GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Maritime Stakeholders Collaborate to Strengthen Safety and Environmental Protection

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The Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA), Premier's Office, is moving forward with a collaborative strategy with stakeholders to elevate industry standards, enhance marine safety, and strengthen environmental stewardship across The Virgin Islands.

The initiative follows the successful hosting of a Maritime Safety Engagement Meeting on Friday, 29 May. The forum united government agencies, maritime professionals, charter industry representatives, environmental organisations, emergency responders, and industry stakeholders to address critical safety challenges and identify immediate improvement opportunities within The Virgin Islands maritime sector.

Attendees explored new initiatives to tighten bareboat charter competency requirements.

"A primary focus of the ongoing discussions is reducing vessel accidents, collisions, and groundings by elevating operator competence and education," Chief Marine Accident Investigator Mr. Jerome Padmore said. He added that discussions highlighted how more in-depth training platforms could ensure visiting operators develop and demonstrate the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to navigate Virgin Islands waters safely prior to their arrival. NauticEd, a global sailing and boating school, initiated the discussion about designing such a course.

Mr. Padmore went on to say, "Additionally, participants addressed the severe ecological consequences of vessel groundings on the Territory's coral reefs and marine ecosystems." He said to combat this, stakeholders are advocating for:

- increased public education regarding the impacts of groundings
- enhanced use of data and technology, and
- future coral reef investigation initiatives.

The Chief Marine Accident Investigator highlighted the urgent need to enhance marine casualty investigation capabilities, particularly for marine fire investigations. He expressed his commitment to developing specialised expertise and formal investigation protocols for fires and vessel groundings in The Virgin Islands.

Concurrently, members of The Royal Virgin Islands Police Force (RVIPF) Marine Unit brought forward several navigational safety concerns that require attention. These key issues included:

- promoting awareness of safe operational speeds
- addressing compliance and enforcement challenges
- closing legislative gaps
- mitigating the under-reporting of marine incidents
- resolving theft issues surrounding dinghies and tenders, and
- managing operational risks during peak marine activity and major public events.

Mr. Padmore underscored that collaboration remains vital to achieving superior safety outcomes throughout the Territory. "Maritime safety in The Virgin Islands is a shared responsibility, and I firmly believe that higher standards are not only necessary but entirely achievable when Government, industry, and stakeholders work together toward a common goal," he stated. "As Chief Marine Accident Investigator, I remain committed to advocating for positive change across the maritime sector, particularly in operator competency and training. Through collaboration, education, and continuous improvement, including strengthening competency standards for bareboat charter operators, we can reduce accidents, protect lives, preserve our marine environment, and further enhance The Virgin Islands' reputation as a safe and world-class maritime destination."

MSIRA expresses its gratitude to all participants for their valuable contributions. The Authority remains dedicated to partnering with stakeholders to identify safety risks, promote industry best practices, and champion initiatives that foster a safer, more sustainable maritime environment.

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About:

The Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) operates under the Premier’s Office and is the official body responsible for the independent investigation of marine accidents and incidents within the territorial waters of The Virgin Islands. Guided by the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and

Investigation) Regulations, 2020 and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Casualty Investigation Code, MSIRA's primary objective is to enhance maritime safety through fact-based investigations, the identification of safety issues, and the issuance of recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. MSIRA investigations do not seek to apportion blame or establish liability.

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Additional Documents or Media

- maritime_stakeholders_meeting_jp.pdf