

Republic of Mauritius

National Environment Policy

(NEP)

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*Ministry of Environment & NDU
Ken Lee Tower
Barracks Street
Port Louis*

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This White Paper defines the new National Environment Policy of the Republic of Mauritius, establishes a clear policy framework and sets appropriate environmental objectives and strategies. It is based on a review of key environmental issues, challenges and opportunities that are specific to our national context and it sets a policy framework under which we have to mainstream environmental considerations in all development programmes and projects. It serves as a guide and a tool for decision-making and action for both environmental management and economic development. The goal of this new environmental policy is therefore two-fold: it has to help in the management of our ecosystems which supports the economic growth of the country and it has to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the Mauritian population. This new policy will be implemented mainly through the revised National Environment Strategy and Action Plan detailing strategies and action plans and setting time-frames and targets.
- 1.2 In view of their specificities, specific chapters are dedicated to Rodrigues and other outer islands to better address their concerns, policies and strategies, on and above the overall policy framework for the Republic of Mauritius.
- 1.3 As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Mauritius has to face a number of inherent constraints and challenges. It is ecologically fragile and particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and to impacts of climate change. Our challenge is to ensure that all efforts to enhance economic resilience takes into account environmental protection and that all decision-making pertaining to development integrates economic, social and environmental considerations.
- 1.4 A prerequisite for an active environmental policy is the integration of environmental responsibility at all levels. In order to meet the challenges, Mauritius needs an environmentally conscious society where each citizen has the responsibility and duty to protect the environment. This policy emphasizes the importance of the need for all stakeholders to take an active part in environmental protection. A spirit of partnership must be realized throughout by all stakeholders.
- 1.5 Environmental policy-making has taken on an international dimension. Depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, effects of persistent organic pollutants, loss of biological diversity, exploitation of resources in our exclusive economic zone are some of the issues that necessitate regional and international cooperation. Environmental issues are also no longer restricted to environmental fora but are now also on the agenda of economic and political platforms such as the World Trade Organization, Multilateral Financial Institutions, the European Union amongst others. This policy will ensure that sustainable development is achieved through enhanced partnerships and networking with regional, sub-regional and international agencies and that appropriate information exchange and sharing of best practices are carried out.
- 1.6 Furthermore, this environment policy aims at taking into account social and cultural factors which encourage or discourage environmental protection, including gender-related considerations.

2.0 Rationale for a New National Environment Policy

- 2.1 The present policies for environmental management are contained in several documents such as the National Environment Policy of 1991, the National Environmental Strategies of 1999, the National Forestry Policy of 2006 and other sectoral action plans. These policy documents need to be consolidated into a comprehensive policy statement in order to infuse a common approach for the various sectoral and cross-sectoral approaches to environmental management. As our development challenges have evolved over time, there is also a need to review the objectives, policy instruments and strategies. We also need a flexible policy framework with a built-in system for monitoring and review.
- 2.2 The need for a new policy is driven foremost by the fact that Sustainable Development is recognized as the dominant development paradigm in the present global context. Sustainability is one of the challenges of the new millennium. This environment policy framework, anchored in the concept of sustainable development, therefore incorporates the relevant recommendations of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the 2000 Millennium Development Summit, the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit and the 2005 Mauritius International Meeting on SIDS.
- 2.3 The Republic of Mauritius has stepped into the 21st century with important economic challenges. The 36% reduction in the guaranteed price of sugar, the dismantling of the multi-fibre agreement and the rising price of petroleum products have cumulated in increasing our economic vulnerability. Government has prepared an economic restructuring plan to consolidate the existing pillars of the economy and to develop new areas of growth such as Light Engineering, the Integrated Resort Scheme, Pharmaceutical, Information and Communication Technology, Marine Industry and Medical Tourism. Government is fully conscious that the long-term socio-economic success of the country is not possible without environmental sustainability and is therefore putting environmental concerns high on its agenda. A sustainable programme or project today needs to focus on growth, poverty alleviation, environmental management, gender and governance issues. There is ample evidence to show that whenever economic objectives of projects have solely been preferred, these projects have proved to be unsustainable ones.
- 2.4 The Government realizes that environment is a key driver of creativity, innovation and competitiveness across the world. This policy will ensure that investment in environmental sustainability leads to higher competitiveness.
- 2.5 The Government recognizes that there is a great potential for more growth in the tourism industry and associated Integrated Resort Schemes (IRS) projects. If we are to sustain the tourism industry, it is of crucial importance that the natural resources that nurture this industry be safeguarded. Mauritius must have a competitive edge on other countries offering similar tourism services and IRS projects and environmental quality can provide that competitive edge.
- 2.6 The Cleaner Production concept still remains to be widely adopted in the manufacturing industry, including SMEs, as well as in the services sector. We will also need to properly manage wastes generated from new industries such as from ethanol distilleries, sea-food industries and the Information and Communication

Technology companies. Consumerism is on the rise, bringing with it higher resources consumption and wastes generation. It will also be important to ensure that maximum economic, social and environmental benefits are obtained in the long term through the development of land released following sugar sector reforms.

- 2.7 Over the past two decades, Mauritius has graduated to an upper middle-income country leading to better quality of life in terms of economic prosperity. This has been followed by a change in life-styles and consumption patterns. Our present policy is production-focused and needs to integrate policies for sustainable consumption. While significant improvements can be made in resource efficiency (through initiatives such as Cleaner Production and Eco-efficiency) these environmental gains can be offset by increases in production associated with growing consumption patterns. On the whole, consumers are typically not exerting a powerful message in the market place for improved environmental performance, nor demonstrating a sufficient willingness to change their own consumption patterns. The present design of the production and consumption system is inadequate - rather than acting according to the circular principle of natural ecosystems, the flow of goods and services is essentially a linear system. Products are produced, purchased, used and dumped, with little regard to environmental efficiency and impacts. Government needs to develop a framework to enable a recycling-based society.
- 2.8 Given a greater emphasis and demand for environmental solutions, the Environment Industry will become a growth sector in the country and in the region. Government needs to work with the private sector to formalize this industry and encourage investment in it.
- 2.9 Our high dependence on fossil fuel and our proneness to exogenous shocks resulting from rising prices of oil products are increasing our vulnerability. Government will need to meet this challenge by developing renewable energy sources and increase national energy efficiency.
- 2.10 Government needs to diversify its environmental protection tools and approaches. New environmental policy instruments are more flexible than command and control approaches and stimulate innovation as well as reduce the costs of enforcement. For our new environmental policy to be effective, the best approach is to use a combination of instruments.
- 2.11 The Government considers it important that environmental policy should have a local basis and that people accept its importance. On the principle that local environmental problems should as a general rule be solved locally, the local authorities must be given additional responsibilities in many areas such as land management, waste management, community beautification programmes, enforcement and environmental awareness raising campaigns. This will need to be accompanied by the required authority and resources to be effective.
- 2.12 Mauritius needs to upgrade its built environment such that it is eventually recognised worldwide as a "Garden Island". The new policy must ensure that an ambitious beautification programme, including countryside amelioration and landscape restructuring, is initiated and that higher quality architectural guidelines be adopted.

- 2.13 The need for a new policy also stems from the importance to have more effective collaboration and participation of major stakeholders in decision-making and project implementation. All major stakeholders including NGOs, Youth, Women, Private Sector, Religious leaders, Politicians, Academicians, and Researchers need to participate in the elaboration and implementation of sustainable development programmes and projects.
- 2.14 Environmental Education plays an important part in building a culture of environmental responsibility in Mauritians. The emphasis on environmental education needs to be strengthened through review of curricula and promotion of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Additionally, environmental education is a process and should target people of all ages in a sustainable development perspective.
- 2.15 This policy must also cater for the needs of cooperation at all levels as environmental policy making is more and more being considered from a regional and international perspective. Transboundary issues such as management of hazardous wastes, trade and environment aspects are addressed in various conventions to which Mauritius is party to. This policy will ensure that the provisions contained in the various Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are implemented in synergy and that appropriate linkages are created to avoid duplication. Furthermore, as a member of the WTO, Government will ensure that environmental and trade policies are mutually supportive.
- 2.16 The National Environment Policy (2006) has been motivated by the above considerations and is intended to be a guide to action: in regulatory reforms, in implementation of programmes and projects for environmental protection and in stimulating partnerships between different stakeholders. It briefly describes the key environmental challenges currently and prospectively facing the country, the vision and objectives of the environmental policy, the guiding principles underlying policy action, the policy instruments used to arrive at targets, the strategic themes for intervention and the mechanisms for implementation and review.

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