

Contact: Jake Patrick Collins  
507.995.5158  
[execadmin@deborahbrosnan.com](mailto:execadmin@deborahbrosnan.com)

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## Dr. Deborah Brosnan Featured in Miami Herald for her Unique, Science-Based Approach to Environmental Sustainability

WASHINGTON, D.C. - It's no secret that tropical islands, such as Antigua and Barbuda, in the Caribbean are popular tourist destinations for their beauty and their recreational options for sun and ocean lovers. But, as their popularity grows, their natural resources, including mangroves, coral reefs, and coastal habitats, are often damaged.

As reported in the Miami Herald, scientist Dr. Deborah Brosnan [deborahbrosnan.com](http://deborahbrosnan.com) believes restoring and maintaining the natural environment is key to economic and community resilience. The feature article focuses on her distinctive work with leaders and projects in Antigua and Barbuda to protect these islands' natural resources and maintain their economic stability. The Caribbean serves as a model for other regions. Brosnan and her team are putting their solutions into practice globally, working with decision-makers in private and public sectors.

### Reconciling environmental sustainability and economic growth

Dr. Brosnan and her team believe restoring and maintaining the natural environment is the key to economic success and community resilience.

**E**nvironmental sustainability and economic development have not always gone hand in hand in the Caribbean, where uniquely diverse ecosystems and exceptional natural surroundings have started to decline due to decades of over-exploitation of the natural resources, environmentally unconscious enterprises and increasing climate change. According to Dr. Deborah Brosnan, a globally renowned scientist, environmental entrepreneur and marine resilience specialist, in the case of Antigua and Barbuda "the whole culture of the islands is tied directly to the quality of its natural environment. It is no secret that as the islands became popular and started to develop a lot of the natural world got destroyed, mangroves were cleared, coral reefs have been declining due to over-fishing, sand dunes have disappeared and now with climate change the natural environment is not as healthy as it was".

All these changes have affected dramatically the islands' natural defenses, making them more vulnerable to natural phenomenon such as hurricanes, particularly in Barbuda, a flat-surfaced island made of limestone and sand that naturally lacks the protection of Antigua's volcanic

mountains and whose own natural sand defenses were decimated by over-exploitation. As Brosnan explains, because sand mining has traditionally been a major source of income for locals, more than 20 million cubic yards of sand have been removed over the last 50 years and the sand dunes that were originally 20 feet tall were reduced to sea level, thus leaving the island unprotected. "As a result, the damage to the environment, the people, the farming areas done by hurricane Irma was much worse than it would have been due to that environmental degradation" - assures Brosnan.

However, these challenges have served as catalysts for change, as important measures that reconcile economic development and environmental sustainability have started to be implemented. First of all, there is a new governmental perspective regarding environmental issues, a tendency that is best expressed with the approval of the 2019 Environmental Protection and Management Act. "There is a much stronger ethic in government driven by Prime Minister Gaston Browne. He is emerging as one of the regional leaders for environmental protection. He has become more aware of the value of the environment both for the people who live here and the tourists. The government is paying



Sea Turtle, Barbuda. Credit: Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority.

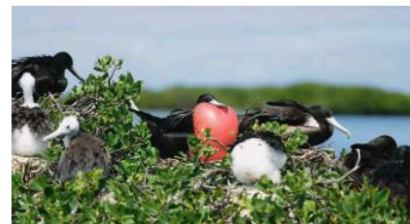
more attention to how the development is done and to the enforcement of the new environmental law that brings the country up to international standards of environmental management and protection" - states Brosnan.

Similarly, other privately-led initiatives have also taken place, such as those led by Brosnan and her team of experts as part of the development of Barbuda Ocean Club, a private residential resort community that not only wants to thrive as a major business but aspires to create a new development model in the Caribbean based on key partnerships with the local communities and a strong focus on environmental sustainability. Working as an environmental adviser for this initiative, Brosnan explains that this emphasis was clearly established since the project's early days: "When we went out to look at the state of the environment for Barbuda Ocean Club we came back and said, 'if you want to develop here it is really important that you look at this project as an ecosystem restoration that you are doing a development on top, not the other way around. You are going to have to start with the environment, that's key. We were delighted when they said 'that makes sense to us, that's how we are going to do it, so how do we do this?' Not a lot of people will say that" - assures Brosnan.

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— DEBORAH BROSNAN

Among the projects being developed, they are focusing on restoring the island's natural defenses such as the sand dunes, the mangroves and a salt marsh that got hit by Irma as well as the coral reefs, which can naturally protect coasts from tropical cyclones by reducing the impact of large waves before they reach the shore. They are also studying the nesting habits of four species of sea turtles, one of Barbuda's natural treasures, and are training locals to become experts in their monitoring. Above all, these efforts are designed to "build resilience". As Brosnan explains, "we became invested in wanting to build environmental resilience, community resilience and economic resilience, because if people are not strong and are not making a living they are not going to care about the environment. You need to have all three and we think we can do it here".



Male Frigate Bird with gular pouch, Barbuda. Credit: Barbuda Ocean Club.