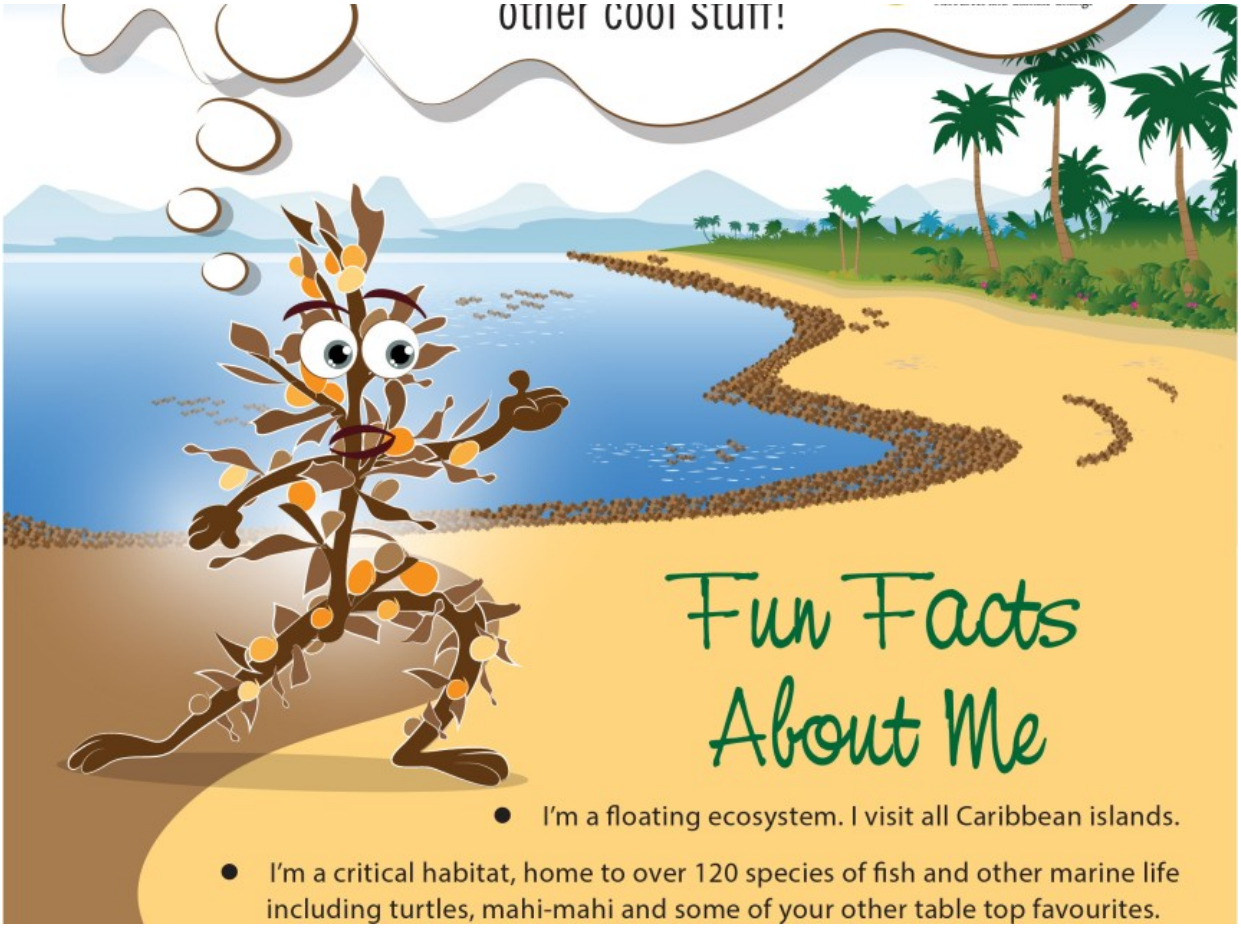
GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

Tel: (284)468-2730
Official Government Website:
https://gov.vg

Public Advisory on Mass Sargassum Landings

Release Date: 1 August, 2025



The Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change is advising residents that the influx of *Sargassum* may continue over the coming days and weeks.

Director of Environment in the ministry Ms. Angela Burnett Penn said 2025 is a record-breaking year for Sargassum in the Atlantic and Caribbean. Ms. Angela Burnett Penn Sargassum landings usually occur during the warmer months, mainly between April and August. Forecasts indicate that this is the peak of the 2025 Sargassum bloom. As such, the total Sargassum amount is expected to begin to decline this year, however, Sargassum inundation of variable degrees will continue to occur in most Caribbean nations and The Virgin Islands.

Ms. Angela Burnett Penn further explained that Mass Sargassum landings first occurred in the Caribbean in 2011 when a new massive bloom of Sargassum known as the Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt started to emerge and now spans from West Africa to the Gulf of Mexico. She said it is the largest accumulation of brown algae ever observed and results from changes in oceanic and climatic conditions as the intensity of landings have varied from year to year.

The Director of Environment said, “While Sargassum is not hazardous in the ocean, when it accumulates nearshore and onshore it can cause unpleasant odours as it decomposes. It can also affect swimming and fishing and may pose challenges for small craft navigation. *Sargassum* is generally not harmful to human health however; prolonged exposure to hydrogen sulfide from *Sargassum* decomposition may cause eye and respiratory irritation, headaches, dizziness and nausea in sensitive individuals.”

The Government of the Virgin Islands developed the Virgin Islands Sargassum Adaptive Management Strategy (SAMS) in 2023 with technical assistance from the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) using regional best practice to deal with the influx of the seaweed.

The Strategy outlines several Government agencies that have a role in *Sargassum* management with the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change serving as lead. The Strategy identifies hotspots, indicates cleanup triggers

for *Sargassum* and best management practices for cleanup.

The ministry has over time, coordinated mass *Sargassum* cleanups in various locations. Permanent Secretary Dr. Ronald Berkeley confirmed that there are currently cleanup initiatives underway on Beef Island at Long Bay and Trellis Bay and in Handsome Bay on Virgin Gorda. Cleanup in other areas will be triggered on a case-by-case basis as limited resources allow and based on accessibility of affected areas with priority given to high-use recreational beaches, ports and areas with critical public infrastructure such as desalination plants.

Ms. Burnett Penn, further indicated that the ministry is also exploring acquisition of specialised equipment for in-water containment and removal of *Sargassum* in preparation for possible influxes next year.

Sargassum cleanup is costly and the public and private sector's partnership is encouraged. The public is encouraged to assist with cleanup of *Sargassum* where landings are moderate. Permission should be sought from the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change to ensure appropriate methods and protective Use of heavy equipment for cleanup of beaches is generally discouraged as it removes significant quantities of sand from beachfronts, leading to beach erosion.

Residents in areas with decomposing *Sargassum* can limit exposure by keeping windows closed when odours are particularly strong and blow inland. The public is also advised to avoid swimming directly in areas with heavy Sargassum landings to avoid potential skin irritation. Boaters are advised to avoid sailing through thick *Sargassum* as it can damage propellers. Boaters should also inspect and clean engine intakes regularly.