



New Electricity Act, September 2024

Yet another waste of precious time

A new Electricity Act has been recently published and debated in the Parliament of Barbados. This action by the Ministry of Energy is consistent only in that it continues the trend of misguided actions and initiatives, that confirms the fact that those making decisions about the implementation of the Barbados National Energy Policy 2019-2030 are completely at sea.

Even the clear and indisputable fact that every initiative taken so far by authorities have failed dismally, seems incapable of inspiring a new approach that deters future mistakes.

For some years now, The Barbados Association of Professional Engineers (**BAPE**) has been concerned that, notwithstanding the excellent and ambitious Barbados National Energy Policy 2019-2030 (**BNEP**), the approach that has been adopted to the execution of this policy is destined to lead to the failure of this admirable initiative. These concerns were raised at the highest possible levels.

When we warned about the potential 'Ponzi-like' model adopted for the roll-out of the photo-voltaic (**PV**) part of the transformation, other stakeholders, at the highest possible decision-making levels, took offense - and rejected our warnings, while publicly encouraging Barbadians to invest heavily in PV installations.

In November 2022, the Barbados Light & Power Company Ltd finally confirmed BAPE's warnings - while raising concerns about Grid instability, and imposing strict curtailment on future connections of intermittent sources such as PV farms, an eventuality that was completely predictable from the very outset.

From the very outset of this adventure by Barbados, BAPE has publicly and privately, at the highest possible levels, emphasized the need for the initiative to be led by highly qualified, experienced, and knowledgeable professionals, who actually understood the immense complexities of the initiative being contemplated.

Nothing that has so far been contemplated in Barbados approaches the BNEP in terms of cost, complexity, potential impact on the country, and even on social transformation.

What we have seen instead in this critical ministry, has been a parade of ministers, permanent secretaries and staff, none of whom have had a thorough understanding of the issues involved, rotating through the leadership of this complex quagmire with inevitable increasingly dismal results.

- The last application for a rate review from BLPC is now three years old and aging - this after that company had threatened that they were in serious financial distress back in 2021.
- The International Development Bank (IDB) funded an ill-conceived consultancy to undertake an initial Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for the Ministry of Energy - despite BAPE's warning at the time that this was a useless exercise - except done for the utility itself.
- Two years later, when it became clear to everyone that the exercise was indeed a waste of time and money, the amazing decision was taken to undertake yet another IRP 'in order to fill the gaps left by the first one'.
- When this exercise also registered as an error, the IDB then agreed to fund this current legislative initiative, which had undergone a number of unsuccessful iterations in recent years.

This is clearly an exercise of trial and error. It should therefore be of no surprise to any rational observer, that this is yet another misguided waste of resources.

Last Step

New legislation is actually the very last step required in the successful roll out of the visionary BNEP that has been set by government.

This obvious fact has been explained by BAPE now for years. We have repeated it whenever asked, and even at times when we were not asked for our opinion.

Required Approach

The required approach for successful roll-out of the BNEP is as simple as it is standard:

1. Appoint a qualified, experienced, knowledgeable, professional team to 'engineer' the BNEP, in the same way that would be done with any other major infrastructural project in Barbados today.
2. Develop a rational, engineered, implementation plan - that outlines the objectives to be met; the resources required; the implementation schedule; and the expected impact on the various stakeholders.
3. Communicate the project plan to key stakeholders for fine tuning, buy-in, and support, and then to the general public for their education and buy-in.
4. Only then can you upgrade the national legislation to underpin and support the now agreed plan of action, national goals and objectives, and the agreed new approaches.
5. Finally, execute the plan under the leadership of professionals (such as architects, engineers and town planners) to meet Planning regulations and building codes, and to guarantee reliable and sustainable performance that meets planned specifications.

This is exactly the professional approach that is used in all modern major infrastructure projects.

BAPE has consistently reaffirmed these concepts at the highest possible levels in Barbados. However we note that various ad hoc decisions have been taken in the absence of the needed master plan, and that some decisions have been greatly influenced by such agencies as the IDB, UN, and other international agency 'experts' who know little about Barbados, and whose knowledge about transforming a small island state from fossil fuel to green energy reliance is limited - as there are no equivalent precedents in place.

Just like was done in facilitating the initial rush with PV investments, this new Electricity Act is therefore merely another knee-jerk reaction by authorities to the fact that the current legislation gets in the way of persons making arbitrary decisions, by allowing intervenors to successfully challenge these ad hoc inclinations. This time the objective is push ahead with questionable billion dollar investments in battery storage.

The current legislation effectively guarantees a high level of transparency that would have forced authorities to justify the key decisions being made when challenged by knowledgeable intervenors - such as the current group.

Essentially, the only really significant change being made, is that the Minister will now be empowered to take these decisions 'in the national interest', while brushing aside concerns raised on behalf of the public. The country will therefore continue to experience misguided steps in this extremely complex project.

The sad result so far, as at 2024, some six years into the twelve-year BNEP, is that we are on a completely wrong track - and are in fact digging a deeper and deeper hole into our energy future.

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