GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Premier Reports on Tourism Growth, Marine Sector Modernisation and Food Security

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(State of the Territory Address Outlines Government's Achievements and Plans)

Premier and Minister of Finance and Tourism, Honourable Dr. Natalio D. Wheatley, has reported that tourism, agriculture and fisheries, and the marine sectors remain central to the continued growth and resilience of The Virgin Islands economy.

Speaking during his State of the Territory Address at the Noel Lloyd/Positive Action Movement Park on 9th June, Premier Wheatley said, "Tourism continues to be one of the strongest drivers of our economy."

The Premier reported that visitor arrivals steadily climbed over the last three years, "from approximately 994,896 visitors in 2023, to more than 1,092,139 visitors in 2024, to a record-breaking 1,202,008 visitors in 2025," adding that this represents "the highest tourism arrivals ever recorded in the history of The Virgin Islands."

Premier Wheatley said cruise arrivals "exceeded 875,000 visitors in 2025, also a historic high," while overnight arrivals "exceeded 300,000 visitors, generating strong returns through hotels, villas, yachting, marinas and hospitality services that support employment, higher visitor spending and Government revenues."

The Premier also highlighted the importance of the marine and charter yacht industry, stating, "Government continues modernising the marine sector to improve service delivery and ease of doing business, with vessel owners, operators, and agents now able to apply for licenses, submit documents, make payments and receive approvals electronically."

He added that more than 90 charter vessels relocated to The Virgin Islands ahead of the 2025/2026 cruising season, generating an estimated $13.99 million in direct seasonal economic activity for marinas, provisioning companies, cleaning services, restaurants and local businesses.

Premier Wheatley further stated that the 2025 Charter Yacht Show "recorded one of its strongest performances yet, welcoming more than 65 crewed yachts, over 170 international brokers and dozens of local vendors, further strengthening the Virgin Islands' position as a premier yachting destination."

On agriculture and fisheries, the Premier said, “Government is also investing in food security, fisheries and agricultural resilience.” He said, “the design of a fish landing site at the Omar Hodge Fisherman’s Wharf is progressing well and construction will commence in the fourth quarter of this year.” He added that “this project will better support fishers and strengthen the fishing industry.”

The Premier stated that, “Government is also advancing an Agriculture Complex to improve the collection, processing and marketing of local produce, alongside a modern abattoir and dedicated farmers’ reservoir to strengthen agricultural production and water access, because food security is national security”.

He further noted that Cabinet recently approved the commencement of formal negotiations toward a Memorandum of Understanding with the Dominican Republic, focused on food security, trade and broader economic cooperation.

Premier Wheatley added that Government will soon be expanding the RATED Programme “to include sectors such as hospitality, agriculture and fisheries, marine, trades, and other areas important to our growing economy.”

In the 2026 State of the Territory Address, the Territory’s leader also highlighted several international affairs achievements, including chairing the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA), launching negotiations with CARICOM and the OECS on full membership, partnering with the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) on projects involving the environment, sustainable development and economic resilience, and signing the Territory’s third Country Implementation Plan with the United Nations.

“Our success in the international arena has significantly boosted our international reputation and strengthened our ability to pursue our national interests,” Premier Wheatley said.

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About:

The Government of The Virgin Islands is committed to promoting good governance and the sustainable development of the Territory with a view to ensuring a well-informed, prosperous, cohesive and stable society. The Premier’s Office serves as the focal point for coordinating cross-sectoral policies and programmes and promoting the sustainable development of The Virgin Islands to ensure a well-informed, prosperous, cohesive and stable society.

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