

# Environmentalists call for stop to Bimini Bay project

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INTERNATIONAL conservationists are calling on the Bahamas government to stop the Bimini Bay development and prevent further damage of vital ecosystems in the country.

Environmentalists both in the Bahamas and abroad say the destruction thus far, revealed in Black and Veatch's environmental evaluation made public last week, is enough to stop the development before it proceeds.

Backing the Bahamas National Trust in their concerns are Bahamas Reef Environment

Educational Foundation (BREEF), Mangrove Action Project (MAP), and internationally renowned marine scientist and shark biologist Samuel Gruder, who runs the Bimini field station as professor at the University of Miami's Rosenthal School for Marine and Atmospheric Science.

Dr Gruder maintains vital wetlands were bulldozed hundreds of metres into the water during construction of Bimini Bay, when he was a council member of the Bahamas National Trust.

Director of international mangrove preservation group Mangrove Action Project, Alfredo

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Quarto, said the development must be stopped before further damage is done and the vital mangroves are threatened.

He said the four 'gaps' were identified in the Bimini Bay Project Report; lack of public access to documents, an alteration of the master plan, lack of an Environmental Management Plan and environmental degradation beyond what was anticipated, are enough to stop the project.

However, Black and Veatch have advised government to go ahead, with conditions.

Mr Quarto said: "We wonder how Black and Veatch can so nimbly make the leap of faith from one very slippery investigative stepping stone to another in stretching to reach their conclusion without falling into the mulch that surrounds this whole development process, and

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has since its contentious inception.

"The so-called 'gaps' should have raised red flags, but instead Black and Veatch are raising their green flag."

MAP is advising government to ensure Bimini Island coastal ecosystems are protected, including the mangroves, sea grass beds and corals, as well as the viability of the proposed marine sanctuary, which may be adversely affected if phase two goes ahead.

BREEF executive director Casuarina McKinney-Lambert said she was "disturbed" by what she has seen on visits to the site, and proceeding to phase two will negatively impact wetlands severely, and undermine the islands' ecological function.

Mrs McKinney-Lambert said:

"The development should not be given approval for an additional phase of development while there has been such an egregious failure to meet the requirements of the first phase."

Black and Veatch suggest developers RAV Bahamas Ltd apply for Blue Flag marina certification, but the Foundation for Environmental Education rejected a previous application because of the development's serious environmental impact, Mrs McKinney-Lambert said.

The golf course, which Black and Veatch maintains should be on solidly terrestrial land, has received no support from the

BNT or BREEF as the proposed site is directly linked to wetlands and the marine protected area.

Mrs McKinney-Lambert said: "There is very little elevated land in the area proposed for phase two of the development and the 'land' where the golf course would be placed would include a considerable amount of wetland.

"The environmental impacts on this and adjacent areas is likely to be severe, far reaching, and irreparable."

To see the Black and Veatch Bimini Bay Project Report log on to [www.best.bs](http://www.best.bs)