

Jamaican Economy Panel

A partnership between United Nations Jamaica and the Department of Economics at The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona



JEP Discussion 13

July 2022

Ocean Economy

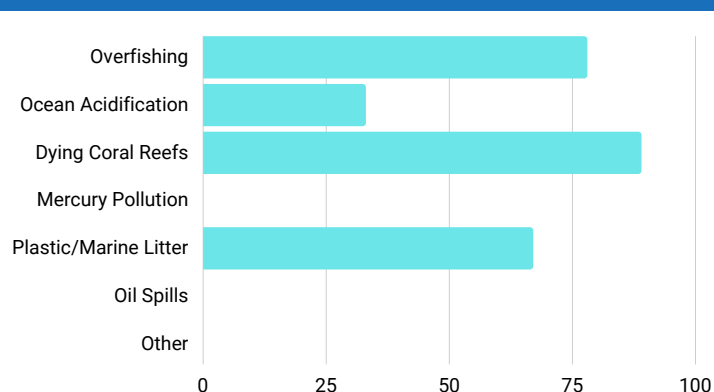


Like many other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Jamaica may not reap the full potential of its vast Ocean resources. The importance of the ocean economy is evident and, as *emphasised* by Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Andrew Holness "the richness of Jamaica's oceans must be managed sustainably to ensure that productivity and diversification is achieved for the benefit of people and communities whose livelihoods depend on it and for the benefit of a healthy planet."

The Ocean accounts for about 70% of the earth, yet the world has not fully captured the economic benefits it can offer. Panellists of the JEP, recently opined on the various major issues faced by the Ocean. Some issues related to climate change, human mistreatment, and lack of appropriate waste management, all of which are detrimental to ocean health.

When the question was posed surrounding the significant issues facing the Ocean, the panellists felt that in the context of Jamaica, overfishing, marine litter/plastic, and the dying coral reefs are the three most prominent issues. Although action has been taken to control the use of plastics, such as the ban on plastic carrier bags and straws, further action is still required.

Major contributors of Ocean Pollution

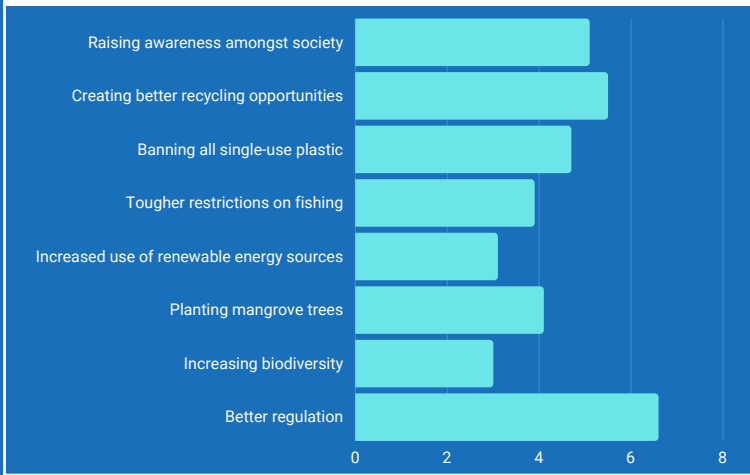


The public-private-partnership of the Government of Jamaica and Recycling Partners of Jamaica has been active in removing plastic bottles from the environment and engaging in public information campaigns to highlight the importance of recycling to civil society. This alliance is an important step, and Jamaica would benefit greatly from similar initiatives to maintain and enhance the beautification of its natural resources.

Regarding the coral reefs surrounding Jamaica, a report published by the World Economic Forum showed that as much as 85% had been lost due to pollution, hurricanes, boat damage and overfishing. These issues compound other hazards, like oil spills and ocean acidification, that adversely affect Jamaica's natural resources. In the case of overfishing - an issue highlighted in the UN Common Country Analysis Jamaica (2021) - and specifically parrotfish around Jamaica's coastline, overfishing of this species impacts the crucial role this fish plays in controlling the growth of algae that covers and ultimately damages coral reefs. Clearly, a lack of awareness of the full consequences of how Jamaica is managing its ocean resources can lead to irrevocable damage to its marine ecosystem.

To tackle these issues and attempt to rectify some of the damage done to the Ocean, the panellists felt that it was essential to create more recycling opportunities and robust regulations, while raising awareness of the consequences of business-as-usual action. The Recycling Partners of Jamaica have provided opportunities for citizens to recycle plastic bottles through a collaboration with the National Environment Planning Agency (NEPA) and Magna Rewards Jamaica Ltd. In 2020, they launched a Supermarket Plastic Recyclables Drop-Off Programme.

Approaches to be pursued



The **Jamaica Environment Trust** has also been active in creating opportunities for plastic recycling, setting up drop-off zones and organising beach clean-ups. Although both initiatives are positive advancements, recycling opportunities remain limited. A timely reform of Jamaica's environmental regulations, notably the somewhat dated Beach Control Act of 1956 and the Watersheds Protection Act of 1963, would appear in order, particularly in light of what we now know about the advancing adverse consequences of climate change. A valuable step forward is Jamaica's **Climate Change Policy Framework (2015)**, one of which is to guide climate change-related issues.

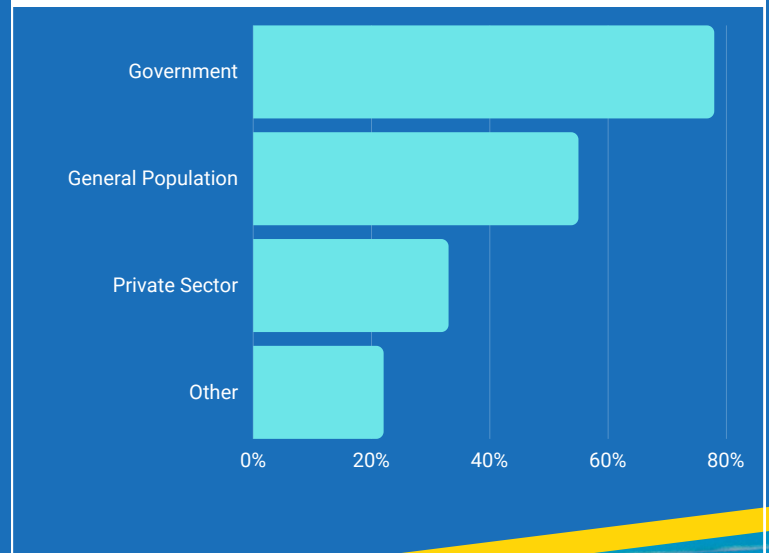
Dr Christine Clarke, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Economics at UWI Mona, highlighted the need for waste management to go further with a **"5 to 10-year campaign promoting separation at source, containerisation and at least weekly collection of garbage."**



The JEP panellists felt that raising awareness is critical in tackling Ocean pollution.

Dr Patrice Whitley highlighted that, **"In order for change to occur, the general population needs to be aware of and concerned about the problem."** Education provides the perfect outlet to address environmental issues, specifically surrounding the Ocean, and to get children involved in environmental practices and blue activities. It mobilises the youth to become frontrunners in creating a new sustainable culture. When the panellists were asked about the groups that should be targeted to combat ocean pollution, they felt that engagement with the government and general population was critical to optimising results. However, this responsibility should not lie with one group; instead, a multi-sectoral approach is needed to optimise results. Although there must be a focus on how the damage can be reversed, it is also essential to consider how the Ocean can be used to create sustainable livelihoods and contribute to the economy through blue activities.

Greater Involvement encouraged among these stakeholders



Dr Nadine McCloud emphasised the job creation prospects that the Ocean economy can create.

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The scope for the ocean economy to create employment and innovation boons and consequently foster economic growth for Jamaica is massive. However, monetizing this critical natural resource must be done sustainably.

Although this balance between risk and reward can be attained, our efforts have neither extracted substantial economic benefits from, nor lessened the hazards our actions impose on, the ocean. In addressing the latter, many more of the existing recycling initiatives and formal and robust accountability mechanisms to discourage improper disposal of land- and water-based pollutants would go a long way.



DR. NADINE McCLOUD
Head of the Department of Economics, UWI Mona

When panellists were asked if they felt development actors were doing enough to regulate pollution, 100% of respondents felt that development actors were not doing enough. The JEP felt that advocacy and technical support should be offered to rectify this issue. Advocacy support is crucial in bringing awareness to marine issues and putting pressure on the government and industries through education and outreach. In terms of technical assistance, expertise in this area can increase organisational knowledge, as well as providing scientific and technical input into marine issues ensuring programmes are effective and sustainable. Additionally, technical support can offer various frameworks and may also assist in the development of scientific tools.

When asked how to guide society toward allocating resources in the public interest, the feedback of the JEP overwhelmingly showed that direct regulation was the best way forward.

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While proper pricing and regulation of our marine assets are necessary ingredients to guide incentives toward more sustainable practices, there are elements of the Ocean Economy that are undervalued or not valued at all. The better we are able to understand the trade-offs of the decisions we make on how best to utilise our Ocean resources, the closer we will be to ensuring that our Ocean resources are managed sustainably for future generations.



DR STUART DAVIES
Senior Economist

Income-based measures that focus on a narrow range of national assets can only partially measure the value of Jamaica's natural capital. Both the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank are making progress in measuring this wealth of nations. As this work further develops, decision makers will be in a much stronger position to understand the trade-offs they face in how to best achieve blue transformation for Jamaica.

Conclusion

To conclude, many attempts to overcome some of the foremost issues facing the Ocean are taking place to preserve Jamaica's ocean resources. However, there remains a long way to go to ensure that blue economic transformation strikes the right balance between optimising its commercial value and ensuring that Jamaica's Ocean resources are sustained for future generations. Achieving this will be the responsibility of everyone, and we all have a role to play. As Jamaica evolves from the devastating effects of COVID-19, effective recovery must include blue economic transformation. Planning for post-covid recovery provides a significant opportunity to reset and chart a new course to build forward better in this decade of action and champion blue economic transformation.

