

*"Protect the
Ocean and You
Protect Yourself."*



4/18/25

TO: ALL WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL WELFARE OF
GRAND CAYMAN

FROM: JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU

I am deeply concerned about the proposal to expand the port and related cruise ship berthing facilities at George Town Harbor on Grand Cayman. I have been coming to the Cayman Islands since the 1970s. The lure of the Cayman Islands has always been their coral reefs and clear waters. During the past 50+ years, I have seen tourism increase dramatically, particularly the cruise ship component. There is no doubt that tourism has improved the economy of the Cayman Islands - but there are limits. In fact, I experience these limits on a regular basis. Getting around in George Town is nearly impossible due to the number of cruise ships in port. Shopping in Grand Cayman is not what draws people to the island - it is the natural environment. The reefs are already stressed from climate change, overfishing, and increased nutrient input. Maintaining Cayman's reefs requires that we reduce human impact, not increase it.

The proposed expansion of Grand Cayman's cruise ship berthing infrastructure would physically destroy nearby reefs, and the subsequent increase in sediment created by dredging would certainly harm reefs. During my 70 years of diving, I have seen many communities develop commercial infrastructure along their coastlines. I know from personal observation that development and related dredging stirs up sediment. Furthermore, the sediment is again stirred up on a daily basis when the ships approach the piers and use their bow thrusters to dock, stay in place and leave at the end of their stays. Once this material is suspended in the water, sediment mitigation is impossible where waves, currents, and tides keep water constantly in motion. In other words, sediment will spread from the site, cover reefs and kill corals. The reality is that mitigation in the ocean for such projects is impossible, and I think past environmental impact assessments have made this clear. It is heartening to see that Cayman's Conservation Law states that the Government shall undertake no projects which will harm the environment. It is clear that the project being proposed would definitely harm the environment. This is why I am against the proposed expansion of the George Town cruise ship berthing infrastructure.

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I have always been impressed that coral reefs and clear waters exist around George Town Harbor. Our Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ambassadors of the Environment education program for kids and adults regularly brings participants to Eden Rock and adjacent reefs, and I hope we can continue to share these natural wonders with guests for the long-term future. We are doing our best to educate the public about the importance of preserving Cayman's natural heritage.

I have a long history with supporting tourism in the Cayman Islands. Back in 1994, I was invited to be the spokesperson for responsible tourism in the Cayman Islands and I worked closely with Thomas Jefferson, then Cayman Islands' Minister of Tourism, and with Mrs. Angela Martin, the Cayman Islands' director of tourism. I was impressed that one of the stated goals was to "Protect our environment, celebrate our cultural heritage while supporting tourism that benefits all Caymanians." With this commitment to environmental protection, I was happy to work with government and industry in the protection of the environment for the future along with promoting the attractiveness of Cayman's reefs to visitors.

I cannot passively let these coral reefs die without voicing my concern! I am speaking out on behalf of my marine conservation organization, Ocean Futures Society, and I hope that the people of the Cayman Islands will also make their voices heard. And most importantly, I hope the decision makers will see that the value of keeping what draws tourists to their island - the ocean and its reefs - is far more valuable in the long run than more cruise ships and a congested George Town. The environment is the heritage of the Caymanian people and decisions made today will have consequences for generations to come.

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