

STATEMENT

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Statement by Honourable Kye M. Rymer-Water as a National Critical Priority

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Good day, Virgin Islands,

On the nineteenth of June, I stood before you to declare water a national critical priority and to share the Government's commitment to addressing the decades-long challenges in our water system. I acknowledged then, as I do now, the hardships our people and businesses continue to face with unreliable supply, and I said that action and not words would follow.

Today, I return to give you an update on the progress made since that declaration. Over the past four months, we have moved from planning into implementation, advancing critical works to reduce water loss, strengthen our infrastructure, and lay the foundation for a reliable and sustainable water supply across the Territory.

As part of this effort, I previously informed you of our strategic partnership with Operators Without Borders. Since then, their team has completed an initial assessment of our water systems and delivered key recommendations to reduce non-revenue water, one of the major challenges we face. Operators Without Borders also deployed a specialized team to assist with the supervision and installation of high-density polyethylene lines along the Ridge Road. Approximately three thousand linear feet of HDPE pipe have been installed from the Diamond Estate Pump Station to the Montessori School gap. I am pleased to report that works to continue upgrading the water distribution lines along the Ridge Road from the Montessori School gap to the Chalwell Pump Station across from Rudy's Bar commenced yesterday, the twenty-ninth of October.

Furthermore, a second team is being assembled for deployment to the Territory shortly. This team will assist in conducting a comprehensive hydrology study and provide additional training in leak detection and repair techniques to strengthen the capacity of the Water and Sewerage Department. These ongoing collaborative efforts mark another significant phase in modernizing the Territory's water network and ensuring the long-term reliability of our system.

Progress and Ongoing Works

The Ministry of Communications and Works, together with the Water and Sewerage Department, is advancing a focused twelve-month action plan to stabilise and

strengthen the Territory's water system.

This plan is built around five core areas: infrastructure upgrades, system management, reservoir security, metering, and public engagement, with several key milestones already achieved.

1. One. Infrastructure and System Upgrades

- Replacement of approximately five thousand eight hundred feet of six-inch HDPE pipe with twelve-inch pipe at Diamond Estate is underway to increase flow capacity and improve pressure management. As mentioned above, approximately three thousand feet of pipe have already been installed.
- The Shirley Land and Long Trench booster pump is being recommissioned to enhance water distribution in those communities.
- Orders have been placed for critical components including pumps, pressure reducing valves, and fittings to replace outdated and inoperable units across the network.

2. Reservoir Security and Site Accessibility

- Comprehensive assessments of all reservoirs have been completed, with fencing, cleaning, and security upgrades underway or awaiting final signatures at Long Bush, Hodges Creek, Carrot Bay, and Zion Hill.
- Access road improvements are ongoing at Hannah Hill, Fort Hill, Long Bush, and other key sites.
- Installation of lighting, surveillance cameras, and secure gates is in progress at multiple reservoirs, including Zion Hill, Carrot Bay, Fort Hill, and Sabbath Hill.

3. System Monitoring and Control

- A modern SCADA system is being implemented to allow for real-time remote electronic monitoring of reservoirs and critical infrastructure.
- Interim pressure management and system stabilization measures are being introduced to improve consistency in water delivery across the Territory.

4. Metering and Network Expansion

- A significant order for new water meters has been placed, with an additional two thousand meters and fittings to follow. This will ensure every connection is accurately metered and billed, helping to reduce non-revenue water.
- Engineering designs are progressing for extensions into underserved communities, including Romney Park, Zion Hill, Carrot Bay to Stoutt's Lookout, Prime Rose Garden, and areas of Virgin Gorda.

5. Asset Mapping and System Review

- A comprehensive digital inventory of all water infrastructure is being developed, including pipelines, valves, and pumps. This effort will update the Territory's GIS maps and digitize historical records for better planning and efficiency.
- A full hydraulic review of the distribution network is being commissioned to identify priority areas for future investment and system optimisation.

Transparency and Commitment

I must be transparent with the people of the Virgin Islands. The consistent and reliable water supply we all desire will not be immediate. The system we are rebuilding has suffered from decades of underinvestment and degradation. Replacing and modernizing these critical components takes time due to procurement, shipping, and installation requirements.

The recent assessment of our water infrastructure revealed that many components of the system are inoperable and must be replaced. These include pump stations, pumps, pressure valves, and other critical fittings and fixtures essential for maintaining steady water flow and pressure.

The Ministry of Communications and Works has already placed orders for these replacement components, and we are awaiting their arrival on island. Once received, installation and repair works will begin immediately. Of the twenty five pressure reducing valves currently installed, only fourteen are operational. Of the nineteen pump stations, only eight are functioning. This underscores the scale of the challenge we face.

Due to the long lead time for the procurement and shipping of these specialised parts, delays are expected. Additionally, leak detection work cannot fully begin until these components are received, as leaks must be repaired immediately once identified to prevent further water loss.

In the meantime, we are aggressively advancing work on reservoirs across the Territory to ensure they are ready to store and distribute water efficiently once system upgrades are completed.

Our assessment also uncovered troubling evidence of persons illegally accessing water from the system. I am once again appealing to those individuals, you know who you are, to visit the Water and Sewerage Department to regularize your water connection. Illegal connections undermine fairness in billing and contribute significantly to water loss and pressure issues.

The Ministry of Communications and Works remains unwavering in its commitment to this comprehensive overhaul. These coordinated actions are more than infrastructure improvements; they represent a decisive investment in the Territory's future.

Water is a national priority, fundamental to our health, our economy, and our way of life. By investing in our systems today, we are securing the well-being of our communities, strengthening our resilience for tomorrow, and ensuring that every Virgin Islander can rely on this most essential resource.

Together, we are building not just pipes and reservoirs but a stronger, more sustainable Virgin Islands for generations to come.

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Additional Documents or Media

- [statement by honourable kye m rymer water as a national critical priority.pdf](#)