GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement by Minister for Communications and Works Honourable Kye M. Rymer- Commissioning of the Long Swamp Sewerage Pump Station

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Good morning.

Standing here today, looking at this facility, I am reminded that progress is not always a straight line. Sometimes, it's a long and winding road with more than a few speed bumps along the way.

This project we are here to commission today, the Long Swamp Sewerage Pump Station, has been exactly that kind of journey. If you look at the history, it goes back further than many of us realise. As early as 1974, a national sewerage system was on the then government's agenda. That was over 50 years ago. Some of our parents and grandparents were at public meetings talking about this very project when many of us were not yet born.

In 2002, a master plan was drafted. Then, in 2010, a major water contract was awarded and through negotiations, two treatment plants were built, one at Burt Point and one at Paraquita Bay.

Both plants, as many of you know, eventually became inoperable after Hurricane Irma caused substantial damage. To note, the Paraquita Bay plant has never been operational. It just sat there. Because no pipe to connect these communities were ever laid. So, like many things in this community, Hurricane Irma came and set us back even further.

For the people of Fat Hogs Bay, Greenland, Little Dix Hill, and Long Look, this has not just been a lack infrastructure problem. It has been a daily frustration. It has been wastewater running down the roads you drive on. It has been the ghuts contaminated with sewage. It has been the smell, the health worries, the mosquitoes breeding in stagnant water, and the embarrassment of knowing that your community deserved better.

For too long, this project was spoken about as something that was always "coming soon”. Some may have even called it a distant hope that would never materialise.

But I stand here today to tell you, that long-held hope is now a reality.

To understand what we have achieved, we have to understand the system. There are four pillars that hold up this entire project.

The first pillar is the wastewater treatment plant at Paraquita Bay. This is the facility that will treat all sewage collected throughout the East End and Long Look communities to a tertiary level, international standard. That means, we've invested in repairing that facility. We replaced all the damaged components and upgraded the entire system. All repairs have been completed individually tested and are in good working condition, and it is soon to be officially commissioned.

The second pillar is the pump station we are standing at right now, Long Swamp. This is the heartbeat of the system. It is the collection hub. All sewage from throughout the East End and Long Look community will be gathered here. This pump station itself is not a small feat. It includes wet wells, inspection chambers, and mechanical pumps that will pump the sewage directly to the treatment plant at Paraquita Bay.

The third pillar is the network of gravity lines and pumping mains, including manholes, that transport the sewage. The majority of these lines have been installed over the past 15 to 20 years. But one critical leg remained outstanding, from Parham Town to Long Swamp to connect the East End community. Proudly, the works will commence soon to complete that segment. We are committed to seeing this through to the very end.

The fourth pillar is the household connections. This is where the system meets the people. This is where we depend on you the home and business owners.

Today, with the commissioning of the Long Swamp Pump Station, we are locking three of these pillars together. The pump station will collect sewage through the existing network and pump it through the mains to Paraquita Bay, after we flip the switch and the system goes live, the commissioning process begins and we will see the full system run cohesively so sewage pumped to the treatment plant during this time will be treated to the required tertiary level.

After a few weeks of testing, we will have full commissioning of the plant, an active, functional treatment facility working in tandem with this pump station.

When people ask if this system actually works, you can tell them, just last week, during testing, water was successfully pumped from this very station all the way to Paraquita Bay. The pathway is clear. The system is ready. It works, it only now needs to be fed with sewage.

Let me speak plainly. For decades, this community has been asked to wait. Administration after administration, candidates after candidates stood at podiums and talked about what the community needs and what was coming. Plans were drawn up. Money was allocated, and then, somehow, other projects took priority, Only the people of East End and Long Look were left to wonder if anyone in government actually remembered them.

But that cycle ends today. Those questions are answered today.

We will flip the switch on a live system. Not to sell dreams but to deliver reality.

To the residents standing here today, and to those who will hear about this from their neighbours, I want you to understand what this means for your daily life.

It means you can flush with confidence.

It means the sewage from your home will no longer end up in the ghuts. It will not flow down the streets for your children and elderly to walk through.

Today, we are taking decisive action to eliminate those long-standing challenges from this community.

But let me be very clear with everyone here. This system will only reach its full potential if you connect to it.

The Government has removed the financial barrier. If you register with the Water and Sewerage Department before the end of 2026, the connection cost is covered by us. Free of charge.

I am not asking you to do this as a favour to the Government. I am asking you to do it for yourselves. For your families. For your property values. For the cleanliness of your neighbourhood. If you are here today, please share this with your neighbour who could not make it. Tell them what this means. Tell them about the free connection. Let us make sure everyone benefits.

As the Premier has rightly stated, what cannot continue is wastewater flowing into the streets, that is not a matter of choice. Let us all act responsibly. Let us hook up to the system and keep our communities clean, beautiful, and healthy.

Delivering quality work also means planning for the long term. We cannot build new infrastructure only to watch it fall into disrepair. That is why we are committed to ensuring proper maintenance for these facilities. We will be seeking to enter into a contract for the ongoing maintenance of these systems.

We want these plants to last, and along with that, we will ensure that personnel from the Water and Sewerage Department receive the training they need to eventually manage and operate these systems themselves. We are building infrastructure, but we are also building capacity.

I want to specifically acknowledge the Minister of Finance, the Premier Honourable Dr. Natalio Wheatley, for his leadership in ensuring the necessary funds remained available for this project. I want to thank the former Ministers of Finance, including previous governments, who at various times placed allocations in the budget to keep this project alive. Without that sustained financial commitment, through different administrations, we may not be standing here today.

I must also acknowledge the team that got us here. Permanent Secretary Elvia Smith-Maduro and the project team at the Ministry of Communications and Works, led by Duane Fraites, have managed this complex project with skill and patience. Contractor Patrick Mitchell of Bio Safe Treatment and Septic Solutions and his team have delivered quality work. I want to acknowledge them today. The previous

ministers who laid the groundwork also deserve credit; this has been a multi-administration effort.

Of course, I thank the residents of East End and Long Look for your continued patience.

With God's continued guidance and the support of the people of these Virgin Islands, we will continue building the modern infrastructure our people deserve.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless these beautiful Virgin Islands.

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