

# Recyclers blame Govt. for ban on Metal exports



Long believed to be lacking in the clout to effectively assert itself in the wake of a government ban on the scrap metal trade that has been in force for more than a year, the Guyana Metal Recyclers Association (GMRA) unleashed a withering broadside on the administration, dismissing the closure of the trade as illegal and demanding its immediate reopening.

In a letter directed to Business Minister Dominic Gaskin whose ministry has now been charged with overseeing the sector and signed by GMRA Secretary Michael Benjamin, the letter describes the continued closure of the trade as “immoral and uncaring” and said that the decision has brought severe hardship and suffering to thousands of our citizens who depend on it for a living.

The GMRA’s outburst came just days after it received a letter from Gaskin indicating that government was working towards a November 2016 target for the completion of comprehensive reforms and the resumption of the exports of scrap metal.

Benjamin said that this position was far too vague after more than a year of closure of the sector. Gaskin’s letter alluded to work done by his ministry and the GMRA to reform the operation of the trade and place it on a footing for a new beginning. The letter pointed out that last April, a proposal arising

out of the consultations was sent to Cabinet but deferred to accommodate wider consultations. The letter from Gaskin also says that consultations were held on April 15 and 22 and most recently on July 19 and that the GMRA and other stakeholders were involved in those consultations.

The reforms in the operation of the sector, according to Gaskin’s letter include legislative amendments, new regulations and the application of smart solutions in monitoring the trade.

But Benjamin said the letter from Gaskin said nothing specific about the reopening of the trade. “After over a year of closure and talking and waiting, the minister’s response regarding when the trade will restart is vague,” Benjamin said.

Interestingly, and despite the protracted controversy including the periodic closure of the trade under the previous administration, the GMRA’s letter to the Business Minister asserts that before the closure of the trade in June 2015 the management of the scrap metal trade in Guyana was second to none in the world. This assertion appears to overlook the sustained controversy associated with metal theft that targeted the country’s utility companies just a few years ago.

The GMRA said in its letter that since the closure of the trade in June last year what obtained has been overtaken by total

lawlessness. It said, “Trading in non-ferrous metal has continued 100% with all such metals now being collected and smuggled out through our ports or to Suriname.” It added that while several complaints were made to Gaskin’s office absolutely no action was taken.

The GMRA said it is challenging government to show us one thing that you have done to curb the illegal trade and one benefit of the closure.

The letter said, meanwhile, that the granting of approval late last year to have 42 containers shipped in December did not amount to a re-opening of the trade. The containers, the letter said, had been awaiting shipping since June 2015 and had attracted millions of dollars in storage fees.

The GMRA said that, “It would have been appropriate to reopen the trade after an earlier audit had been completed.” “The trade could have been re-opened while the government was working to make new legislation.

The hardship and suffering to thousands of our people who depend on this trade for a living could have been avoided as well as the lawlessness that the closure has created, it said, adding that the continued closure of the trade does not serve any useful purpose but is only corrupting the trade.”