GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement By The Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley Minister For Health And Social Development Update On The Derelict Vehicle Programme

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Minister For Health And Social Development

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Of The Virgin Islands

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Update On The Derelict Vehicle Programme

Madam Speaker, I rise to provide this Honourable House with an update on the status of the Government's ongoing efforts to manage and mitigate the issue of derelict vehicles across the Territory.

Madam Speaker, the management of derelict vehicles remains a critical financial, environmental and public health concern. These abandoned vehicles not only blight our landscapes and tarnishes our tourism product, but also present safety hazards and contribute to mosquito breeding and vermin infestation. It is on this premise that the Ministry of Health and Social Development, through the Department of Waste Management, has been working diligently to address the matter in a systematic and sustainable manner.

Madam Speaker, in March 2025, the Government of The Virgin Islands signed a contract with ENS Excavation and Trucking Services to clear the temporary derelict vehicle site located at Havers, Tortola. While the contract originally covered the removal of 500 derelict vehicles, a total of 642 vehicles were ultimately collected and prepared for export. The unexpected surplus of 142 derelict vehicles comprised mainly of vehicles that were abandoned in public areas and confiscated vehicles from the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the barge to facilitate the exportation of these vehicles is expected to arrive in June; and ENS Excavation and Trucking Services has indicated that the loading process should be completed by 19th June, 2025. This marks an important move toward restoring environmental conditions and the visual appeal of the affected area.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Social Development, through the Department of Waste Management, is actively working to identify and secure a new long-term storage site for derelict vehicles, as the current site at Havers will be cleared in the coming weeks. As part of our efforts, the Ministry has engaged the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change for assistance in identifying a suitable parcel of Crown land for the sole purpose of storing and processing derelict vehicles and other scrap metal. Regrettably, until a new long-term site is secured and operational, the Department will have to suspend the collection of derelict vehicles. However, in the interim, the Department will continue to issue removal notices to owners of derelict vehicles deemed to be an immediate public nuisance and, where necessary, will impose fines until such vehicles are removed to an appropriate location.

Madam Speaker, in addition to actively searching for a long-term storage site for the Derelict Vehicle Programme, my Ministry is working on a number of initiatives aimed at improving the overall management and reduction of derelict vehicles throughout the Territory. The first initiative is the re-implementation of the Derelict Vehicle Disposal Fee in accordance with the Derelict Vehicles (Disposal) Act, 2000. Effective 1st September 2025, Madam Speaker, this fee will be collected as a one-time payment at the Department of Motor Vehicles during the vehicle licensing process, for all vehicles. The purpose of the fee is to help offset the costs associated with the removal, processing, and proper disposal of derelict vehicles throughout The Virgin Islands.

According to The Virgin Islands Derelict Vehicles (Disposal) Act, 2000, the fee schedule is based on the weight of the vehicle. The three (3) weight classes are:

- Category A (1,500 – 3,000lbs): $60
- Category B (3,000 – 6,000lbs): $85
- Category C (over 6,000lbs): $125

Madam Speaker, this initiative was previously launched in 2004 but later discontinued due to resource constraints and operational challenges at the time. The renewed and re-implementation reflects the Government's commitment to safeguarding public health, promoting environmental stewardship and maintaining the aesthetics of our communities. A comprehensive public communications campaign will be launched in the upcoming weeks to ensure that the public is adequately informed about the fee structure, legal implications and the process for payment. The campaign will include radio announcements, press releases and educational materials across various platforms.

My Ministry is also actively developing a revised policy that will guide the amendment of the existing Derelict Vehicles (Disposal) Act. Madam Speaker, it is evident that the current, outdated legislation no longer adequately addresses the Territory's needs in light of technological advancements, environmental threats, and rising operational costs. The new policy aims to establish a forward-thinking, integrated, and enforceable framework that supports a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to managing derelict vehicles.

The proposed policy would implement the collection of the one-time disposal fee at the port of entry, rather than at the Department of Motor Vehicles. It would also revise the disposal fee structure to reflect the current costs associated with the collection and proper disposal of derelict vehicles. Additionally, the policy aims to strengthen inter-agency collaboration among the Department of Motor Vehicles, His Majesty's Customs, the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force, and the Department of Waste Management, to enable comprehensive tracking of vehicles throughout their lifecycle. We envisage that modernising the Derelict Vehicles (Disposal) Act will improve the quality of life for residents, enhance the Territory's tourism product, and promote greater financial responsibility.

Madam Speaker, in closing, the Government remains committed to restoring the environmental integrity of our communities and ensuring that the Derelict Vehicle Programme is executed in a structured, lawful, and effective manner. I thank the public for their patience and continued cooperation as we enhance our operations to better serve the people of The Virgin Islands.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.