GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement by the Minister of Communication and Works- Water as a National Critical Priority

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Statement by Minister for Communications and Works

Honourable Kye M. Rymer at the Water Infrastructure Update Press Conference.

Water as a National Critical Priority

Thursday 19th June 2025

Today, I stand before you not just as your Minister of Communications and Works and the person responsible for the distribution of water in the Territory, but as someone who truly empathises with every household and business that has faced the struggles of an unreliable water supply. I understand that living without consistent access to clean water is not merely an inconvenience, it's a daily challenge that affects your health, well-being, and peace of mind. Your frustrations have reached my ears, and I assure you, we are committed to bringing about real, lasting change.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the severity of the situation. The residents of Sea Cows Bay, Baughers Bay, Road Town, Huntums Ghut, East End and West End, and our outer islands have been particularly hard hit. Your constant cries for help have not gone unnoticed.

Additionally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the nurses, teachers, government and private workers who courageously prepare for work each morning despite the lack of water, and to the businesses, beauty salons, grocery stores, and other essential services that are grappling with these challenges. I sincerely apologise for the hardships you have faced. We know that every failed water delivery impacts your daily lives and livelihoods, and we are dedicated to making meaningful changes.

This ongoing issue is not new—it is a burden that many families have carried for far too long. It is a challenge that has persisted across decades, and while I inherited it, I am resolutely dedicated to resolving it once and for all.

Among the critical issues we face is an alarming rate of water loss within our infrastructure. A significant amount of water produced is lost before reaching your taps, due to leaking pipelines and aging systems. These losses are a direct contributor to the water access issues many of you experience. We know that leaks along the road persist for weeks, causing frustration and uncertainty about when relief will come. Furthermore, we have often found that repairing one leak can lead to another showing up along the same line, compounding the problem.

I want to emphasise that repairs for such longstanding infrastructural water issues are no easy fix. Many times, the reasons given for water disruptions, such as burst pipes, may seem trivial or even silly to the public. However, these are indeed the little foxes that create bigger problems. Fixing longstanding issues like those we are facing takes time and concerted effort.

Nonetheless, I am all about solutions. BVI, I want to reiterate that you deserve better, and you are getting better. We are committed to eventually fixing all water issues in the territory to enable a reliable and consistent flow of water to households and businesses daily.

That’s why addressing this issue head-on is essential to improving the reliability of our water supply. We won’t just cover up the symptoms; we’re determined to get to the root cause.

Our efforts will extend beyond quick fixes. We are implementing sustainable, long-term solutions that will restore and future-proof our water systems for generations. With Cabinet approval, our government has made water a national critical priority, emphasising our commitment to ensuring every Virgin Islander can rely on consistent access to this vital resource.

Declaring water a national critical priority underscores its essential role in the health and prosperity of every community member and business. It elevates our water concerns to a national focus, ensuring we allocate the resources and coordinated action necessary to tackle current issues and secure a resilient water future.

For you, the residents, this declaration translates into six key action items:

1. Prioritised Funding and Resources: We are fast-tracking water infrastructure projects with an initial allocation of $8 million from the $100 million loan facility to ensure immediate repairs, upgrades, and expansions are promptly executed.

2. Coordinated Government Action: All relevant ministries and agencies will work in a unified manner to deliver water services efficiently and transparently.

3. Improved Service Reliability: Expect a more reliable water supply and fewer interruptions through strategic interventions like leak reduction and pressure management.

4. Enhanced Water Quality: Systematic monitoring and maintenance will ensure the water reaching your homes meets stringent safety standards.

5. Community Engagement and Capacity Building: We will invest in training local engineers and technicians while actively engaging the community to foster sustainable improvements long-term.

6. Transparency and Accountability: We promise regular updates to keep you informed about our progress and the challenges we face, fostering trust and shared responsibility.

In addition to these measures, I am also pleased to announce that we are working on a temporary water incentive plan to help ease the burdens faced by households during this challenging time. This plan will provide essential resources and support to residents affected by the water supply issues. I will return to you to communicate the details of this incentive plan aimed at providing temporary ease and assistance in getting access to water.

Our Water Optimisation Strategic Plan is already in motion, targeting the areas most affected. Our goals include:

- Rapidly reducing water losses through advanced leak detection and prompt repairs to maximise delivery.

- Improving pressure management to stabilise supply across all communities.

- Expanding and upgrading reservoirs to ensure we can better withstand emergencies.

- Modernising our infrastructure with upgraded pumps and smart controls for efficient service.

- Empowering local talent by training our teams to sustainably maintain and manage our water systems.

In our journey towards these goals, we actively seek to empower local talent. We will engage local engineers and experienced professionals from the Water and Sewerage Department to draw on their invaluable knowledge of our water networks.

To expedite repairs, we will divide our operations into specific zones, allowing for simultaneous leak detection and repairs. I invite local contractors with the necessary skills to participate in this national project. Please contact us at 468-2183 or email mcw@gov.vg to register your interest.

We are also thankful for our international partners. At a recent OECS conference, I learned of the vital work being done by Operators Without Borders, who provide skilled professionals to support communities in crisis. Thanks to them, three engineers are currently on the ground, collaborating with our teams to make a positive impact.

Today, we have Rhonda Harris, Marcel Misuraca, and Mike Hewitt with us, each bringing their expertise and dedication to our Territory. We are grateful for their swift response and look forward to a lasting partnership as we transform our water systems for the better.

To the people of the Virgin Islands, thank you for your patience, resilience, and trust. We recognise the challenges you have faced, and we are committed to transforming this national priority into a daily reality of reliable, safe water for every home and business. Over the next four months, we will fast-track and ensure that our work is efficient, aimed at fulfilling this promise for all of you. Together, we

will build a brighter, more water-secure future for all.

Thank you.