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New projects to get energy and fuel from the ocean

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by Marlon Madden

If all goes according to plan, Barbados could soon be producing energy from the ocean and biofuel from the pervasive sargassum seaweed as Government presses ahead with plans to make the island 100 per cent reliant on clean energy while capitalising on the blue economy.

Minister of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology Davidson Ishmael gave the indication on Friday, while noting that work has already begun with two significant pilot projects.

While not providing specifics, he gave the assurance that Barbados' efforts to move towards the use of more renewable forms of energy and energy efficiency were gathering momentum. He said no stones were being left unturned in the effort.

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energy conversion and the conversion of the seemingly ubiquitous Sargassum seaweed into biofuel," he said.

Ishmael was speaking at the Bagnall Point Gallery at Pelican Village on Friday during the closing ceremony for the **National Innovation Challenge 2022 – Ocean Edition**, which was hosted by Export Barbados (BIDC) in association with Compete Caribbean Partnership Facility (CCPF).

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During that ceremony, three entrepreneurs walked away with cash prizes to carry out various projects aimed at protecting the ocean space and the island's fish stock, collect data, boost employment, while minimising the impact of climate change, among other things.

"Beyond this challenge there remains much work to be done to see increased numbers in our blue economy relative to investment, job enhancement, employment, business creation, and the emergence of new industrial sub-sectors, and ultimately exports," said Ishamael.

"My ministry, through Export Barbados (BIDC), will be pursuing the building out of a solid ocean economy portfolio with these objectives in mind. In this regard, the oceans economy is one of three strategic pillars with Export Barbados, and as we speak, two significant pilot projects are being executed.

"The first one, the development of a sea moss industry where we anticipate that we can create value-added products beyond the traditional sea moss drinks; exploring such products as nutraceuticals and health and wellness products.

"The second project is a wave energy project in conjunction with a firm from the Netherlands with expertise in wave energy. This project is aimed at exploring a new clean source of energy in keeping with the government's vision for significantly reducing dependency on fossil fuel by 2030," Ishmael reported.

He told the gathering that there were significant untapped and under-tapped resources in the island's ocean space that should be explored.

The minister said as Government continued to better define and understand how to leverage the ocean's asset, it would be done in a way that also helps to "improve how we eat, how we travel and transport our goods, how we mitigate climate change, how we harness our energy and how we protect our coastlines, among other things".

"Equally critical is that, such activities must be done in a manner that is restorative rather than destructive, we need to continuously replenish our fish stocks, prevent the loss of our biodiversity, reduce the pollution and overall declining health of our waters. In other words, it has to be done in a manner that assures sustainability. Within this context of sustainability, it becomes crystalised that the ocean economy is of paramount importance to our sustenance and survival," said Ishmael.

Pointing out that his ministry and related agencies were dedicated and ready to lead the country forward in the development of the blue economy, he said in addition to energy, there was a need to support businesses interested in areas such as mariculture development, sustainable fisheries, marine biotechnology, waste management and data collection.

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