GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Ministry of Environment Mid-Year Retreat

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Ministry of Environment Shares 2025 Mid-Year Review

The Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change has released its 2025 Mid-Year Review, outlining major progress in land management, environmental protection, climate resilience, and coastal restoration.

The report reflects a dynamic period of legislative reform, strategic planning, and active stakeholder engagement across the Virgin Islands.

Land Management Reform

Permanent Secretary for the Ministry Dr. Ronald Smith-Berkley led the presentation on land reform, highlighting the enforcement of the Crown Land Management Act, which came into effect on January 31.

Dr. Smith-Berkley said the ministry introduced updated application forms and business plan templates to streamline access to crown land and support the implementation of the Act..

The PS said, “The proposed Crown Land Advisory Board is currently awaiting Cabinet approval, and the Land Use and Rental Policy is under review. Strategic land acquisitions in Hannah Hill for water reservation and Sage Mountain for agricultural development reflect a renewed focus on resource sustainability. Revisions to seabed rent and crown land lease frameworks are also underway to promote transparency and long-term planning.”

Environmental Protection & Climate Change

Assistant Secretary Tessa Smith-Claxton presented updates on environmental policy and climate resilience. He said a comprehensive Biosecurity Policy is being developed to protect the territory from invasive species, supported by funding from the UK Darwin Plus Programme. A legislative Issues Paper is currently being drafted to guide future biosecurity legislation.

Ms. Smith-Claxton also highlighted the ongoing upgrade of the Climate Change Policy, with public consultations actively underway to ensure the revised framework reflects both local priorities and international best practices. The Ministry is conducting a territory-wide survey to gather feedback on the proposed Environment and Climate Change Bill, reinforcing its commitment to inclusive and transparent policymaking.

The Virgin Islands Climate Change Trust Fund, established in 2009, is set for its official international launch in Belém, Brazil. The fund aims to secure sustainable financing for climate-related projects, including support for private residents installing solar panels. Minister Hon. Julian Fraser, along with the Permanent Secretary and Director of Environment, will represent the Virgin Islands at the launch event.

Coastal Management & Sargassum Response

Director of Climate Change, Ms. Angela Burnett-Penn presented key initiatives focused on beach restoration and Sargassum mitigation. She reported on the Long Bay Beach Management Project, a flagship effort launched in response to ecological damage caused by Hurricane Irma. This include:

- Purpose: Restore Long Bay Beach and support sustainable tourism
- Actions Taken:
    - Structured parking areas created
    - Invasive mien trees removed
    - Nearly 600 native trees planted, some commemorating historical figures
    - Six environmentally friendly family units constructed, expected to open in the upcoming season
- Policy Context: Serves as a pilot under the Virgin Islands Beach Policy (2020), guiding comprehensive beach management across the Territory.

Additional coastal efforts include development at Brandywine Bay, and the ProMAs Project, a collaboration with Green Bay targeting marine litter through circular economy strategies such as repurposing plastic waste.

Water quality monitoring has also been enhanced through the RE Simbal initiative, which funded the acquisition of a vessel to improve data collection, especially around the sister islands. Staff across agencies are receiving training to strengthen monitoring capabilities.

Ms. Burnett-Penn addressed the Territory’s unprecedented Sargassum landings, outlining a multi-tiered response strategy including:

- Coordinated clean-up efforts in critical areas
- Cleanup triggers based on Sargassum volume
- Leaving small amounts in place to support beach ecosystems
- Future approaches include boom installations, specialized equipment for efficient removal, and surf rakes to minimize sand loss

Ms. Burnett-Penn also emphasized the need for budgetary support to acquire equipment that will enhance future response capabilities.

Infrastructure & Flood Mitigation

Deputy Director of the Public Works Department, Mr. Navarro Donovan, addressed infrastructure improvements, stating that the goal is to reduce flood risk in Brewers Bay by improving drainage along Brewers Bay Road East leading to the Community Centre.

Deputy Premier and Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change Honorable Julian Fraser closed the session by commending the ministry's presenters and stressing the urgency of passing the Environment and Climate Change Bill. He voiced concern over unregulated hillside development, noting that sediment runoff from such construction often ends up in the ocean. He said with the proposed legislation, activities like these would require an Earth Change Permit, introducing stricter oversight and regulatory safeguards.

Gallery





Additional Documents or Media

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