to:

- a. send for persons, papers and records;
- b. have meetings whether or not the House is sitting;
- c. meet in various locations;
- d. report from time to time; and
- e. communicate with any other Committee on matters of common interest.

Ministerial Response

The Standing Orders¹ provide for the Minister responsible for the Ministry or Body under review to submit within sixty (60) days a paper to the House responding to any recommendations or comments contained in the Report which are addressed to it.

State Enterprises Performance Standards

The (PA(E)C used the State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual as a benchmark to examine the performance of State Enterprises. The manual outlines the framework for compliance with official policy and the monitoring mechanisms to be used in assessing such compliance. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago monitors the performance of State Enterprises to ensure that these enterprises

¹ Standing Order 110 (6) in the House of Representatives and 100(6) of the Senate.

successfully execute their mandates and maximize value for money for the national stakeholders and shareholders²

Election of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman

In accordance with section 119(6) of the Constitution, the Chairman must be a Member of the Opposition in the Senate. At the first meeting held virtually on Wednesday November 18, 2020, Mr. Wade Mark was elected Chairman and Mr. Rushton Paray was elected Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

Establishment of Quorum

The Committee is required by the Standing Orders³ to have a quorum in order to exercise the powers granted to it by the House. A quorum of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chair or Vice-Chairman), with representatives from both Houses was agreed to by the Committee at its First Meeting held on November 17, 2020.

Change in Membership

- By resolution of the House of Representatives at a sitting held on June 13, 2022, Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Dr. Nyan Gadsby Dolly;
- Senator Amrita Deonarine ceased being a Member of the Committee when her appointment as a Senator was revoked on September 11, 2023.
- By resolution of the Senate at a sitting held on October 24, 2023, Senator Hazel Thompson-Ahye was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Senator Amrita Deonarine.

Determination of Date and Time of Regular meetings

The Committee is required by the Standing Orders⁴ to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House. At its Second Meeting, the Committee agreed to meet on the First and Third Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m.

² State Enterprise Performance Monitoring Manual – Ministry of Finance Website accessed on March 30, 2022
<https://www.finance.gov.tt/2017/05/19/state-enterprise-performance-monitoring-manual-2011/>

³ Standing Order 87(2) of the Senate and 97(2) of the House of Representatives

⁴ Standing Order 101(b) of the Senate and 111(b) of the House of Representatives

Methodology

Determination of the Committee's Work Programme Third Session

At the Committee's Twelfth meeting held on Wednesday February 01, 2023, the Committee identified the following entities for examination during the Third Session of the 12th Parliament:

- National Commission for Self Help Limited
- National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited
- Community Environmental & Protection Enhancement Programme Company Limited;
- Estate Management & Business Development Company Ltd;
- Sports Company of Trinidad & Tobago Limited;
- National Infrastructure Development Company Limited;
- Tourism Trinidad Limited;
- Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited
- National Flour Mills Limited;
- National Export Facilitation Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago;
- Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited; and
- Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited.

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines steps taken by the Committee to conduct the inquiry into the operations of TTL. The following steps outline the Inquiry Process agreed to by the PA(E)C:

- I. The Committee conducted a review of the responses provided to the Eleventh Report of the PAEC on the Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (TTL) for the financial years 2008 to 2016. Based on the responses provided, the Committee wrote to the relevant entities to determine the status of the implementation of the recommendations.
- II. The Committee also conducted a review of TTL's Audited Financial Statements for the Financial Years ended September 30, 2018. Based on an analysis of the financial statements, issues were identified and questions for written response were generated.
- III. Questions for written response were forwarded to the Ministry of Public Utilities (MPU), Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Finance – Investment Division (MOF-ID) on July 22, 2022. The MPU's responses, were received on September 19, 2022, the MOE's responses, were received on August 10, 2022 and the MOF-ID's responses were received on November 11, 2022.
- IV. Preparation of an Issues Paper which identified and summarised matters of concern in the responses provided by the TTL. Based on the responses received and the issues identified, the Committee agreed to have a public hearing.
- V. A public hearing was held on February 1, 2023. Representatives from TTL, the MPU and MOF-ID were invited.
- VI. Questions for additional information were sent to the TTL after the public hearing on February 9, 2023. The TTL's responses were received on February 24, 2023.
- VII. Report the Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry. The Report will be transmitted to the MPU as the Minister with oversight of the TTL

for written response within sixty (60) days in accordance with Standing Order 110(6) of the House of Representatives and 100(6) of the Senate.

VIII. Carry out follow-up to monitor progress in the implementation of recommendations.

Company Profile

Overview⁵

TTL was incorporated on June 29th, 2017 In Trinidad and Tobago by the Investment Division of the Ministry of Finance as the Tourism Trinidad Destination Management Company Limited. The name of the company was changed on January 30th, 2019 to Tourism Trinidad Limited.

Tourism Trinidad Was born out of the strategic need to separate the product offerings of our two islands, so that greater is focused on each island's destination strengths (internally) and targets markets (externally). It is therefore the TTL's mandate to delivery a positive and unforgettable Destination Trinidad as a means of diversifying the economy, to generate revenue beyond our established energy sector.

The principal activities of the Company are as follows:

- i. To market Trinidad's Tourism offerings and facilitate the marketing and promotion internationally in our key overseas market.
- ii. To attract Tourism investments and promote tourism business development in Trinidad.
- iii. To promote education, awareness and cooperation in advancing economic expansion through Tourism.

Board of Directors

- Mr. Cliff Hamilton - Chairman
- Ms. Carol Austin – Chief Financial Officer
- Ms. Marsha Mobhair – Entrepreneurship Development Officer
- Mr. Ian Downes – Manager, Corporate Services

Line Ministry - Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts

Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts - Senator the Honourable Randall Mitchell

Permanent Secretary - Mrs. Simone Thorne-Mora Quinones

Deputy Permanent Secretary - Ms. Jasmine Pascal

⁵ MTS's Company Overview web accessed on June 1, 2023
<https://www.mtsco.com/index.php/company-overview>

Issues and Recommendations

In the Committee's examination of TTL, the following issues were identified and the corresponding recommendations and observations made:

1. The transition from TDC to TTL

The Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) officially ceased operations on August 21, 2017. In a request for written submission dated April 05, 2023, TTL was questioned as to whether a feasibility study had been conducted prior to the decision to market Trinidad and Tobago's respective tourism product offerings separately. Specifically, the Committee asked about the factors that were in favour of separating the product offerings of the two islands. In a written submission received on May 18, 2023, TTL stated that:

“A consultant was engaged by the Cabinet to review the Tourism Development Company (TDC). The consultant recommended in his final report “*Institutional Review of the Tourism Development Company – Final Report*” that two options for the replacement tourism organisation be considered, the first of which was recommended by the Ministry of Tourism as follows:

“**Option #1:** The Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Marketing and Product Development Company (TMPDC) with a separate company established in each destination to operate independently of each other.”

The report states that “the reason for the independence of each entity is based on a recognition of the fact that the THA has responsibility for tourism in Tobago and the two destinations are selling different visitor experiences which require different product offerings coupled with different marketing approaches [...]. In Trinidad, the company would take over the functions presently carried out by the TDC including responsibility for developing and marketing the business, conference and meetings product of Port of Spain, the development of niche products including culture, festivals, sports and the link and the provision of business advisory services, investment for the development of capital tourism projects and niche product development”.

It was also noted in Cabinet Minute No. 416 of March 9, 2017 that the THA had “already conducted a separate study and decided that the establishment of a separate entity/authority of the management of Tobago's tourism would be most effective in advancing the island's tourism

development agenda.” It was further noted that “Trinidad and Tobago had three (3) distinct destination marketing brands, each with its own suite of product offerings, namely:

- i. Trinidad – Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions (MICE) base and product driven.
- ii. Tobago – Leisure-base and market-driven.
- iii. Destination Trinidad and Tobago – promotion of awareness of the country and provision of the opportunity to sell both experiences.”

At the public hearing held on June 7, 2023, the Committee sought a description of the transition from the TDC to TTL. Officials from TTL indicated that TDC had outlived its mandate and that, as such TTL was created. After the transition, TTL was now operating with half of the employees that were originally engaged at the TDC. Some areas of responsibility held by TTL’s predecessor TDC were meant to be retained by TTL - for example, the management of all beaches. However, the Committee learnt that this responsibility was, in fact, assumed by the line Ministry. This was to allow TTL to focus on the marketing and promotions aspect, which is essentially the company’s role. TTL has no responsibility for the management of any assets.

2. Status of the Marketing Plan

In the written response received, TTL indicated that the drafting of its Marketing Plan was ongoing. It was stated that the plan was being developed for the period April 2023 – September 2024. At the public hearing, the Committee queried the completion of the Marketing Plan. Officials indicated that the company was taking a strategic approach to identifying the appropriate source markets to ensure a positive impact on visitor arrivals. Moreover, the Committee was enlightened on TTL’s marketing plans for various niches - for example, Festival Development, Tourism Festivals and Meetings and Conferences, as well as Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR), and Diaspora. These are critical areas where the company’s messaging will be targeted. Officials stated that messaging speaks to an ‘always in season’ destination. As such, these areas being targeted will satisfy the variations in visitor arrivals throughout the year. Officials indicated that, as part of this strategy, a calendar of events was being drafted to be used as one of its marketing tools to showcase the year-round offerings of Trinidad and when one should visit.

Recommendations:

- *TTL should provide a copy of its Marketing Plan for the Period April 2023 to September 2024 to Parliament by January 29, 2024;*
- *TTL should provide a copy of the completed Calendar of Events to Parliament by January 29, 2024; and*
- *TTL should submit an update to Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the areas of its Marketing Plans that have been implemented, highlighting its successes, challenges and the lessons learnt.*

3. Challenges faced by the TTL

In the written response received, TTL indicated that the company experienced the following challenges while executing its mandate:

- Global challenges
 - i. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a lockdown of the country’s borders for the period March 2020 - July 2021, forcing the suspension of all travel to the destination and imposing restrictions on all public gatherings. All areas within the tourism industry were severely impacted by the restrictions imposed. (T&T reopened to fully vaccinated persons in July 2021);
 - ii. In Trinidad and Tobago specifically, slow easing of restrictions further exacerbated the recovery and path back to normalcy. This is clearly reflected in the visitor arrivals data over the period;

Table 1: Visitor Arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago:

Year	Trinidad	Tobago	Total	% Change
2020	88,032	7,248	95,280	-
2021	40,618	3	40,621	-57.4
2022	216,022	10,467	226,489	457.6%
2022 (Jan-May)	67,181	2,788	69,969	-
2023 (Jan to May)	121,875	7,354	129,229	84.7%

- iii. COVID-19 also undermined business confidence globally, regionally, and locally, thereby stifling investment. As a result, new investment - as well as re-investment - has been sub-par. The underlying weak performance of tourism businesses has also contributed to the fragile business confidence.

▪ Operational challenges

- i. Understaffing due to recruitment constraints and limited funding have affected the company's ability to deliver on all of its responsibilities. A review of the organisational chart and job descriptions, to better align staff roles with the company's core mandate, was being undertaken at the time of the Committee's inquiry in June 2023;

As at June 07, 2023 when the public hearing was held, the staff complement at TTL was only forty (40) employees. All staff hired at TTL were engaged on a contractual basis. The Committee learnt that there were no permanent employees. In response to prior issues regarding the timely release of funding, the Committee was informed that a number of staff at TTL were new and inexperienced. In evaluating the success of the initiatives undertaken per Strategic Action Plan (2021-2023), TTL indicated the further recruitment beyond the roughly fifty percent (50%) of filled positions was halted and financial releases understandably slowed post COVID-19 lockdown. This had a severe impact on the ability of the organisation to fulfil its mandate as the country and by extension the tourism sector were in a state of lockdown. This statement was with specific reference to the completion of the requisite templates for the Budget Division, Ministry of Finance (MOF).

Officials from the MTCA indicated that training was being conducted with TTL's staff to draft the submissions correctly with sufficient justification. Staff was also trained in proposal writing. The officials from the MTCA specified that the training being conducted would assist in the receipt of funding in a timely manner because of the accuracy of the documents submitted to the Ministry of Finance.

- ii. Successive administrative changes have impacted work continuity and productivity; and
- iii. Budgetary constraints have also affected TTL's ability to optimise operations.
- The economic impact of COVID-19 also affected the budgetary allocation for the tourism sector, given the decision to close borders - a decision that severely affected the tourism industry. As a result, TTL stated that there was a dramatic fall in funding (releases) for Recurrent Marketing and Public Sector Improvement Program (PSIP) expenditure from Fiscal 2020 to Fiscal 2021. Recurrent Marketing expenditure fell by 95% from \$4,246,004.00 in 2019/20 to \$206,875.00 in 2020/21. PSIP expenditure fell by 91% from \$4,183,407.00 in 2019/20 to \$370,353.00 in 2020/21.

The Committee requested a status on the plans implemented to remedy the operational challenges stated above. In additional information received dated on July 10, 2023, TTL stated the following:

Operational Challenges	Status
1. Understaffing	The Company's Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Directors on June 28, 2023; therefore, a review of the organisational chart and job descriptions will be executed to better align to the Company's mandate.
2. Successive administrative changes.	As at April 3, 2023, a Chief Executive Officer was confirmed at the helm of the organisation. All but two Managers have been confirmed in their respective positions; the filling of these two vacancies is pending the review of the company's organisational structure.
3. Budgetary constraints	In fiscal 2021/2022, Tourism Trinidad received an allocation of \$9,468,000 under the Public Sector Improvement Programme but only ~\$524,960 was released for the fiscal year. This severely impacted project delivery and sector recovery efforts. For fiscal 2022/2023, Tourism Trinidad has received \$27,523,000 in PSIP funding and \$20,000,000 in Recurrent funding and has been obtaining the requisite releases at more regular intervals to facilitate project implementation.

Recommendations:

- *TTL should submit a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the review of the organisational chart and job descriptions to be executed to better align the Company's mandate; and*
- *TTL should submit a report on how the receipt of releases in regular intervals has positively impacted the company's fulfilment of its mandate and project implementation.*
- *TTL should submit a status on the progress made with the training TTL's staff, indicating the following:*

- *areas and subject matter covered;*
- *number of persons trained;*
- *results of evaluations conducted on trainees post-training;*
- *training schedule for newly recruited staff.*

4. Withdrawal of Airlines from Trinidad

At midnight on March 22, 2020⁶, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago officially closed the country’s borders. In the written response received, TTL indicated that the closure of borders, coupled with international travel restrictions, negatively affected the company’s ability to deliver a quality tourism product. The reduction in flights to Trinidad resulted in Air Canada, United Airlines, Jet Blue, WestJet, Copa Airlines, Suriname Airways, American Airlines and British Airways ceasing operations in Trinidad. As at April 2023, Air Canada, WestJet and Suriname Airways had not returned at all, while Jet Blue, Copa and American Airlines had not returned to their pre-COVID-19 level of operations.

At the hearing held on June 7, 2023, the Committee sought an update on the factors that led to the discontinuation of the aforementioned airline services. Officials from TTL indicated that airlines were grappling with issues of crew and pilot shortages and therefore were not able to operate the large fleets that they had previously been able to operate. As a result, Trinidad had a deficit of a total of twenty-five (25) international flights per week when borders were reopened, which negatively impacted all of country’s source market. The table below identifies the number of carriers pre and post COVID-19:

Table 2: Number of carriers operating pre and post COVID-19 – T&T

Total number of carriers operating pre COVID-19 - ten (10)	Total number of carriers operating post COVID-19 - seven (7)
1. Caribbean Airlines. 2. American Airlines 3. British Airways 4. United Airlines 5. Copa Airlines 6. LIAT	1. Caribbean Airlines 2. American Airlines 3. British Airways 4. JetBlue 5. Copa Airlines 6. United Airlines

⁶ Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, Young: *Borders close midnight Sunday*. Accessed on October 16, 2023: <https://newsday.co.tt/2020/03/21/young-borders-close-midnight-sunday/>

7. Air Canada 8. West Jet 9. JetBlue 10. Suriname Airways	7. KLM
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Note:

1. Pre-COVID information is dated from before 20th March 2020, which was the date of Trinidad & Tobago's border closure.
2. Post-COVID data is dated as at 20 March 2023.
3. It is to be noted that Trinidad & Tobago's Borders reopened on 17th July 2022.
4. Resumption of international scheduled flights commenced in September 2021, on a phased basis, as airlines encountered issues with equipment and flight crew availability.

Regarding the Canadian carriers West Jet and Air Canada, due to labour law amendments by the Canadian Government, the crew of Canadian airlines are no longer allowed to stay in service over a particular period, thereby limiting the airline's ability to fly south in a cost effective manner. TTL indicated that the furthest location a Canadian-based airline could go without incurring a prohibitive crewing cost was Antigua. Servicing the Canada-Trinidad route has therefore become less financially viable for Canadian airlines. Trinidad had a deficit of a total of twenty-five (25) international flights when borders were reopened, which negatively impacted all of Trinidad's source markets. The loss to Trinidad's tourism industry per week as a result of the 25 international flight deficit when the borders reopened on 17th July 2022 from the source markets were as follows:

Table 3: Impact of decrease in Airlift on Tourism Industry – T&T

Market	Airline	No. of Flights Lost (weekly)	No. of Seats Lost (weekly)	Average Base Fare TTD	Revenue Lost* TTD
Miami	American Airlines	7	1,274	\$1,789	\$2,279,186
Houston	United Airlines	3	522	\$2,647	\$1,381,734
Ft. Lauderdale	JetBlue	4	624	\$1,702	\$1,062,048
Toronto	Air Canada	3	480	\$2,566	\$1,231,680
Panama	Copa Airlines	5	780	\$1,856	\$1,447,680
London	British Airways	3	1,164	\$3,571	\$4,156,644
Total		25	4,844		\$11,558,972

Recommendation:

- *TTL should submit a status update to Parliament by January 29, 2024 on the status of the resumption of the operation of airlines listed as at January 29, 2024.*

5. Measurement of the Return on Investment

Return on investment (ROI) is a metric used to denote how much profit has been generated from an investment made⁷. At the public hearing, the Committee questioned TTL on the indicators used to measure its ROI. Officials stated that there was a three-year gestation period from when the marketing programme was implemented to when ROI can be observed and as such, any current calculations of ROI would be premature.. It was indicated that the indicators include:

- i. Length of stay;
- ii. Average visitor spend – e.g. in Trinidad between 2015 and 2019, the average length of stay was 13 days. The average visitor spend for that five year period was TT \$7,433 or US \$1,093. This provides an idea of the sum spent, based on the number of visitors;
- iii. Room tax - which is 10 %;
- iv. Vat – 12%;
- v. Total Contribution to GDP. For example, what we have projected for 2023 to 2025 is total revenue receipts of US \$429 million, with total arrival of 388,000 visitors. Direct contribution to GDP is 2.8 per cent. GDP contribution multiplier impact is 7.8 per cent; employment contribution direct is 17,500 jobs at 2.8 per cent of labour force; employment contribution multiplier is 52,700 jobs.

Recommendation:

- *TTL should conduct a comparative study involving institutions in other Caribbean countries with the similar roles and functions as TTL to determine whether the return on investment indicators used by TTL are industry standards and submit the findings to Parliament by January 29, 2024.*

⁷ Harvard Business School website, *How to Calculate ROI to justify a Project*. Accessed on October 19, 2023: <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/how-to-calculate-roi-for-a-project>

6. The Status of TTL's Strategic Plan

The Committee queried the status of TTL's Strategic Plan for the period 2020 - 2023. Officials indicated that the Strategic Plan for the period 2020 - 2023 had been aborted because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the inability to implement many aspects of the Plan. TTL indicated that a Strategic Plan was being proposed for the period 2023-2025. According to an update received dated July 10, 2023, the proposed Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Directors on June 28, 2023. Expenses related to the development of the Plan as at June 2023 were as follows:

- 2020-2023 Strategic Plan - \$316,635.75; and
- 2023-2025 Strategic Plan - \$287,756.47 as at May 15, 2023.

Procurement of a Consultant

A consultant was procured for the drafting of the Strategic Plan. A Board Note titled *Towards the Development of a Strategic Plan for Tourism Trinidad Limited* dated September 15, 2022, was presented at the Seventh (7th) Special Meeting of the Board of Directors for the year 2022. The Board selected a consultant for the development of the Strategic Plan from two submitted proposals - one from Res Consulting and the other GW&MR Consulting Limited. The engagement of the consultant cost \$248,500.00. The Committee questioned the reason for the Strategic Plan being drafted externally versus internally, given the in-house expertise and knowledge of the local industry and Trinidad's tourism product. Officials stated that the consultant would serve as a facilitator when meeting with the Ministry, stakeholders, hoteliers, airlines, tour operators and all other ancillary providers of tourism services.

At the time of the hearing, officials indicated that the selection of the target market or segments was as a result of consultations with stakeholders prior to the drafting of the Plan, which was navigated by the consultant. TTL indicated that the process required an independent broker and that the technical knowledge required was not available in-house. For these reasons, TTL believed that an independent consultant would more effectively facilitate the process.

Recommendation:

- ***TTL should submit to Parliament by January 29, 2024 the total cost spent on the procurement of the consultant retained to develop the company's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan.***

Conclusion

In light of the above, the Committee notes that TTL's primary function is the marketing and promotion of tourism on the island of Trinidad and all of the associated elements that allows the company to market a product or an experience that is unique. In keeping with the Government's thrust to market and promote Trinidad and Tobago as a premier tourist destination nurturing and promoting the culture of Trinidad and Tobago in all its positive forms locally and abroad, the Committee noted TTL's transition from TDC, challenges faced by the company and the measurement its return on investment.

The Committee also noted the challenges in relation to the lack of funding and withdrawal of airlines from Trinidad. The Committee is optimistic that the company will continue to strategically position Trinidad as one of the leading competitors with other premier tourist destinations.

The Committee therefore awaits the responses of the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts to the recommendations proposed above, in accordance with Standing Orders 100(6) and 110(6) of the Senate and the House of Representatives respectively which states inter alia that –

“The Minister responsible for the Ministry or Body under review shall, not later than sixty (60) days after a report from a Standing Committee relating to the Ministry or Body, has been laid upon the Table, present a paper to the House responding to any recommendations or comments contained in the report which are addressed to it...”

The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee respectfully submits this Report for the consideration of the Parliament.

Sgd.
Mr. Wade Mark
Chairman

Sgd.
Mr. Rushton Paray, MP
Vice-Chairman

Sgd.
Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Keith Scotland, MP
Member

**THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE –
THIRD SESSION, TWELFTH PARLIAMENT
MINUTES OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2023 AT 9:40 A.M IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE
MEETING ROOM, GROUND FLOOR, CABILDO BUILDING, PARLIAMENTARY
COMPLEX, ST. VINCENT STREET, PORT OF SPAIN**

Present were:

Mr. Wade Mark	-	Chairman
Mr. Rushton Paray	-	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob Mottley	-	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Researcher

Excused were:

Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie	-	Member
Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal	-	Member

Absent were:

Mr. Keith Scotland	-	Member
Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing	-	Member
Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds	-	Member

CALL TO ORDER

- 1.1 At 9:40 a.m., the Chairman called the meeting to order and welcomed those present.

THE EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Sixteenth (16th) Meeting held on May 17, 2023.
- 2.2 There being no omissions or corrections, the Minutes were confirmed on a motion moved by Ms. Amrita Deonarine and seconded by Mr. Rushton Paray

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING

- 3.1 With reference to item 8.2, page 4: the Chairman informed Members that the request for additional information was sent to the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited (NIDCO) on June 06, 2023 with a deadline of June 21, 2023.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION RE: TRINIDAD TOURISM LIMITED (TTL)

- 4.1 The Chairman reminded Members that the purpose of the public hearing was to conduct an examination into the Audited Financial Statements of the Tourism Trinidad Limited for the financial years 2018 to 2020.
- 4.2 Members discussed their areas of concern and the general approach for the public hearing.

SUSPENSION

- 5.1 There being no further business for discussion in camera, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 9:59 a.m. to reconvene in public.

AN EXAMINATION INTO THE AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE TOURISM TRINIDAD LIMITED FOR THE FINANCIAL YEARS 2018 TO 2020.

- 6.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.
- 6.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

Tourism Trinidad Limited (TTL)

- Mr. Clifford Hamilton - Chairman
- Ms. Carla Cupid - Chief Executive Officer
- Ms. Carol Austin - Chief Financial Officer
- Ms. Marsha Mobhair - Entrepreneurship Development Officer
- Mr. Ian Downes - Manager, Corporate Services

Ministry of Tourism

- Ms. Simone Thorne-Mora Joseph - Permanent Secretary
- Mr. Brain Gift - Tourism Advisor II
- Mr. Keon Francis - Cultural Officer II

Ministry of Finance – Investments Division (MoF-ID)

- Mr. Mala Mohammed - Acting Director Agro-based, and Services Sector Manufacturing

6.3 Key Issues Discussed:

1. The transition from Tourism Development Company (TDC) to the TTL;
2. The clarification of the management of beaches in Trinidad;
3. The effects of crime on regional and international travel;
4. The TTL's plans to enter into an agreement with the search engine Google to improve the perception of Trinidad once researched;
5. The breakdown of the sum of \$70,542,600 spent by TTL since March 31, 2023;
6. The status of the completion of the development of a Marketing Plan for the period April 2023 to September 2024;
7. The proposed marketing messaging and targets for Trinidad;
8. The status of the audited financial statements for the financial year 2022;
9. The average number of visitors yearly from the diaspora as well as internationally and regionally;
10. The plans to capture the offerings/sites across Trinidad to increase the tourism product;
11. The focus of the TTL on Mayaro's tourism offerings;
12. The consideration of geo-tourism as a domestic tourism product offering;
13. The need for more funding to improve and expand tourism products;
14. The collaborations between the MTCA and Regional Corporations;
15. The inter-ministerial collaborations regarding Trinidad's tourism industry;
16. The reasons for the development of TTL's Strategic Plan externally versus internally;
17. The status of the consultants engaged to complete the Strategic Plan;
18. The collaborative efforts of the stakeholders, the consultant, MTCA and TTL to draft the Strategic Plan;
19. The methods used to measure return on investment;
20. The untimely receipt of allocations by TTL from the MTCA and the steps taken to improve the release of funding;
21. The lack of experience of the staff at the MTCA and TTL in writing briefs and proposals;
22. The status of the number of applications received under the Tourism Accommodation and Upgrade Programme (TAUP);
23. The reasons for the low participation from stakeholders to receive Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Industry Certification (TTTIC);
24. The status of the TTTIC;
25. The plans to target specific properties and tour operators under TAUP;
26. The challenges and lessons learnt from TDC;
27. The existence of any formal policing of Trinidad's tourism assets e.g. hotels, guest houses etc.;
28. The TTL's certification process for and awareness of the number of guesthouses or beach houses operating in Trinidad; and
29. The withdrawal of some airlines from operating in Trinidad.

Please see the Verbatim Notes for the detailed oral submission by the witnesses.

- 7.1 The Chairman thanked the officials for attending the meeting and they were excused.
- 7.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to TTL.
[Please see Appendix 1]

SUSPENSION

- 8.1 At 12:12 p.m., the Chairman suspended the public meeting to resume in-camera for a post-mortem discussion with Members only. A discussion ensued.
- 8.2 There being no other business, the Chairman thanked Members for their attendance. The Committee agreed that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on **June 21, 2023 at 9:30 a.m.** at which time the Committee will conduct an examination of the Audited Financial Statements for the financial years 2016 to 2018 and a follow up Inquiry into First Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (UDECOTT) for the financial years 2014 and 2015, First Session (2020/2021), Twelfth Parliament.

ADJOURNMENT

- 9.1 The adjournment was taken at 12:17 p.m.

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

JUNE 7, 2023

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

***Additional Questions arising from Meeting of the Public Accounts
[Enterprises] Committee***

Request for Additional Information

Questions from public hearing

Tourism Trinidad Limited (TTL)

Provide the following in writing:

- i. A copy of the Miller Report on the TDC;
- ii. The result of the marketing efforts in attracting visitors regionally and internationally for the period 2018 to 2022;
 - a) The revenue earned from visitors each year for the period 2018 to 2020; and
 - b) The amount of foreign exchange gained for each year for the period 2018 to 2020.
- iii. The details on the procurement process of the consultant to complete the Strategic Plan for the period 2023 to 2025;
- iv. The number of staff and the positions who have been hired/fired/or resigned from the company for each year for the period 2018 to present;
- v. The human resource recruitment process;
- vi. The details on the proposed contract for the 60th Anniversary of Trinidad and Tobago's celebration;
- vii. The number of airlines that were in operation pre COVID-19 and post COVID-19;
 - a. The loss incurred as a result of the decrease in airlines to Trinidad;
 - b. The impact of this on the tourism industry; and
- viii. The list of recommendations for the Committee to assist the company in achieving its mandate;

Ministry of Tourism Culture and the Arts

Provide in the following in writing:

- i. The number of staff at the Ministry for each year for the period 2018 to present;
- ii. The current percentage of contract staff and the number of public servants at the Ministry;

- iii. The number of staff and the positions who have been hired/fired/or resigned from the company for each year for the period 2018 to present;

Questions from written submissions

General Questions (pgs. 1-11)

1. How does the TTL measure the success of its stakeholder engagements?
2. What was the aim of these sessions **(Pg. 1 Obj. 1)**?
3. How beneficial are these sessions to the growth of the tourism industry?
4. What was the reach of these engagements?

The TTL produces Quarterly Media Perception Reports, showing “positive sentiment growth” **(Pg. 2 Obj. 3)**.

5. With regard to the impact of crime on visitor arrivals, has the TTL sought to draw references from the media strategies used in other territories with strong tourism industries, but which are traditionally seen as affected by crime and violence?
6. Are there plans to re-engage the Destination Management System provider for its services?
 - a. Was a review conducted on the success of this engagement?
7. With reference to the Operational Challenges faced, what is the status of the organisational chart and job descriptions that were being undertaken to better align staff roles with the company’s core mandate?

Questions 1.2. (pg. 1)

Based on the mandate of the TTL:

1. List the number of Trinidad’s tourism offering that were develop and marketed. State the financial impact of these offering.
2. What is the sum of income generated by:
 - Leading and facilitating the marketing and promotion of destination Trinidad and Tobago internationally;
 - leading in attracting tourism investment in Trinidad;
3. What is the total expenditure of the following:
 - Development and marketing of Trinidad’s tourism offering.

- Leading and facilitating the marketing and promotion of destination Trinidad and Tobago internationally.
- Taking the lead in attracting tourism investment in Trinidad.
- The promotion of tourism business development in Trinidad.
- The promotion of education, awareness, and co-operation in advancing economic
- Expansion through tourism.
- Encouraging a tourism friendly approach through well-defined and co-ordination
- Marketing strategies, inclusive of social media and other technology-based platforms.

Questions 1.3. (pg. 6)

1. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, what is the status of the tourism industry to date?
2. State the factor affecting the tourism industry.
3. Has there been an increase in visitors arrivals post COVID-19? If no, what measures are being taken to increase visitor's arrival?
4. What is the status of the statement 'In respect of investment, COVID-19 has undermined business confidence globally, regionally, and locally. As a result, new investment, as well as re-investment has been sub-par. The underlying weak performance of tourism businesses has also contributed to the fragile business confidence'?
5. What is the status of the operational challenges?

Questions 1.4. (pgs. 6-7)

1. How would the weaknesses and threats in the SWOT analysis be addressed?
2. What does 'perceived duplication of promotional efforts' mean?

Questions 1.5. (pg. 7)

1. Briefly explain the statement 'the impact of the company on the tourism industry to date remains a difficult assessment'. Is there any impact on not being in a position to conduct an assessment?

Strategic Plan

Based on the information at Table 6, page 13 on more indicators:

1. Has there been any improvement in VOTE D018 –Festival Development, VOTE D013- Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Programme (TAUP), VOTES D014 and D019 – Development and Implementation of Sport Tourism Master Plan?

Human Resources and Organisational Practices (Pgs. 14-22)

1. What is the reason for not recruit the persons currently fulfilling the positions at the two (2) Visitor Centres on a long-term basis versus short-term at the Airport Office and Cruise Ship Complex?
2. When will the positions as stated in Table 12 (pg. 20) of the response be filled?
3. What training initiatives were conducted using the budget of \$150,000 that was allocated to training in FY 2023?

Marketing, Promotion and Communications (pgs. 22-25)

1. How has TTL addressed the challenges it faces in engaging with prospective customers/markets?
2. What types of events are being developed and supported as a Niche?
3. Regarding the Advertising Agency of Record (AOR), what was the cost of the engagement for each year for the period June 2019 to June 2021?
 - a. Does the Marketing Department continue to perform the activities the AOR was previously doing?
 - b. Have considerations been given to continue to use the in-house Marketing Department versus an AOR?
 - i. Has an assessment been conducted to determine which option is most beneficial to the company? If yes what were the results? If not, why not?
4. How does TTL measure the success and benefits of the Marketing Tools used?

The submission explained that new markets to penetrate for the national tourism product are Central and South America (Q23. Pg. 20).

5. What specific strategies are being adopted to generate interest in those two (2) regions?

Risk Management (pgs. 26-28)

1. What are the benefits of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Industry Certificate (TTTIC)?

2. Since the resumption of travel and the ending of local and international COVID-19 restrictions, what is the status of increasing the number of stakeholders come on board with the programme?
 - a. If no, what incentives does the programme offer to persuade industry stakeholders to comply fully?
 - b. At present, how many stakeholders are fully TTIC certified?
3. What is total sum of losses since Air Canada, United Airlines, Jet Blue, West Jet, Copa Airlines, Suriname Airways, American Airlines and British Airways?
4. What will be done or what will make the airlines resume its operations to Trinidad and Tobago?
5. What is the status of the conflict between the Board of Directors and Senior Management of TTL (Q.32 pg. 27)?
6. Explain the statements “a loss of confidence in the Company was reflected in reduced budget allocations”.
7. How does TTL plan to improve stakeholders confidence in the company?

Question 32 (pg.27)

1. Based on the mandate of the TTL and the lack of formal risk policy and formal risk management framework, what is being done by the TTL to address its reputational risk?

Question 38 (pg.27)

“There has been no formal company-wide evaluation of controls, as stated above each internal audit evaluates control. Each manager informally assesses controls in their department when reviewing the performance of the department”.

1. State how each managers assesses controls in their department when reviewing the performance of the department.

Internal Audit (pgs. 28-30)

1. What is the requisite staff complement for the Internal Audit Unit?
 - a. What is the status of the filling of the second post, Audit Officer and the On-the-job Trainee?
2. How has the TTL addressed the major challenges faced by the Internal Auditors?
3. What is the status of the Risk Management Framework?

4. When will the first phase of the Strategic Plan be completed? Provide a timeline for the completion of the Strategic Plan.
5. What is the status of the recruitment of the External Auditor?
6. What is the status of the audited financial statements for the financial year 2022?
7. What is the status of addressing the following major challenges of the internal audit department:
 - The lack of staff;
 - The absence of an approved Strategic Plan; and
 - The absence of a mature risk management framework.

Procurement Practices (pgs. 30 – 31)

1. Regarding the challenges faced by TTL in executing its procurement process, what plans are in place to recruit foreign suppliers/ address the said challenges?
2. What does TTL believe to be the issue, which prevent the company from finding foreign suppliers?
3. Which areas are foreign suppliers needed?

Cash in hand at Bank (pgs. 34 – 35)

1. State the benefits of the Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Program (TAUP) to the local tourism industry?
2. What areas of training was offered to the 20 Tourism Stakeholders from the allocation of \$1,332,621 received on 28 July 2020?
3. Who provided the training services to these stakeholders?

Deferred Income (pgs. 35-36)

Based on the response to **Q. 76, pg. 36:**

1. How was the success of the following measured:
 - virtual and hybrid tourism recovery initiatives;
 - conversion of international promotional campaigns to domestic tourism campaign.
2. Describe the relationship between local operators and TTL.
3. How did the TTL measure the citizenry response to the domestic tourism campaigns?

- i. What went wrong?
- ii. What could have been done better?
- iii. What lessons were learnt?

Expenses – Schedule (pgs. 38-39)

The TTL implemented the automated Sage 50 software, which shows a detailed breakdown of the Aged Payables by days.

1. What is the Sage 50 Software?
2. What was the cost to implement this software?
3. What are the benefits of this software?
4. How has it improved the company's ability to clear its liabilities?

Consultancy Fees (pgs. 39-41)

1. How long did the consultants provide for recruitment and payroll services to TTL?
2. How did the company address the lack of human resource capacity?

Legal and Professional Fees (Pgs. 40 – 41)

The TTL stated a number of issues as the reasons for seeking outside legal professionals.

1. Was the lack of human resources within the legal Department addressed?
 - i. If not, why?
2. What are the plans to acquire the relevant personnel with experience industrial relations and labour laws and in trademark application?
3. Given the tangible benefits gained from the engagement of outside legal professionals, will there be plans or considerations to recruit professionals with access to a wider knowledge and experience pool for handling novel legal matters on the company's behalf as a way to reduce fees in this area?

Appendix II – Verbatim Notes

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE SEVENEENTH MEETING OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE HELD (IN PUBLIC) IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, GROUND FLOOR, CABILDO PARLIAMENTARY COMPLEX, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, ST. VINCENT STREET, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 07, 2023, AT 10.15 A.M.

PRESENT

Mr. Wade Mark	Chairman
Mr. Rushton Paray	Vice Chairman
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob Mottley	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Mrs. Laurel Lezama Lee Sing	Member [Excused]
Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh Sooklal	Member [Excused]
Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie	Member [Excused]
Mr. Keith Scotland	Member
Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds	Member

TOURISM TRINIDAD LIMITED (TTL)

Mr. Clifford Hamilton	Chairman
Ms. Carla Cupid	Chief Executive Officer
Ms. Carol Austin	Chief Financial Officer

Ms. Marsha Mobhair

Entrepreneurship Development
Officer

Mr. Ian Downes

Manager, Corporate Services

MINISTRY OF TOURISM, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Mrs. Simone Thorne-Mora Quinones

Permanent Secretary

Mr. Brian Gift Tourism

Advisor II

Mr. Keon Francis

Cultural Officer III (Ag.)

MINISTRY OF FINANCE–INVESTMENTS DIVISION

Ms. Mala Mohammed

Director, Agro-Based Manufacturing and
Services Sector (Ag.)

Ms. Malini Ganga Persad

Senior Business Analyst (Ag.)

Mr. Chairman: Good morning and let me on behalf of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee warmly welcome each and every one of you to this meeting of our Committee. I would like to particularly extend a warm welcome to those officials from the Ministry of Finance, Investments Division, of course, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts and the Tourism Trinidad Limited. Welcome to our meeting.

I would like to indicate that my name is Wade Mark and I am the Chairman of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. Now let me just bring to your attention the following so that you will be aware. The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee has a mandate to consider and report to the House of Representatives on the following: the audited accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements of all enterprises that are owned or controlled by or on behalf of the State; the Auditor General's report of any such accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements, and whether policy is carried out efficiently, effectively and economically and whether expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it. So this is some of the functions and mandate that we have to carry out on behalf of the people and report to the House of Representatives.

Now, the purpose of our meeting this morning is to examine or to make an examination into the audited financial statements of the Tourism Trinidad Limited for the financial years 2018 to 2020. Now this Committee is desirous of hearing from you the challenges being faced by this new company,

Tourism Trinidad Limited. And of course, we will try to generate solutions as we enquire into your challenges so that we can make the appropriate recommendations for improving your operations. So that is extremely important for us. And I may wish to advise that our role as a Committee is to work with you to improve the delivery of services that you offer that you generate in an efficient, effective and economic manner.

Now our meeting—the broadcast of this meeting is delayed but it will be carried at the appropriate time by our Channel. So this broadcast that is delayed is going to be carried on our Parliament YouTube Channel called ParlView and, of course, it will be broadcast on Channel 11 and Radio 105.5 FM. That is to come. Of course, viewers and listeners can send their comments related to today's topic, and we have an email address, parl101@ttparliament.org or on our Facebook, at facebook.com/ttparliament or on Twitter @ttparliament.

Now I would like to ask my colleagues who are with me this morning to introduce themselves and thereafter I will then call on the representatives in the following order to introduce themselves, that is the Ministry of Finance Investments Division followed by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts and finally Tourism Trinidad Limited in that order. So I will ask my colleagues at the table with me to introduce themselves and we go in the order that I have outlined.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Ministry of Finance.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Ministry of Tourism.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Any more persons from the Ministry of Tourism?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Anyone else from the Minister of Tourism? If not, let us deal immediately with the officials from Tourism Trinidad Limited.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Anyone else, Mr. Hamilton?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, once again and members—we have one more person, sorry, Sir. My apologies.

[Introduction made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Okay, at this time, I would want to invite a representative from the Ministry of Finance Investments Division to make a brief opening statement. Who will go?

Ms. Mohammed: Good morning everyone, members, Chairman of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity. The Investments Division of the Ministry of Finance is responsible for executing the investment policy as prescribed by Cabinet. Accordingly the mandate includes oversight, monitoring and, where necessary, the rationalization of Government equity holdings in commercial entities. Tourism Trinidad Limited is one of those entities incorporated in June 29th, 2017 as a wholly-owned state enterprise. The company is mandated to develop market of the business conference and meetings product of Port of Spain, the development of niche products, including culture, festivals, sports and the provision of business advisory services.

Additionally, the Investments Division acts on behalf of the Minister, corporation sole, and carries out the corporation's function. This includes the representation of the Minister in shareholding meetings, establishment of new state enterprises and divestment of state enterprises when it becomes feasible to do so. We look forward to today's discussion. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Madam Permanent Secretary, I now would like to invite you to make some brief opening remarks.

Mrs. Thorne-Mora Quinones: Good morning, Chair and members once again. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts is in charge of developing tourism and cultural policy for Trinidad and Tobago. In 2020, the culture portfolio was added to the Ministry in recognition of the fact that Trinidad and Tobago could not separate—well I should not say “not separate”, but the cultural aspect of our country was so important to the tourism product that it made much more economic sense to add the cultural portfolio.

The Ministry therefore has under its control or supervision the TTL, what we call our performance spaces that would be NAPA, SAPA, National Carnival Commission and Naparima Bowl. So they assist us in implementing our cultural portfolio.

The Ministry is particularly pleased to be called here today alongside this morning our main partner, the TTL because we will get a chance to show Trinidad and Tobago the progress that has taken place since the cultural portfolio has been added to the Ministry. So we thank you for this opportunity once again.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, all right. Thank you. And may I invite the Chairman of the Tourism Trinidad Limited to make a brief opening statement? Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Seeing that our colleagues from the Ministry of Finance spoke about the mandate, I thought that I would elaborate on the mandate in addition to looking at additional documents and policy issues that support the mandate. Really, TTL's primary function is the marketing and promotion of tourism on the island of Trinidad and all of the associated elements that allow us to market a product or an experience that is unique and that is certainly marketable and persons who are willing to pay for that experience.

Our mandate—the six outlined points in the mandate from Cabinet but I am not going to elaborate on those, I am going to talk about the documents that support it and we are fortunate to have had clear mandates from Cabinet and we have a Tourism Development Policy from 2021—2030 that clearly outlines what we are supposed to do in relation to the Government's policy with regard to the tourism development, both in Trinidad and Tobago because that is how the policy covers, both areas.

The other document that we have is the State Enterprise Performance Monitoring Manual which also guides us in terms of what we do and then finally, the strategic plan that we have for 2023 to 2025. So those are the documents that guide what we do in addition to the mandate. The mandate sets the platform and all of the other things on top of that.

So I just wanted to say that it is from that perspective that we are going to attempt to address our presentation, looking at current activities in market, current activities as it relates to product development and visitor experience, regional development for community tourism, some of the planned initiatives that we have in terms of festivals, going after the meetings and conference markets and looking at the VFR market, which is friends and relatives, and then talking about the gates that

we expect to target in terms of where those people are going to be coming from, and then the expected economic benefit to the country and how we are going to go about measuring those benefits. So that is the sort of outline that we thought we would express to you in terms of our approach to the presentation.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Hamilton. And may I suggest, as we commence our enquiry, I would like to ask of your good self, or maybe the Permanent Secretary, or you all may wish to assign responsibility at the appropriate time to respond to the queries or questions that we would seek to advance. For example, I would like to begin by asking if someone from the Tourism Trinidad Limited or the Ministry to describe for us the transition from Trinidad Development Company Limited to this company called Tourism Trinidad Limited. Give us a little understanding of this journey, a description of what has happened in this transition, what has happened and the impact that rising levels of crime in Trinidad; how has that impacted on the tourism industry particularly as it relates to visits to this country by both international and regional visitors.

So those are the two initial areas that I would like to have the company share with this Committee so we will have an understanding of where we have come from and this transition and we are dealing with your responsibility for the promotion—the marketing and promotion of the tourism product. How is crime, rising crime levels, impacting on visitors to this country, both from an international and regional perspective?

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I have been designated to respond to your question. On the issue of the transition from TDC to Tourism Trinidad Limited, I think the State took a position that TDC, as it was, had outlived its mandate. There was a report done called the Miller report that highlighted the deficiencies associated with the management of TDC and it was that report that informed the changes that Cabinet took in transitioning from TDC to TTL. I think that study was done in 2016 and I think the decision for the transition for that took place in October of 2017. All right.

The TTL is functioning with probably less than half of the employees that were original engaged in TDC. A number of the areas of responsibility that were held by the TDC were retained by the Ministry, so therefore, the management of all the beaches, all of that, those activities were retained by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts so TTL basically could focus on marketing and promotion and that is really what we do. We have no responsibility for managing of any of the assets.

So that I think gives you an overview of the transition and what is taking place and since then TTL has put in place the management structure and everything needed to continue to effectively run the organisation.

Mr. Chairman: Before you go on to the crime level, may I ask if you have the copy of the Miller report that can be made available to this Committee?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, we can certainly do so.

Mr. Chairman: Then you talk about half of employees. Can you tell us, as you are on that, what is the current complement of staff under the Tourism Trinidad Limited?

Mr. Hamilton: I think the current complement is about between 30 and 35.

Mr. Chairman: And so the Tourism Trinidad Limited would have had 70 to may be 80?

Mr. Hamilton: At some points, it was well over one hundred.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. And you mentioned, Mr. Hamilton, something about the management of our beaches being undertaken by the Ministry. As I understand it, and you need to clarify for me and the Permanent Secretary, the management of beaches in this country is not a function of National Security? Because I think that I raised a question recently about lifeguards, the Minister of National Security answered the question because that is under his assignment as the Minister of National Security. So I find it quite interesting that National Security is dealing with beaches and you have just indicated to us that the management of beaches is supposed to be a responsibility of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, which I agree with “eh”. I want to tell you I agree with that. I believe the management of beaches ought to be under the control of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. So I do not understand how it ended up in National Security. So could someone clear the air for us on this one?

Mrs. Thorne-Mora Quinones: Chair, I could answer that. So there are four beaches under the control—the physical, the infrastructure is under the control of the Ministry. That is Manzanilla, Maracas, Las Cuevas and Vessigny. The lifeguards, however, fall under the Ministry of National Security. So there is close collaboration. Other beaches, for example, Mayaro, Toco, other beaches, I think fall under the regional corporations. So the Ministry would have inherited these four beaches—Manzanilla, Las Cuevas, Maracas and Vessigny—from the old TDC. So we now have a project unit

that is responsible for managing the actual site, the infrastructure of the sites as well as other sites that came under our portfolio.

Mr. Chairman: May I ask, Madam Permanent Secretary, what is the view of the Ministry as it relates to those beaches that are under regional corporations as opposed to them falling under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts? And then the second area I wanted you to clarify as to what is the thinking of your Ministry—you mentioned lifeguards. Why this separation from lifeguards from beaches? So you are responsible for beaches but National Security is responsible for lifeguards and I am wondering why that function is not under your purview as the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. What is preventing you all from taking on that responsibility? Because there seems to be a natural synergy flowing in tourism as it relates to beaches and lifeguards. So can you share with us why this contradiction and separation? And have you made any representation for those important bodies to be under your direct control? I am talking about outside of the four beaches, because if the Tourism Trinidad Limited is an arm or an entity falling under the Ministry, I am seeing some contradictions taking place and the flow that is supposed to be taking place does not appear to be taking place. So that is why I am asking all these things for, not only my own clarification, but for the consumption and clarification of the national community.

Mrs. Thorne-Mora Quinones: Okay. So again, I could answer that. The Ministry as it stands currently, it is a small Ministry that is growing incrementally. At this current time, we also recently inherited not just those four beaches but we had like some river estates and Fort George, Lopinot, Toco, Toco with the heritage sites. So we are incrementally acquiring sites. So it is not that we have dismissed the idea of the other beaches but it cannot all be done at one time because we are small and as we acquire, we are increasing the size of our project unit.

We have started discussions with one particular beach in north Trinidad, but again it is a work in progress. So it is not that we have dismissed the idea completely but because of the rate at which we are acquiring, and at times even faster than the staffing, it is a catch-up game. So it is not that we have not considered it, it is just it will take time, we cannot do it all, it is incremental.

And with respect to the lifeguards, the lifeguards were under the Ministry in the past. However, we have like the army, the defence force, the police, the prisons, they are security and in charge of looking after, for example, defence force securing our coastline, and you know securing our property. The lifeguards were seen as being part of that, you know, security—when I say security, the protection of

our citizens. Just how the fire services are to protect, the police is to protect and serve, the lifeguards were seen as protecting the citizens. So that is why they would have been placed there in about 2016 I believe. Yes, they felt they were a better fit as part of—to protect and serve even though it is not their particular motto but it is part of the protect and serve of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Just to clarify again, did I hear Mr. Hamilton say earlier on that you have a plan, a development plan for 2021 to 2030?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, we have a draft strategic plan.

Mr. Chairman: From the 2021 to 2030 you said?

Mr. Hamilton: No, 2023.

Mr. Chairman: Or 2023.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I understand. Mr. Hamilton, could you go on to the question of crime and how crime in Trinidad and Tobago is affecting the tourism product?

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman for that question, it is rather timely because we just had a meeting last week with some of the stakeholders and these are ground-tour operators in Trinidad. These are people who take tourists on hikes, take them to the various rivers and the response that was probably—the general response is that they do not see the crime affecting the visitors. These are people that they work with who come to Trinidad, who have been to Trinidad repeatedly and they have never encountered any crime. Now there are some folks who probably, and I think depending on where they go and where they take persons, would say that persons are concerned about crime but the general consensus from that stakeholder meeting that we had last week was that they are not concerned about crime and the visitors that they are not concerned about crime. And I take it that we do have an issue with crime, it is a public menace and certainly for tourism, it is a bigger problem because it creates a perception.

However, we have been talking about how we try to deal with that outside perception of crime by using technology and we are hoping that we will be able to enter some agreement with Google whereby in terms of the search engine—if we give them content that is positive, when you google Trinidad, what comes up first are those positive things that we are saying about the country or other people are

saying about the destination. So we are looking at that in terms of how we can help to minimize the international and regional perception of crime in Trinidad. But as the stakeholders have said, they are not seeing it, it is not affecting their customers. So that is my best report on that issue.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, thank you very much. If you go to what you have submitted between pages 1 to 11, you mentioned some 70,000. Is that 70 million or 70,000? It is 70 million—am I right—\$70,542,600 spent since March 31st, 2023 to undertake the company's principal activities. Are you seeing it?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I am seeing it.

Mr. Chairman: If you look at page 10 and you look at page 2.4—yes, page 10, 2.4.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: We just wanted to get if you can give us a kind of detailed breakdown as to this sum that we are talking about, 70.5 million, how that was spent since March 31st, 2023 and you said that that was spent to undertake the company's principal activities? Can you provide this Committee with a breakdown of how this?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I can tell you but we will have the Chief Financial Officer give you more detail. I can tell you that 28 per cent of that represents payroll but she can give you a further breakdown. I would think that between 80 to 85 per cent of it was due also to marketing.

Mr. Chairman: Marketing, yes.

Ms. Austin: Okay. So I will give you broad categories. So we started off in 2018, operationalization was 1.1 million. For recurrent which is our operating expenses, salaries and staff costs being a major amount of that was 47 million. We had also marketing, recurrent, which—s well as the recurrent for operating was 0.9 million and PSIP which is primarily our capital projects, that was 21.5 million. All right. So if I go to give you a percentage, we will have 33 per cent as our capital projects and 67 per cent as recurrent marketing and recurrent expenditure.

Mr. Chairman: I find your marketing is very miniscule I see—is it 900,000, ma'am?

Ms. Austin: No, our operation first started off as a capital project, our marketing aspect, but at a point, some of our expenditure was shared with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts and

that is why that is separated as marketing. But really, the bulk of the marketing in the initial stages came from the capital projects, our company being primarily a marketing company.

Mr. Chairman: All right. As we are on that this matter, Mr. Hamilton, I just want to dovetail neatly into us getting an appreciation of the present status of the development of your marketing plan for the period April 2023 to September 2024. Can you share with us what is the status of that marketing plan?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, Mr. Chairman, we will have the CEO give you an update on that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Ms. Cupid: Thank you for your question, Mr. Chairman. In terms of the development of our marketing plan, and I would jump off from what the Chairman said earlier, we are embarking on a really strategic approach to identifying the appropriate source markets where we will be able to have our visitor arrivals be positively impacted. In terms of what we are outlining in our draft strategic plan, we are looking at markets, for example, US, Canada, that is North America, we are looking at the UK and Europe. We are also looking at Latin America and the Caribbean. So those are the three areas that we are looking at. When we break that down into the various niches, we are looking at festival development, tourism festivals, we are looking at meetings and conferences. We are also focused on VFR and diaspora. Those are critical areas that we are looking at in terms of where we target our messaging.

Now our—according to the National Tourism Policy, our tagline and our messaging speak to a destination that is always in season. So we are looking at addressing those peaks and troughs within the entire year that speaks to, you know, variations in visitor arrivals. So that is where the tourism festivals and the development of festivals will come in.

So once we have those festivals rolled out, we are developing a very detailed calendar of events. In fact, it is almost completed and that calendar of events will now be used as part of our marketing machines, to tell people these are the times you visit Trinidad, these are the times you can identify depending on what affinity or what you like to have. These are times that you can visit and, of course, we work with stakeholders to develop packages so that we can tell them these are the experiences that you can now come to Trinidad and avail yourself. So that is the type of messaging that we are looking

at, that is the type of marketing that we are looking at to ensure that we target source markets with pinpoint accuracy.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Hamilton or your CEO, between 2018 when you came into existence, 2017, 2018, you started to operate, up to 2020, and even beyond, would you be able to share with us and the public what has been the result of these marketing efforts in attracting visitors internationally and regionally to Trinidad and Tobago? So like, for example, at the end of 2018, how many visitors through your marketing programmes have arrived here and give us a breakdown. How many came from the international community, the diaspora as the CEO said earlier, how many came from the Caribbean as examples. Right. So 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, what has been the numbers involved given the thrust of your marketing campaign and promotion?

And if you can tell us too, Mr. Hamilton, how much revenues, what kind of revenues are we deriving from this product, right, international visitors, regional visitors, and do we have a foreign exchange breakdown in terms of the component? These are things that we would be interested in **having and the country would be interested in hearing.**

Mr. Hamilton: Okay, Mr. Chairman, we will seek to give you that information.

Ms. Cupid: Okay, thank you for your question, again. In terms of tourist arrivals between 2015 and 2019, the main markets where we would have seen our arrivals would have been USA, 42 per cent, Canada, 14 per cent; CARICOM and the Caribbean, 20 per cent; Europe, 14 per cent; Latin America, 7 per cent, and the rest of the world, 3 per cent. In terms of actual arrivals, we had an average per year of about 304,000. Okay. In terms of the demographic grouping, diaspora and VFR accounted for about 40 to 45 per cent I believe. Yeah. So that is the kind of trend that we are looking at. Of course after 2019/2020, you know those were anomaly years, yeah, but that is the type of visitor arrivals that we are looking at for those years. Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. May I also ask on another note, can you advise, Permanent Secretary, what is happening with the financial audited accounts for the Tourism Trinidad Limited? What has happened in 2021 thus far, 2022? Have you submitted? Are they pending? What is happening to the audited accounts for the period 2021, 2022? Because I think we have up to, from our research, we have up to 2020. I do not know if you would have submitted and we are yet to receive those submissions, that is, audited accounts for 2021 and 2022. Is there any—could you advise us?

Ms. Austin: If I may, Chairman, 2021 was completed and submitted already, 2022, a decision was taken at the board level for some important reasons to change auditors because you know there is a term within which you should have new auditors. That decision was taken and at present, we are going through all the paces and we got approval just about last week from the Ministry of Finance to proceed with our selected auditor based on our tendering process and we are now advised to hold our AGM where the announcement will be made on the selection of the auditors. Thereafter, we will continue to schedule that audit and we do not foresee us taking too long thereafter to close off that audit.

Mr. Chairman: Now you said, Madam Permanent Secretary, that it was submitted, the audited accounts for 2021. Was it submitted to the Ministry of Finance?

Ms. Austin: Yes it was.

Mr. Chairman: As corporation sole?

Ms. Austin: Yes, correct, it was.

Mr. Chairman: Can I ask corporation sole, was it submitted to the Parliament?

Ms. Mohammed: Good morning, Chair, again, thank you. Yes, it was submitted to Parliament, the 2021 audited financials by letter dated October 12th, 2022 and by email dated October 11th, 2022.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, all right. Thank you very much. We will have to search our files and make sure that we received it. So at this time, I will invite Mr. Paray to be followed by Ms. Amrita Deonarine to further our enquiry.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Chair. Good morning again, ladies and gentlemen. I have been listening to the submissions so far and in your opening statements, and this is the impression that I am getting, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, in your opening statement, you advised that you are policy directors more so for tourism than an implementation agency. So it is policies that you are creating that are to going to drive the direction of our tourism and the fact that culture is a main part of the product for tourism. Your main focus is on policy direction, not the implementation. You are responsible for a few spaces, performing spaces, Naparima Bowl and four beaches. Right and then the TTL says that, you know, you too are generating the market, getting that experience package for sale, for that 300,000 people on average that come to Trinidad and Tobago each year.

Now I am the MP for Mayaro and tourism is a big component of our local economy down there and I have wondered in the past why the Ministry—and back then was TDC and now it is TTL. The regional corporations are given this mandate to manage infrastructure but when you look at the virements under tourism in these budgets, you get anywhere between \$150,000 to \$200,000 a year. When you have a space like Mayaro—and forgive me for just using that as the example because I am extremely familiar—we have over 16 local tourism sites, inclusive of beaches, the Nariva Swamp, we have mud volcanos, we have a saltwater lake which all can be packaged as part of this tourism infrastructure.

So I am wondering when you have allocations in the national budget at 0.2 per cent one year of the national budget for tourism, 0.1 per cent, 0.7 per cent, 0.1 per cent, when you look at what we are giving to tourism, my question to both agencies, both the Ministry and TTL: Is that a hindrance to where you would like to be in terms of our tourism product? The fact that neither of you all seem to be an implementation agency in terms of infrastructure and so on and we are depending on regional corporations. Because you come to Mayaro and you cannot find a washroom on a beach in Mayaro in 2023. You have heard of Church Road, you have heard of the Sea Wall, you have heard of Indian Bay, you have heard of Ortoire Bay. But how much of that 300,000 people that are coming each year, going to these places and they have to change their underwear in the mangrove? And that is a real issue.

Because I will get messages on messenger for Easter, people who are planning to come to Trinidad and say “MP, we improve anything as yet?” and when you call the regional corporations, why are we not doing more?, “Well, we are not getting the funding”. So I feel there is a disconnect somewhere and I guess what I want to get from you is if that is something that you are aware of as a hindrance. Because if we are pushing tourism, tourism—the final product of a secured tourism environment is employment, small business creation, putting people to work, again, the sale of the experience is to put money into the pockets of the people in these communities.

But if that 300,000 people who are coming are only going to those four or five spaces that is under your control, which I doubt very much, but they are coming to Toco, to Moruga, to Mayaro which are suffering the same type of issues, that cannot be working for your agenda, in your policy to make sure you are delivering on Cabinet and the State’s expectation at the end of the day. Is that a hindrance? Is that something that you are aware of? If you are aware of it, is it something that you

are making headway in renegotiating some sort of arrangement with the State to capture that, if you want to call it your domestic tourism market, whereas I am hearing a more focus on that international 300,000 that is coming and I do believe our domestic tourism market is probably four or five times the value of what may be coming in from our international markets. So I just want to get some feedback if those things are in your circle of consideration and if it is being addressed in any way.

Mrs. Thorne-Mora Quinones: Through you, Chair, I will answer. Okay, so I would have mentioned the fact that—I would have said earlier that we are a small organisation that is incrementally growing. So we have taken into consideration Trinidad as a whole, the infrastructure, and the beaches. But not just that, right now, we have been focusing on other sites that could be used for domestic tourism, and by extension, and then, the international. We have here Las Lapas, Los Iros Volcanic Park, Fort Abercromby Heritage Park, Lopinot. We acquired Lopinot. So I could—there is a whole list I mean I would not go through the whole list here. All right.

Apart from that, we have invested considerable sums of money—we have been investing considerable sums and maybe I gave the wrong impression when I said that we are policy. Yes we are policy but we are also in charge of the management of the beaches and these other sites that I have been calling. Considerable sums, I cannot give you all the figures here right now but we could give as to how much have been and we will be requesting in the new fiscal year to upgrade Manzanilla for example that would have been washed away by a flood about two years ago, right, so it was reopened recently, we spent considerable funds. So we are taking into consideration sites that are all over under the regional corporations but as I said, it is incremental. We look at the size of the organisation and it is increasing.

But apart from the physical infrastructure as we go more and more throughout Trinidad, Mr. Gift here, you could speak on our sustainable tourism—our community base product tourism training for the—yeah. So he is going to speak a little more on a programme that will be involved in all the communities, starting off again incrementally. We launched it late last year but we will be doing and I believe Mayaro is maybe one of these—anyway, you speak.

Mr. Gift: Good morning, again everyone. As part of the Ministry's thrust towards the development of specific niches, we have been involved in community-based training for particular communities. So as the PS would have mentioned, we would have undertaken a community-based training workshop with the community of Lopinot and this workshop took place over a three-day period. We also have earmarked for other training workshops, other communities. We are in the process now of making

arrangements for community-based training in Paramin and there are also other discussions to be held with other regions and by way of regional corporations to have community-bases training in those communities. So I think we have also earmarked for training the Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite region and this would take place later in this fiscal.

Mr. Paray: I want to ask this as well, historically, you know as a child growing up, you would hear on the radio about Amral's Travel and you know they will be inviting tourists from all over the world to come to Trinidad and, I mean, you ask anybody in Port of Spain or San Fernando, aye, let us go for a weekend somewhere, it is either they talk Tobago or they head Mayaro, probably to a lesser extent Moruga and perhaps somewhere in Toco for those who like, you know, the gliding and surfing and so on.

So you know I am hearing of all these sites that you are focusing and these community training and so on. And when you look at the type of infrastructure, I am just amazed that you know, historically over, the last 20-odd years, Mayaro has not been a focus and we have 17 miles of beachfront, you know, five open beach spaces that are available for the development for safe bathing zones. We have the swamp, you have your eco-tourism, you know, and yet you tell somebody, look, we are going for a weekend somewhere, "geh ah house in Mayaro". I mean Easter weekend, if you try to find a room in Mayaro for any weekend from now until Christmas, you are not going to get any. But yet the infrastructure, if we are serious, you know, low-energy pricing environment, you know, we have a depletion of our foreign exchange and yet, you know, some places that have the historical significance.

I remember reading one of the books done by the gentleman who was involved with Amral's Travel, you know, he sold this story about Mayaro being the gateway to Atlantis. You know that beach, you know, you wake up on that eastern side of the island and the sun takes you at quarter to six in the morning, you have this experience, and we are not selling our stories, you know. We have, as I said, 16 sites. We found that warm saltwater lake up in Poole Valley since 2017 and it is probably one in the—you cannot find that anywhere else in the Caribbean but yet, you know nothing seems to be done from that domestic market and I am hearing everything about the international market for TTL that you are focusing on but I am wondering why is there—if you say it is started but I think it is a bit slow because it is a market that people have money.

I mean we have every Sunday you look at the Sunday Express and you look at cash balances in the commercial banks, there is liquidity in excess of \$6 to \$9 billion and if you are not creating spaces for

people to take that money out of the banking system and getting it into Mayaro and Moruga and Toco and get it into the beach houses and all the other auxiliary services for our local domestic market, we cannot have the multiplier effect of that money circulating.

So I have reviewed quite a bit of the questions, the documentation that you sent. I mean I see the importance of the job that you have to do, it is not an easy task. The country is looking at tourism as a bailout for us in terms of economic space. So perhaps in your conversation at the state level, at the Cabinet level, at the investment level, perhaps you ought to be asking for more and if you tell us what are those challenges in getting more, when we put our report together, we can make a solid case for you with the hope that focusing on the domestic side as well, we can really deliver on the commitment of churning the local economies in these local communities, getting these facilities going, putting our young people to work.

And I will tell you this, eh. Mayaro has a unique feature in terms of financing because unlike other areas Toco, Moruga, which have small beaches, we have long expanse but we have two financing agencies outside of the commercial banks. You have MIPED and you have the credit unions, both capitalizing hundreds of millions of dollars just waiting for young people to get their SMEs going and I am saying if TTL or the Ministry can focus a little more in getting these ideas outside there, getting the infrastructure going and encourage our young people to get involved in the business, I think we can start solving some of that problem in terms of unemployment, getting our youth focused back in business and I think you have a huge task, it is a herculean task but I do not think it is impossible.

So just from reading the documentation, I did not see that part of that domestic tourism drive and hopefully going forward it is something that you could probably tell us where we are heading in those areas and what are your challenges so we can put it appropriately in our report going forward back to the Minister and the Ministry at the end of the day.

Mr. Gift: Just to mention that the Ministry would have had initial discussions with the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation late last year to look at some of the opportunities with regard to the development of tourism in the region. These discussions are ongoing and it is envisaged that we will be able to have some further clarity or solutions with regard to some of the issues that currently plague the Mayaro/Rio Claro region. We hope to have further discussions and to address some of the concerns that you would have raised.

Mr. Paray: I just have one area just to ask again, Mr. Chairman and then I pass on to the other member. In terms of the concept of—I think National Geographic has a huge programme on geotourism where they look at the ABCs, your abiotic and biotic and cultural offerings at the community level. Is that something that T'TL has looked at? I saw in the documentation you have had some work with National Geographic in terms of I think the travellers' programme that they have, but taking in the fact that geotourism has both a sustainable impact opportunity where you can manage where people go without destroying one beach, you can spread them across the island.

But the fact is that you know you can look at that asset in terms of—in Mayaro, in Kernahan, we have a mango orchard which you cannot find anywhere else on the island. How do we get that as part of a biotic product in terms of having something for the experience? Has geotourism been part of your mandate in terms of the ABCs of tourism to get our domestic part of the tourism—start moving people moving cash, you know, into communities on weekends, during holidays. Is that something that you are looking at, at this time?

Mr. Hamilton: Member Paray, we are looking at it and I appreciate the comments that you have raised about Mayaro. Everything that you have said, I know, I am aware of and I agree with you, I totally agree with you. That comes down to an issue of resources. It is not that it is not policy because if you read the National Tourism Policy document, it clearly outlines the five regions for which we are going to focus on development and Mayaro is one of those five regions. So I think, as the PS said, we have been slow in terms of getting the funding up and running. I do not think it is for lack of ideas because I think we know what Mayaro is. I mean it is a destination of—one of a kind in terms of the spread and the abundance of experiences you could get in Mayaro. So I think that is really where we probably need help in terms of saying we need to put more funding to ensure that these things happen and we will speak to that in terms of the economic benefits and the measurements because that is one of the things we are looking at going forward.

We have targeted to get 500,000 visitors to Trinidad by 2025 and we are saying in order to achieve that, this is the funding levels we need to achieve that, but that also takes into account that we put in place all of the other infrastructure things, because that is what we are selling, we are selling this experience. Right and we are hopeful that that would happen that we could make a sound case, a business case that the funding would be forthcoming because we really want to see tourism spread throughout the island. That is where the real benefits take place. Right. So we totally support your view and we welcome any support that you can give us in terms of getting additional funding. Right?

Mr. Paray: Absolutely.

Mr. Hamilton: Okay.

Mr. Paray: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member Deonarine.

11.15 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Deonarine.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you, Chair. Good morning again everyone. I have been following the conversation so far, and on the subject of collaboration, the Ministry of Tourism collaborating, and TTL collaborating with the regional corporations, from what I understand so far; based on member Paray's issue that you raised with Mayaro/Rio Claro. Is this part of the plan to continue to be collaborating with regional corporations? And if that is so, now, I am very well aware that regional corporations also have an equally challenging problem that you all have as well; they do not have sufficient resources. So, when you have this discussion with the regional corporations and identify the things that need to be done to create that tourism product from the infrastructural level, what is being done to take the discussion further with, let us say the Ministry of Works and transport, with the Ministry of Public utilities and all these inter-ministerial collaboration that is required to generate or to produce that tourism product to give you that momentum so that you can produce that product that tourists are looking for when they come to Trinidad and Tobago?

Ms. Thorne-Mora Quinones: Okay. Thank you for the question. So that collaboration is already taking place. As we acquire sites, we have been engaging the attention. We have been writing, calling, begging, and pleading the different Ministries, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the drainage division, the utilities, WASA, T&TEC. So that collaboration has already started and it will intensify as we acquire more and more sites.

Ms. Deonarine: Now, PS I am hearing what you are saying, and you are saying that you all are gradually acquiring spaces, taking charge of it. The progress is incremental. But as far as I am concerned, through you, Mr. Chair, as long as I know myself, a Ministry of Tourism has been in existence. So my question then is: How come progression is now taking place? I am trying to understand, because every year there is an allocation towards tourism. Let us take the pandemic out of it right. Prior to the pandemic, every year there has been allocation towards tourism in the country,

and why is it that we are now talking about gradually picking up momentum into acquiring spaces and packaging spaces and addressing the challenges that we as citizens of the country know that tourism face when we go to the beaches, or when we travel abroad and we see how something as simple as a teak field could be packaged into such a beautiful revenue generating tourist attraction? Why is this momentum now taking place?

Ms. Thorne-Mora Quinones: The country has realized, finally realized the potential of the tourism product, the tourism service, the tourism sector. So there is now an impetus to do what.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. So, then this takes me to the strategic. Now, I see that you all have a strategic plan for the period, is it 2019 to 2023? And then one is currently being developed up to 2025? Is that correct?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, the 2019, that plan was basically aborted because of Covid, because we could not have implemented a lot of the issues in that plan. But the new plan that is now being proposed is 2023 to 2025.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. So the plan for 2020 to 2023, I saw 316,000 was spent to develop the strategic plan. And then now for 2023 to 2025, a consultant is being engaged at the cost of \$248,000. Now, my question is, and I am directing this question to the Ministry of Tourism: Why is the completion or the generating of the strategic plan being done external from the Ministry of Tourism and not necessarily with TTTL and the Ministry of Tourism?

Ms. Thorne-Mora Quinones: The strategic plan we are referring to is TTL's strategic plan.

Ms. Deonarine: Right, but a consultant was procured. But why? Why is it not being done in-house? Because we have sufficient expertise within TTTL and I am sure, within the Ministry of Tourism, and your experience with your –cross-collaboration and exactly what the tourism product should be going forward, how come we are not using our human resources within the Ministry of Tourism and TTTL to capitalize on the expertise to develop the strategic plan? Because I do not think anyone else understands what the tourism product should be and how it should be marketed and promoted, and how it should be—how indicators should be developed to achieve growth in tourism, economic growth, and foreign exchange generation in tourism. I do not think anybody else understands that more than the Ministry of Tourism and the experts within the TTTL. So my question is: Why are we sending 248 million to procure a consultant to do this work? 248,000, sorry.

Mr. Hamilton: Member Deonarine, the reasons for having the consultant is to ensure that the consultant serves as a facilitator. Because in developing the strategic plan, we have to bring in stakeholders; all of the hoteliers, all of the ground-tour operators, all of the other ancillary providers of tourism services, because our industry is so fragmented, and we need to get consensus. So, that is the reason. That really and truly is the role that the consultant plays. He is an independent broker in dealing with all these various interest groups. Because we do have a lot of interest groups that, in some cases are very fractured. And it is probably better that you hire someone from the outside to facilitate that process. So, all of the stuff that we came up with, in terms of the target market that was as a result of ongoing consultation with the stakeholders. Do we go after this market segment? Do we go after that market segment? Do we go after the north-east? Do you go after Europe? Where in Europe do we go? If we go to Germany, where in Germany do we go? All of those things were a result of consultation with the stakeholders, which was navigated by that consultant. I do not think that we could have done that in-house and gotten the same type of results. Because you needed an independent broker. And that was really part of the real reason for it being done; not to say that the technical knowledge is not housed in the Ministry and in TTL. But I think from the standpoint of buy in, that an independent broker facilitated the process better.

Ms. Deonarine: I would like you to further elaborate on that. Because I do not understand how an independent person coming in can capitalize on buy in from stakeholders more than you can.

Mr. Hamilton: No, it is that the consultant navigates the process. They facilitate the process of getting information. So there was a series of consultations that went on before we came up with the plan. And that was his role, to basically work through all of the many questions and all of the ideas that were put forward and basically getting to the substance of it.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. So then, based on what you are saying, can you tell me whether it is the consultant or is it a team effort amongst—

Mr. Hamilton: No, it is a team effort.

Ms. Deonarine: Amongst yourself, the Ministry of Tourism, the consultant, other Ministries, to come up with these strategic outcomes that you all are trying to achieve through this strategic plan?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Ms. Deonarine: Is it a—

Mr. Hamilton: It is a collaborative effort. We involved airlines. We involved hoteliers. We involved ground tour operators. We involved the Ministry. We involved those persons that we thought were relevant to the plan.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. So then tell me, through you Chair, tell how do you, in this strategic plan, come up with indicators to measure your return on investment? Because member Mark, the Chairman, asked a question earlier on how much your activities and programmes and promotions? It is about, let us say 5 million in 2020, according to your statement of expenses that has been spent on PSIP programmes, publicity, promotions, printing, and so on. How is that translating to a return on investment on an annual basis for this country; so that we can say, maybe five years from now, we can be in a position where we could say that: You know what? International tourism receipts as a percentage of total exports had increased from 2.34 per cent in 2020, the year that COVID had hit, and recovered to 5 per cent of total exports prior to COVID 19.

So, tell me how are you coming up with these indicators to measure a return on investment? Because remember, at the end of the day what we are trying to do is develop a sector that would bring in foreign exchange, that would help us to diversify the economy, so that we are not solely reliant on the energy sector. We have some money that we are getting from tourism. We have some money that we are getting from non-energy manufacturing. So, that is what I am trying to understand: How is this strategic plan being developed to ensure that we have a return on investment that can accrue to us translating and saying that we have increased our contribution to total exports in terms of foreign exchange?

Mr. Hamilton: Okay. We have certain things that we use in the industry to measure the impact of what takes place from a marketing standpoint. There is usually a three year gestation period, from when you put your marketing programme out there, to when you start to see a return on that investment. And what we look at is, we look at length of stay. We look at the average visitor spend. And those are parameters that we use. So, for example, in Trinidad between 2015 and 2019, the average length of stay was 13 days. The average visitor spend for that five year period was TT \$7,433 or US \$1,093. So that gives you an idea of what the spend was, based on the number of visitors.

And then we also take into consideration room tax, which is 10 per cent; VAT, which is another 12 per cent. That gives us—so, we start then looking at the total contribution to GDP. For example, what we have projected for 2023 to 2025 is total revenue receipts of US \$429million, with total arrival

of 388,000 visitors. Direct contribution to GDP is 2.8 per cent. GDP contribution multiplier impact is 7.8 per cent; employment contribution direct is 17,500 jobs at 2.8 per cent of labour force; employment contribution multiplier is 52,700 jobs. So, we have basically mapped out what we expect to get from this investment.

Ms. Deonarine: Right. So, this is excellent. This is exactly what I wanted to hear. I wanted to hear like exactly how we are going about doing the forecasting to understand what it is we are trying to achieve.

Now, I understand that. But in your submission you also indicated that you all both the Permanent Secretary and chairman, you indicated that you all have severe challenges when it comes to resources; both on the human resource side and also on the budgeting side in terms of releases.

So, correct me if I am wrong, because I am seeing some confused faces. Okay, all right. So, from a releases standpoint, from the annual budget, do you all receive all of your allocations and has there been a pattern of receiving all of the allocations so that you all can meet, work towards achieving this. Because the targets that you setting, Mr. Chairman, most respectfully, are targets based on the fact that you receive the amount of allocations that you request?

Mr. Hamilton: You are correct. You are absolutely correct.

Ms. Deonarine: Right. And if you do not receive these allocations that you very well request, and I have been here for almost five years now, and almost 99 per cent of the time every Ministry that comes before us do not receive the amount of allocation in releases. Tell me, how is this going to affect achieving these objectives and these targets that you have set? And how are you going to work around it, or what we here as a committee can do to assist? Because telling us one thing to plead with the Minister to give your releases is one thing, but we also have to think about alternative scenarios or alternative policy, alternative ideas or actions to work around the challenge. Because it is a problem and cash flow would continue to be a problem.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much for your comments on that. We recognize that there are a lot of things that we do not control in tourism, because of what it is. It is susceptible to market shifts. It is susceptible to airlift issues. If an airline decides to pull that out tomorrow and reduce the number flights into Port of Spain that is something we have no control over. That can impact the numbers severely.

Disruption in the marketplace, if a major marketplace has disruption that could affect the outflow of traffic. And then, untimely releases. Point well taken. If we do not get timely releases we are put into a dilemma, because we have to plan, in some cases three to six months out. Because if we are going to go to a show in Europe, the further out we plan, we are guaranteed to deal with pricing issues. Because if we are going to Germany and the ticket we get a price today, let us say it is \$2,500, and we do not buy that ticket, in a month's time that same ticket could be US \$3,700. So, the planning horizon is critical for us. And that could only be done if we have releases.

So what happens is, the closer it gets to the date of activity, the price could more than double, triple in some cases. So, that is why it is critical. So even with us planning for the resources, we have to end up using it somewhere else because we were not able to get it in time so other things suffer. So, for us, the most critical element is being able to get releases well in advance, so that we can actually make commitments.

Ms. Deonarine: Thank you so much. PS, are you able to say what you are doing on your end to ensure that the issue of releases is more timely, so that we do not end up in this problem where, you know, it is really difficult? Or do you have these targets on a strategic plan that now becomes a moving target, because of this challenge of, one challenge of resources and releases of resources?

Ms. Thorne-Mora Quinones: One of the reason's we get late releases has to do with the submissions. One of the issues we have is, we have a lot of new stuff at TTL. We have a lot of staff movement at the Ministry. So, simple as that may sound, the Budget Division, Ministry of Finance, there are specific templates. So, what I have been spending a lot of time doing is training the officers to do the submissions correctly, sufficient justification. Basically that is it; the process, getting your quotations, simple things like that; how you present. So I have done a lot of training. I actually brought in persons for training for proposal writing; presenting your document in a way that is persuasive language. So a lot of time is spent on that. So that when it goes down to the Budget Division it does not come back. In all honesty, we have had a lot of that. They keep sending back, "we do not understand, why I need this, what information." They are doing their job, the control/the monitoring part. So, that we spend a lot of time. We have been working very closely with TTL. It is a young staff.

The submissions that go down, they go down in the more acceptable format, the more acceptable template. So that releases hopefully would start being more timely in the future. We have had a lot of investment and meetings with Budgets Division officers as to what they require from us.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. Thank you PS. Chair, if you allow me, there is one area that I want to—okay.

In your responses, you all made mention of the Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Project. And when COVID 19 had hit, this was one of the programmes that was announced to help mitigate the challenges that the tourism industry was encountering from the southern stock in both domestic and global activity. Well borders were closed, so we had no tourists arriving. But I saw that you all basically prepared for almost 23 applications, but received only nine. Is that correct? Is it nine or seven?

Mr. Hamilton: I would let Ms. Marsha Mobhair answer that question. She can respond to that question.

Ms. Mobhair: Good morning member. Thank you for your question. Just to clarify, I believe it is two separate programmes you would be referring to. So the first one, as you rightly said, the Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Project that speaks to providing an incentive for the upgrade of accommodation properties with one to 150 guest rooms.

With respect to the 23 applications, that falls under the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Industry Certification Programme. So there is a little discrepancy there, in terms of how you classify the 23 under TAUP. So I just wanted to clarify that. There is a relationship between the two however, in that the objective of the TAUP is to really bring properties up to what we call the international standard, which falls under our national standard on which the TTIC programme, the certification programme is based. So, with respect to the applications, we had originally targeted 23 applicants to be certified under the TTIC programme, but we would have received nine complete applications and audit under that programme.

Ms. Deonarine: And why is that?

Ms. Mobhair: For various reasons. One, coming out of COVID, of course, the investment or funding required for properties. Because TTIC includes tour operators, tour guides, tourism taxi drivers and accommodation properties. And, of course, the meet the standard there will be sitting certain things you would have to put in place, whether it be equipping the property or whatever facility

they operate, statutory approvals; all these things to put in place. So, therefore, that was one of the reasons why it could have been a challenge for some of them to access.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. So, is this certification programme still ongoing?

Ms. Mobhair: CEO, I would defer to you on that question.

Ms. Deonarine: As part of the PSIP?

Ms. Cupid: The certification programme is ongoing, yes it is. We would have had two hotels in south. I think it is Cara Suites and Royal Hotel. They would have received or achieved TTIC certification last week. So, it is something that we are looking at rolling out. Because when you have visitors, both domestic and international, they want to ensure, they want to be able to experience a certain standard of service delivery, a certain standard, in terms of their accommodation property.

So, that is what Ms. Mobhair was talking about in terms of the two programmes being linked. You must achieve or attain TTIC certification to qualify for the Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Programme. Otherwise, it is not afforded to you. Yeah? And those two properties as well they would have entered the TAUP programme and we have other properties coming on board. To that end, we also engaged in or started rolling out a marketing programme related to the TAUP programme. Because we feel that persons need to get more information on the benefits of the programme, and we want to increase the uptake, and so on so, that our accommodation sector can attain a certain standard, and certain international standard.

Ms. Deonarine: Tell me something, is it, rather than in addition to sharing additional information on the programme, is it at all the mandate, or part of the plan to target specific places that you have identified that could very well benefit from it, and so on?

Ms. Cupid: You are speaking to regions or target specific properties?

Ms. Deonarine: Like specific properties or specific tour operators, and so on.

Ms. Cupid: I would let Ms. Mobhair respond to you.

Ms. Mobhair: Sure, with respect to the targeting of properties, TAUP specifically caters for small to medium size hotels and guests houses and bed and breakfast properties. As I mentioned, any accommodation property located within Trinidad and Tobago. Although TTL retains responsibility slowly for Trinidad, with one to 150 guest rooms.

So, what we would normally do is, of course, target properties that we are aware of, that fall within this range and definitely provide assistance and guidance towards them accessing the TAUP incentive.

Ms. Deonarine: And how has the feedback been?

Ms. Mobhair: The feedback has been quite good, with respect to the second category in terms of six to 150 guest rooms. So the incentive is broken up into two.

With respect to the one to five guest room category, however, we have not had applicants within that specific grouping. And again, due to funding issues and also sometimes lack of statutory approvals such as Town and Country Planning. What happens is TAUP is a reimbursement grant incentive. And, therefore, persons are required to put out the money upfront before they apply for the reimbursement. So, that sometimes can be a challenge if they do not have access to that financing.

Ms. Deonarine: And, based on your targeting so far, and potential persons who are interested in this incentive programme, how much of them have you seen not meeting the necessary requirements to benefit from this incentive programme? Because that is an interesting thing that you have raised, because many of them do not have the necessary Town & Country approvals. I am trying to get an essence of how many or what percentage?

Ms. Mobhair: I would say the majority of those who approach us would possess the necessary requirements. Maybe just a few out of the lot, in terms of Town & Country planning, or the second requirement that possess a challenge sometimes is that the properties must be at least four years in operation. So, that is another issue that is sometimes raised. But I would say it is on the minority side, in terms of those with those issues.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. PS, I have one last question to you. Thank you so, much Ms. Mobhair.

Ms. Mobhair: Mobhair, you are welcome.

Ms. Deonarine: PS, now TTL was formed as a result of—in lieu of TDC. What I am trying to understand is, of course, when TDC came to an end, there would have been some challenges or some lessons learnt that you would have acquired from TDC that you will, of course, take across to TTL and try to address. My question is: What are some of these challenges or lessons learnt, and how do you intend to address these challenges going forward?

Ms. Thorne-Mora Quinones: I would let Chair address that question.

Ms. Deonarine: Sure.

Mr. Hamilton: I think the main messages that were learnt from TDC could be one of management. And if you were to get an opportunity to read the Miller's the report, okay—we are going to make sure that you get it. The Miller's report outlined what were some of the operational challenges with TDC. And that gave rise to a whole lot of other issues within the company.

In terms of accountability, in terms of the levels of reporting, in terms of just share lack of leadership, coupled with poor management practices. All of those things, I think overtime, just culminated and basically made the organisation ineffective the most part.

Ms. Deonarine: So, the lessons learnt going forward is to ensure—

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, proper management

Ms. Deonarine: Accountability.

Mr. Hamilton: Oversight.

Ms. Deonarine: Okay. All right, Chair, I would stop there.

Mr. Paray: Thank you I just wanted to follow up two things from what Sen. was asking a little while ago. Is there any formal policing of our tourism asset, in terms of beach houses, guest houses? Is there a policing component of the mandate of the tourism Ministry or TTL to make sure that we get the standards in place? Or is it up to those who come forward to ask for the certification that there is a business advantage for them versus the others? Whereas, if you have a policing mechanism—they say if you want to get into the industry you must meet certain basic standards of offering. Is that something that the Ministry or TTL is looking at or doing?

Ms. Thorne-Mora Quinones: I will ask Ms. Mobhair to respond.

Mr. Paray: Sure.

Ms. Mobhair: Thank you Vice Chairman. So, with respect to the use of the term policing, I would say no, because TTL does not have that enforcement mandate in terms of ensuring that these properties must be registered or licensed, so to speak, at this particular point in time. However, we do look quick properties. We work with all interested persons who would like to open up accommodation spaces within Trinidad, to guide them as to the requirements, and that is on a national

level, legal and statutory approvals, as well as we provide them with the national standard, or at least how to access it. So, at least they are guided us to how to establish and run their operations.

Mr. Paray: But do you think if that is something that can be mandated, it lists the entire industry and that our final product has some consistency across the board? Because one of the challenges that I would find as an MP as well, when we had the cut away in Manzanilla last year, and we lost quite a bit of traffic into Mayaro, the guest house owners and the hotels would say, well, MP, when there are issues in Tobago there is compensation. We do not get anything here. And the first question I would: Are you registered with the agencies that looked after tourism? Because only at that time we can have an idea what is your business volume, your profile, what is the compensation that we can provide in the interim, if we know the data? But I am saying that it is difficult to improve the industry if I am going to pay \$1,500 a night to go into a beach house, and when I get there, there is no water, you smell woodlice all over the place. So, it turns me away from coming back to the area, even though there may be a few places that are certified, and you will really get the best experience possible. But it stifles the industry.

In terms of our proposal going forward, if your agency, or if through the Ministry, get a bit or more mandate legislatively, if you want to get into that industry, before you can even go and put a classified ad in the newspaper, you must have a minimum requirement to make sure when somebody spends their money, especially part of that 388,000 people that are coming. Some will end up in Toco, Manzanilla, Mayaro, Moruga; that there must be a standard across the board, in terms of the quality of the place, the housing, the bedrooms. Is that something that would make your job easier, in terms of lifting the industry for us in this critical period that we heading into the next five or 10 years, as we try to diversify Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Chairman: Who would you like to answer that question?

Mr. Paray: Anyone, either the Ministry or TTL; anybody who—

Ms. Cupid: I will take the question. It is something that will improve or make our jobs easier. Because we want to be able, without a shadow of a doubt, to say that this list of properties met a certain criteria. So, right now it is voluntary. Okay? Ms. Mobhair spoke about TAUP and TTIC. If you want to access TTAUP you have to have the TTIC certification.

However, outside of that, it is really a voluntary programme. If it was something that was legislated, that if you have to offer your rooms to guests, whether domestic or international, that you must meet a minimum requirement or else you cannot operate, or else you can be shut down, then that is something that would make over jobs easier. They do it in other Caribbean islands, other jurisdictions, so it is something that would help us immensely. Because when we do our marketing, and I spoke earlier about packaging, and so on, we want to ensure that what we are putting together, even outside of accommodation providers, tour operators, tour guides, tourist transport. We went to ensure that these persons who are providing this service on behalf of the definition, that they meet a minimum standard or criteria. So, yes. The answer is yes.

Mr. Paray: Do you have an idea of the total amount you—I think you have a fair idea from the hotel side of it, 10, 15, 20 rooms, and so on, for those big organisations. But I would ask TTL if you have an idea of the amount of what you call these private beach houses or guesthouses that operate in Trinidad and Tobago? Do you have a feel of that number and what percentage may actually have the certification?

Mr. Hamilton: Member, I would say that most of the small, like beach houses that you are describing, those persons would not have any sort of certification. The majority of them would fall into that category of not being certified.

I think, and I am going to go here, because I think it is something that we probably need to be aware of. Air B&B has come on the scene. Air B&B has added, if you go to their website, they now have more rooms listed on their website than we have rooms—traditional hotel rooms.

Mr. Paray: Yes.

Mr. Hamilton: Now, because of their business model, they have some advantages in that if you get three strikes you are gone. All right? So, that is a sort of quality control element in terms of the delivery of their experience. You are saying, listen we are going to put you on our website. You are making these promises to the customer. If the customer comes to your property and these things are not in place, he is going to write you up and it goes on their website and they see the ratings and if your ratings drop three times in a row you are gone.

Now, that works for them because that is an electronic platform. I think in our case that could be achieved, because most customers today are very much in tune with the electronic world. And I think

it is something that we are going to look at going forward, rather than trying to deal with everything with a piece of paper, even in using an app, that the customer could probably give us feedback in terms of the quality of her place. So, people self-regulate, rather than us trying to use the big stick. We can say to the guy, listen, we have gotten three complaints about your property and we have you on our website. We are promoting you. Listen, we are going to have to take you off the website. I am sorry. Until you improve, you just cannot be on the website, because you are basically affecting the overall quality of the destination.

Mr. Paray: Do you think that—I, know the fact that a lot of these guesthouses and beach houses they operate under the radar for a number of reasons, tax purposes, and so, on. But it creates a whole world of other problems in terms of policing.

The Mayaro police tries to do patrols and they make an observation and they cannot find an owner, there is no record of the owner of the house. They see two doors broken into, Saturday night, but they do not have a number to call. We have tried to create databases in the constituency for people to register, so the policeman would know who owns what. And that lack of data is really stifling that whole holistic approach of making your community a safe community to invite. We want 5,000 to 8,000 people to Mayaro every weekend rather than only for Easter.

The fact that the policing of the industry to me is so weak it is hard to do the other things. I really feel if we ought to want to drive tourism as a real backbone for Trinidad. I mean, I know Tobago is much more advanced in a lot of areas than us here. But it may require a bit of policing, licensing.

Change is hard. We like everything the easy way. But if we want to create an industry that is going to be world class—and you know five/10 years down the road we reengineer our ports in Galeota to dock two cruise ships. We need to have our places at a standard for these 3,000 people that are going to be coming off one of that cruise ship and getting a world class experience as well.

So, in terms of planning five, 10, 15 years going down the road, I really feel that is something that in your internal discussion ought to come up. I am sure we are going to put a bit of writing in our report as well, in terms of that being a consideration to really strengthen the industry, taking note of the importance of it, for us as a small island developing State going forward. So, Chair that is my comment on that. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hamilton, the consultants that were engaged for the strategic plan who were they?

Mr. Hamilton: I think the first consultant was PriceWaterhouse as a group. The second was RES Consultant.

Mr. Chairman: What? Please repeat.

Mr. Hamilton: R E S Consultant.

Mr. Chairman: R-E-S.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Who are they? What is that, RES? I do not know what is that. Who are the directors or owners of this?

Mr. Hamilton: I can tell who the principal consultant is. His name is Francis Lewis.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. And what is his claim to fame?

Mr. Hamilton: Harvard-educated MBA. Wharton School of Business Undergraduate Degree in Business. Over, I think, 25 to 30 years' experience in management. Former lecturer, I think, of Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business.

Mr. Chairman: All right, I just wanted to ask; not so much the name of the individual. But what was the procurement process used to both deal with your first strategic plan when PriceWaterhouseCoopers worn out, and your second strategic plan, when the group that you just mentioned won out? What was the procurement process? Was it a sole select process, or was it a competitive tendering process?

Mr. Hamilton: I think the one, the initial one from records that I saw, because I can only refer to records, was that that went out for bid. Right. I think the one with regard to RES was a sole select.

Mr. Chairman: Why? Mr. Hamilton, how long have you been Chairman?

Mr. Hamilton: I have been Chairman since 2022.

Mr. Chairman: You recently arrived on the compound.

Mr. Hamilton: On the compound.

Mr. Chairman: So, when this last individual or group was engaged, you were there?

Mr. Hamilton: I was.

Mr. Chairman: Now, you can provide us with details—

Mr. Hamilton: I would be able to that.

Mr. Chairman:—of this process?

Mr. Hamilton: Mmm-hmm.

Mr. Chairman: Now, the other thing I; want to ask the Permanent Secretary: Is there a fast, or a heavy turnover of staff at both the TTL as well as the Ministry of Tourism? Because you keep talking about training and retraining in terms of getting people to draw up proper proposal to persuade the Ministry, the Budget Division. I do not know if it is a question you have to retrain people so often, because so many people are leaving the Ministry or TTL. So I am not too sure.

Ms. Thorne-Mora Quinones: I could speak about the Ministry. Well persons are leaving because the public service, by nature, is very really fluid. Persons are appointed today, they are acting tomorrow somewhere. It is fluid. That is just how it is, a lot of persons. The contracts persons are fairly stable.

Mr. Chairman: Could you provide us in writing what has been the experience between the period 2018 to the present time, as it relates to those persons who have come, when I say persons you know we have offices. You have titles of offices. How many persons in X area have come in, home many have left, and what has the Ministry been doing to address this situation?

I know as you rightly said, Madam Permanent Secretary, you have this challenge within the public service. It is a fluid situation. And I wanted to ask: What percentage of your staff is on contract and what percentage are public officers.

Ms. Thorne-Mora Quinones: Okay. I would have to put that in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Put that in writing. And Mr. Hamilton, could you share with us what is the situation with you? When I say with you, with TTL, as it relates to the flow of staff? What has been the experience between 2018 to the current time? Who many? I am hearing that you have had some crises as it relates to critical office holders. The last CEO as an example how do you leave? Could you explain to us? Because I understand there was some, and there are some other critical

officeholders that have left. Could you share that with us, given your experiences 2022? Or could you put it in writing, as it relates to what has happened like in the Ministry of Tourism between 2018 to 2022? What has happened with your key staffers, who have gone, who have come.

Mr. Hamilton: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: And what is the reason for going, what is the reason for coming. So, at least we can have an idea.

Mr. Hamilton: Okay, so, I would be happy to put that in writing. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Now, can you share with us any information on a contract that was issued for the 60th anniversary of our Independence? Who got it, and what was the sum involved, and what was the process, as it relates to procurement; as it relates to that contract? You can clear the air for us on that?

Mr. Hamilton: We never issued a contract, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: What did you issue?

Mr. Hamilton: Nothing. There was a submission, but it was never embraced.

Mr. Chairman: There was a submission, but it was never embraced.

Mr. Hamilton: No.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Do you have any idea what was the submission?

Mr. Hamilton: It was to provide elements for the 60th anniversary celebration. I could not tell you exactly what all those elements were.

Mr. Chairman: Could you put it in writing for us, those things?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: And also, I wanted to ask a very important matter: Could you share with us what you consider to be the factors leading up to the discontinuation of services by some major airlines? When you talk about American, I think it was Air Canada and United Airlines and is it JetBlue as well?

Mr. Hamilton: West Jet.

Mr. Chairman: West Jet. So how many before Covid were operating in Trinidad and Tobago? How many, subsequent to Covid? And what has been the impact, in terms of cost? Because as you have said, these things could have devastating consequences for your product. So, what has opened? If you can just give us a tight summary and how has that impacted on the product?

Ms. Deonarine: Chair, if you allow me, I just want to ask one thing in addition to that. While you will respond to that question, I also saw in the submission that the contract with KLM Airlines is for a period of two years. Is that correct?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Ms. Deonarine: Right. At the end of that two years, what is the plan with respect to do access to that part of the region in terms of tourist attraction?

Ms. Cupid: Okay, I would respond to the question. In terms of the KLM matter—I would respond to the Chairman's question first. My apologies. What we can do is submit in writing a total picture for you of what is happening in terms of the airline industry. Right. Of course, the period for COVID 19 would have impacted on availability of airlift due to—and the chairman would have spoken to it earlier—there are factors outside of our control.

So a lot airlines right now are grappling with things like crew shortages, pilot shortages, and so on. And so they are not able to operate the extent of the fleet that they would have had in the past.

You would have mentioned West Jet and Air Canada, the Canadian market has a unique challenge whereby they would have—and the Canadian Government would have made some amendments to their labour laws, I believe. And, because of that, you would find that airlines based in Canada, they are not able to have their crew in service over a particular period of time. So that now stymies the ability of a Canadian based airline to come too far south. I think the furthest they can get to is Antigua, without crewing, undertaking a crewing cost. Yeah? So if they come to Port of Spain, what they would have to do is put their crew up in a hotel or so, and there is a cost involved in that. So, that is the reason for that challenge that is specific to the Canadian market.

But in terms of the performance of the other airlines, what we can do is submit that response in writing to you, so you will get a full picture of the challenges that we face.

Mr. Chairman: And the cost.

Ms. Cupid: And the cost. Yeah?

Mr. Chairman: I know that there are many questions that we would have to pursue, but time does not allow us in the way that we would like. So I want to indicate that the human resources function is very important. We have not spent sufficient time, but we would put in writing. And I have asked Mr. Hamilton to provide this committee between 2018 to 2022, and even beyond, what has been happening with your staff and that turnover. Who has gone? Why they have gone? Who has come one? And the process of engagement. That is very important for us to understand what is taking place.

Is it 100 per cent of your staffers are on contract, Mr. Hamilton?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, yes, 100 per cent of them on contract.

Mr. Chairman: And does that auger well for stability and certainty and predictability, this contract kind of system? Is there not a need for us to have more security of tenure for you staffers so that people could have some predictability and certainty? Otherwise that is going to lead to crisis after crisis? Unless you pay them \$100,000 a month, and that might keep them. But if you are paying them at a certain level, as we know that you might have to pay, given the resources, then as the PS said, people are going to be moving. So, that is something that you may have to look at.

And I and I would like you, as the Chairman and the PS, to submit to us in writing, some of your recommendations that you would like us to consider to make this organisation more efficient, more effective, more economical, right, in its operations. So that those recommendations would be welcomed. So that when we are finalizing and generating our report, we can look into these areas of concerns that you would have, so challenges in your solutions in terms of recommendations going forward. Okay.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: We have to close at this time, because we have other commitments. But I want to give you the assurance that you would get a slew of questions that you would be required to put in writing, the responses. So that all those questions that we could not pursue today, we will get you to put in writing and we would put all that into our final report.

So, on behalf of our committee, the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, we would like to thank the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts for being here, headed by the Permanent Secretary. We

would now suspend these proceedings at this time to allow your safe passage out of our compound.
So, thank you very much.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you members.

12.12 p.m.: Meeting adjourned.