



Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Walter Roban, JP, MP

Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs

Friday, February 18th, 2022

"Blue Shield: improving the effective marine enforcement of our Exclusive Economic Zone"

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on our strategy to improve the protection of our marine resources within our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Bermuda is privileged to have a very large Exclusive Economic Zone. Our EEZ is approximately four hundred and sixty four thousand (464,000) kilometre square. To put this in context, this is larger than the combined EEZs of the Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos, Anguilla, and the British

Virgin Islands, which have a combined total of four hundred and forty-five thousand, five hundred (445,500) kilometre square.

As a small island nation, having the resources to manage and enforce our protections has always been a challenge. However, we aim to change this. The public will recall the announcement I made last November that Bermuda would become the first Overseas Territory to join the UK *Blue Shield* program. This, combined with our ongoing efforts, will allow us to effectively manage one of our most important assets, our ocean.

Mr. Speaker, our EEZ extends out approximately three hundred and seventy (370) kilometres or two hundred (200) miles from our shores, roughly in the shape of a circle. With this in mind, one of our biggest challenges is having a good understanding of the “goings on” or *maritime domain awareness* of the threats in our EEZ. For Bermuda these are largely resource and shipping related including:

- Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing;
- Illegal ballast exchanges and dumping at sea;
- Commercial and recreational vessel activity; and
- Shipping activity

To date this has been very challenging but advances in technology, combined with assistance from our neighbours, as well as better integration of our local assets, mean that it is now possible to monitor and manage our EEZ almost in real time.

Mr Speaker, the *Blue Shield* Programme is a new UK Government initiative to tackle illegal fishing and other unlawful activities around the UK Overseas Territories.

Announced in November 2021 at the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC), the Blue Shield Programme is the latest project funded by the *Blue Belt programme*, which actively protects and enhances over four (4) million square kilometres of ocean globally.

The aim of the Blue Shield Programme is to identify and analyse activities taking place within the maritime domains of Bermuda and other participating Territories that may impact the health and sustainability of their respective biodiverse marine environments.

For us it will provide a complete picture of marine activities, which will allow improved management of our waters. Through establishing compliance and enforcement frameworks, Blue Shield will actively monitor activity, assisting us to ensure environmental regulations are met. Where necessary, Blue Shield will also help Bermuda to undertake enforcement action against non-compliance.

Mr. Speaker, what I am particularly excited about is that the focus of the Blue Shield program is on marine resources, and it is being implemented by marine resource managers, who bring a wealth of resources, expertise and knowledge on fisheries and habitat

management. This perspective is crucial to effectively understanding and managing the challenges in our particular context.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable members may be aware of a recent visit by a delegation from the “*UK’s Blue Shield team*”. The purpose of the trip was to undertake a needs assessment and gap analysis of our domain awareness, our existing capacity and to better understand our local situation. Prior to arriving the team developed a scoping document in Dec 2021 using the *Draft Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy 2021* developed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

This assessment took place over the first week of February by a team of three (3) from the UK’s Marine Management Organization and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. While on island the Blue Shield team undertook numerous meetings with the Governor, Minister and Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs, and technical representatives from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the RBR Coast Guard, Department of Marine and Ports and Disaster Management to assess the draft Scoping Document. Additionally the team visited numerous fish landing sites throughout the island, the Marine Operations Centre at Fort George, the Eastern protected Grouper grounds with the Fisheries Section and western areas with the RBR Coast Guard. This gave the team the opportunity to experience firsthand local sea

conditions and habitats, the size and capabilities of our vessels, the impressive capabilities of the Marine Operations Centre, and the assets of local enforcement. As an aside they also got to partake of the most excellent fish sandwiches at Woody's Restaurant.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of next steps the Blue Shield team, in conjunction with our local agencies, is now developing a three-year action plan based on their findings. While it is still being developed, I can say that the plan could incorporate a very impressive array of assistance, such as:

- Providing enforcement equipment to local agencies;
- Deployment of bespoke underwater camera equipment to monitor and protect ocean wildlife;
- Use of latest satellite surveillance data to monitor maritime activity across EEZ;
- Assessments with in the EEZ using Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), as well as satellite surveillance data, to identify shipping trends and risks. This will help focus enforcement activity in the entirety of our EEZ;
- Passive acoustic units, which, once deployed underwater, can monitor the sounds of vessels with GPS positioning systems turned off; and

- Enforcement training to build in evidence collection and case file management; as well as specialist satellite surveillance technology.

Mr. Speaker. in closing, I am very excited about Bermuda's participation in the Blue Shield programme and would like to thank the Her Excellency, Governor Rena Lalgie and her team, and the UK Government for their willingness to share this vital assistance with us, to help support our marine environment's surveillance, protection, and management.

Bermuda will continue to align itself with the highest standards needed for protecting our oceans and I look forward to updating this Honourable House in due course as we move forward with this exciting initiative.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**