



## Background

The Barbados Cooperative Movement was represented among stakeholders when the **Ministry of Energy** rolled out the **Barbados National Energy Policy 2019-2030**. The opportunities for mutual benefits to the movement, as well as to the country, then led to the creation of a joint task force, coordinated by the Ministry's PS, and including representatives of the Ministry and all cooperative organizations to explore a mechanism that could fill this role.

A steering committee under the chairmanship of Bro Hally Haynes, then president of the credit union league was elected and the Barbados Sustainable Energy Cooperative Society Ltd (**CoopEnergy Barbados**) was registered in June 2020,

CoopEnergy's mission is to lead and facilitate the transformation of the local cooperative movement into its next phase of development, led by the principle of *Cooperative Ownership*. This envisions the enfranchisement of all Barbadians through collective investments, guided by the Cooperative Principles, and built initially upon investments in energy.

Since 2020, CoopEnergy has pursued numerous potential investment possibilities in our quest to set out on the path towards our set goals. These include some major photovoltaic (PV) projects with both local and international sponsors, wind energy initiatives, real estate, electric vehicle imports, telecommunications projects, and of course the divestment of the BAMC holdings in the local sugar industry. We also undertook a role as intervenor in the 2021 Electricity Rate Hearing - which continues as we write.

To date, we have avoided PV investments for reasons which we shared publicly, and so when this apparently lucrative scheme crashed in November 2023, CoopEnergy remained unscathed of the near \$500 million fallout that resulted.

## Sugar Industry Initiative

The sugar industry initiative has been by far the most highly publicized of our efforts to date, and in fact we have had the pleasure of sharing, in some detail, those projections, the vision, and our plans that had been formulated, with the wider cooperative movement.

A year into the process, and just when it seemed that this divestment would be completed as planned, we were presented with a number of new conditions by BAMC, apparently compiled by Cabinet, without being afforded any opportunity for our input, or even for meaningful discussion on the changes. This has led to the current stalemate.

Our experience with this project so far can be summarized as follows:

- 1. In early 2023, CoopEnergy became aware that government was intent on divesting a number of entities, including the BAMC and CBC into private hands.*
- 2. It was our understanding then, that negotiations were ongoing with another entity for the takeover of BAMC, and had reached a stalemate after an offer of \$1.00 was made for the deal, along with a plan to significantly reduce the size of operations.*
- 3. CoopEnergy then formally expressed our interest in taking over BAMC's operations, with the intent of transforming the business into a green **energy** operation, with sugar and molasses as significant byproducts in an expanded industry. We were agreeable to an offer based on an independent, acceptable valuation of the ongoing concern to be conducted.*
- 4. BAMC accepted our offer, and drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to guide the transition process smoothly during the transfer of ownership. This MOU, to which we signed on, was previously shared with our members.*
- 5. Some key points of the MOU are:*
  - The new operation would be privately run, without direct government control.*

- All present and former BAMC workers would be given shares in the new operation, totaling 45% of the share capital and become part-owners of the business.
  - CoopEnergy would hold 55% of the share capital. This was to be contributed when the actual economic value of the entity was determined.
6. Between February 2023 and December 2023, CoopEnergy engaged with BAMC, our members, large Credit Unions, the wider Cooperative movement, and the general public, along terms that are clearly outlined in the MOU.
- We participated on the Boards of the two companies which BAMC had established, the Agricultural Business Company (**ABC Ltd**) and the Barbados Energy and Sugar Co (**BESCO Ltd**)
  - Numerous meetings were also held with members, investment advisors, credit unions, the Financial Services Commission, and the public - via Brass Tacks on VOB.
  - Despite some initial reservation by a few persons, the idea was generally enthusiastically received.
  - Some reservations subsequently arose among directors of ABC & BESCO, as well as among CoopEnergy directors, when repeated requests for very basic financial and accounting information were unsuccessful - despite repeated promised deadlines.
  - Then surprisingly, in December 2023, an 'agreement document', apparently unilaterally compiled and originating at Cabinet, was presented to cement the transition.
  - However, this agreement contained significant variations from the MOU that has guided our progress until that time. These included:
    - ABC and BESCO would no longer be truly privately controlled companies, as government decided unilaterally to retain 25% of the shares.
    - The chairman and deputy chairman of BAMC would be directors of ABC and BESCO, and in fact were insisting on holding chairmanship of the two companies.
    - No decision was made on the allocation of shares to workers, or for their representation on the ABC / BESCO Boards.
7. Concerns about these changes were raised with BAMC, as well as with Minister Weir. CoopEnergy sought to have clarity on the changes, and to have concerns answered about the obvious conflicts of interests that resulted.
8. For example we were essentially dealing with BAMC through the chairman and deputy of BAMC - who were also sitting on ABC & BESCO Boards; while Dr Mascoll was also representing government through the PM's office - where he was substantively employed. These are all clear conflicts of interest.
9. A meeting was convened by Minister Weir on 27 November 2024, after CoopEnergy made a public statement about our concerns on Brass Tacks on 18 Nov. The minister was mostly concerned about the impact of our public statement. He did however instruct that the requested financial information be provided by BAMC.
10. Despite this, and after several written and verbal requests, no such information was ever received from BAMC or government.
11. In August 2025, we finally received official communications from BAMC via a letter from Dr Mascoll, advising that the agreement was being invalidated.
12. In the opinion of the Board of CoopEnergy, this action by BAMC represents a clear breach of contract, and suggests that government and BAMC had operated in bad faith.
13. We advised, in reply to this letter, that we would reserved our options of response.
14. CoopEnergy Board then decided to seek the guidance of our AGM before any further action.

## Our Members' Position

At the 25 October AGM, CoopEnergy members raised detailed concerns that such a revolutionary proposal could be so arbitrarily terminated without explanation. The meeting directed the Board to pursue the matter to the fullest extent by:

- *Fully clarifying CoopEnergy's position, actions and reactions to all members, and to the public in general.*
- *Exploring all legal, social, and political options that may be required to pursue a satisfactory resolution to this impasse.*
- *Keeping members fully informed with progress and enlisting whatever assistance is required to successfully pursue this important matter.*

The meeting re-emphasized the potential historic importance of such a transition, as well as the obvious social, economic, environmental and enfranchising importance that would redound.

## Our Actions so Far

The Board of CoopEnergy has taken the following actions following the AGM;

- *Communicated the situation status to all members*
- *Communicated to the PM and senior officials our concerns about how the process has been handled, and requested that the PM intervene to ensure fairness and proper process*
- *Update all sectors of the Cooperative movement as to the current status of the initiative*
- *Retained legal counsel and initiated formal communications with BAMC.*

## We will also

- *Seek to address the questions and concerns of the sugar workers who were promised equity in the proposed new structure*
- *Make our position clear in the public domain via this document.*

## Summary

The success, scope, size, and public support for the cooperative movement in Barbados have long passed the stage where the vision, priorities, plans, and best interests of this Movement can continue to be at the disposal of the traditional 'plantation style' thinking and interests that have dominated our country now for eons.

With 200,000 members, significant accumulated financial reserves, and impressive human resources at our disposal, the time is here for the cooperatives sector to step up into our true role by promoting the enfranchisement of our membership beyond the accumulation of savings that are simply placed at the disposal of the banking system.

Representatives of the collective cooperative movement of Barbados reaffirmed that the time was ripe, when they decided to create the **Barbados Sustainable Energy Cooperative Society Ltd.** back in 2020. We believe that 2026 is now the perfect time for the Barbados cooperative Movement to really begin to live the prayer of St Francis of Assisi, and become an instrument of God's peace for our members.

Trevor Browne  
President  
CoopEnergy Barbados  
8 January 2025