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The Tourism Minister yesterday attempted to dampen the row the Bahamas National Trust's (BNT) top executive has sparked with the boating community, acknowledging the sector's importance while calling for greater management and policing of this nation's marine resources.

BNT executive director Eric Carey made an "unreserved apology" yesterday to international boaters infuriated by his comments that many of them were too cheap, and would not be missed if they decided not to come to the Bahamas. "They might have taken Mr. Carey beyond the context that he wanted to because concerns have even raised before about how we better manage our waters, and do they take more out of our waters, and do they take more out of our waters from time to time," Obie Wilchcombe said in response.

"It comes down to how do we better manage and police it. We have an archipelago and many boaters come into our country. Many have, from time to time, been accused of taking more fish, conch or lobster than prescribed.

"I understand what he [Mr. Carey] is saying but the responsibility lies with us, the Bahamian government and the people, to better manage what we have because as long as we have this asset people will do what they want to do." Mr. Carey has since moved to "retract" comments made in a posting on this newspaper's website, which resulted in incensed boaters threatening to take their cruises - and business - away from the Bahamas.

Mr. Carey said his remarks - both on The Tribune website and at the

Exuma Business Outlook Conference - were “ill advised”. He said he had never intended to “paint all foreign boaters with the same brush”. At the Exuma Business Outlook, as reported by Tribune Business last week - he suggested that communities throughout the Bahamas levy mooring and anchorage fees on visiting boaters. He said many came to this nation, anchored in its waters and “pay absolutely nothing..... Half of the time they don’t even spend \$5 in the Bahamas and what do they eat? Our fish”.

Mr. Carey then added: “Thousands of boats come in and lay up in Elizabeth Harbour. Every one of them should be picking up a mooring for which they should pay, and if they don’t want to pay then they should go somewhere else.” This prompted fiery reaction in comments posted on The Tribune’s website. Mr. Wilchcombe said the boating community has been ‘positive’, especially for Family Island communities.

“They go into these islands and spend money at the stores, at the dock and in the communities. They have been wonderful for our country in helping the economy grow,” the Minister said.

“I think that what Mr. Carey wants is better management, and we agree with him that we should have rules and regulations but, at the same time, we must appreciate what the boaters have meant to the Bahamian community.”