GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Coordinated Response to Flamingo Pond Fish Die-Off as Sargassum Season Intensifies

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The Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change (MENRCC), in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and local non-profit organisation Beyond the Reef, has been actively responding to a fish die-off event observed at Flamingo Pond in Anegada.

Following reports of the die-off, and given the significant influx of Sargassum seaweed recorded in the area the week prior and earlier that same week, the Ministry identified Sargassum decomposition as the primary suspected cause.

In a show of community partnership, Beyond the Reef volunteered to install a Sargassum boom to reduce further influx into the pond and to assist with clearing the pond entrance over the weekend. The Ministry commends Beyond the Reef for their generous and practical contribution to the response effort.

Director of Environment, in the Ministry of Environment Natural Resources and Climate Change Ms. Angela Burnett Penn welcomed the collaborative response to the event.

She said "The fish die-off in Anegada is a stark reminder of the very real environmental consequences that Sargassum inundation can have on our fragile coastal ecosystems. The Ministry conducted a thorough assessment which confirmed our initial findings, and we are encouraged by the signs of improvement following the intervention over the weekend” .

The decomposition of large volumes of Sargassum in and around coastal ponds is known to impede water exchange and severely deplete oxygen levels in the water, creating hypersaline and hypoxic conditions that are harmful to fish and other marine line.

Ms. Burnett Penn further stated that, “We are particularly grateful to Chris Juredin and his team from Beyond the Reef for their immediate and practical support in installing the boom and clearing the pond entrance. This kind of community

partnership is invaluable as we respond to the increasing pressures that Sargassum poses across the Territory”.

On Thursday 30th April, 2026 representatives from the Ministry and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, accompanied by members of Beyond the Reef, conducted a site visit to confirm this assessment. During the visit, the Ministry collected water samples, and a visual inspection of the area was carried out.

Environment Officer at the Ministry of Environment Natural Resources and Climate Change Ms. Atoya George noted that the findings were consistent with the Ministry's initial assessment.

She said, "Our water quality testing confirmed that the decomposition of Sargassum was depleting oxygen levels in the pond to a degree that was unsurvivable for the fish. While our follow up assessment on Monday 4th May, 2026 showed some recovery, dissolved oxygen levels remain low, so we will continue to monitor closely. The installation of the boom is a practical intervention and we will be tracking its effectiveness as part of our collaborative ongoing response."

According to the University of South Florida's Sargassum Watch System, whose April 2026 bulletin confirmed that Sargassum levels have been tracking at record highs across the Atlantic and Caribbean, 2026 is projected to be a record year for Sargassum inundation in the region. In light of this forecast, the Ministry will continue to monitor the situation at Flamingo Pond and across the Territory to coordinate an effective response where appropriate.

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Additional Documents or Media

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