GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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MSIRA Report Highlights Persistent Grounding Risks in The Virgin Islands

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The Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) has published its report into the grounding of the sailing vessel *Nohea Holokai* near Anegada on 6 July 2025.

The 46-foot Lagoon catamaran was participating in Sail Caribbean's "Challenge Day" exercise when it ran aground at approximately 8:00 a.m. Under the "Challenge Day" arrangement, three 13-year-old students were assigned the roles of skipper, navigator and mate and performed the primary vessel-handling and navigational tasks onboard the vessel while other students assisted with various tasks. The assigned captain and crew remained aboard in supervisory roles and were expected to intervene only if the operation became unsafe. During the exercise, the vessel entered a coral-head field outside the Anegada Channel and struck a submerged rock or coral head. The impact punctured the starboard hull, resulting in rapid flooding and partial submersion. All 14 persons aboard were safely evacuated, and no injuries were reported.

Chief Marine Accident Investigator, Mr. Jerome Padmore, stated: "The incident illustrates how several simple safety issues, such as the lack of a dedicated lookout, divided attention, limited navigational information, and inadequate onboard oversight, can combine to result in serious marine accidents."

MSIRA's investigation identified several important safety issues:

- No dedicated lookout was assigned while the vessel was operating near known navigational hazards.
- The attention of the captain, crew and participants became heavily focused on raising the mainsail, reducing the monitoring of the vessel's position and track.
- The chart plotter displayed only limited mapping information and did not show the detailed chart information needed to identify the surrounding coral heads.
- Concerns about the chart plotter had been identified before departure but remained unresolved.
- The supervisory arrangements did not fully account for the assigned captain's limited independent experience with vessels of comparable size and

complexity or with navigation in the waters surrounding Anegada.
- More experienced senior personnel were stationed aboard a separate support vessel, limiting their ability to continuously monitor the developing navigational situation or intervene immediately.

Mr. Padmore indicated that the investigation also identified separate concerns regarding the vessel's certification and operational arrangements. Fourteen people were aboard, although the vessel's certificate specified a maximum of 10 persons, and the investigation found no evidence of an exemption or amended endorsement. These certification matters were not considered direct causes of the grounding but were recorded as an additional safety issue.

Grounding continues to be a significant marine safety concern in The Virgin Islands. In 2025, out of 16 marine accidents reported to MSIRA, 10 were due to vessel groundings. Additionally, there have already been 6 recorded groundings in 2026. "These incidents can lead to serious injuries, loss of life, loss of vessels, expensive salvage operations, pollution, and considerable damage to the Territory's fragile coral reef ecosystem," he emphasised.

According to the Chief Marine Accident Investigator, "Groundings should never be dismissed as routine or unavoidable incidents. This investigation shows how simple shortcomings can combine to create major consequences. Fair weather, familiar waters and access to electronic navigation equipment do not replace the need for an effective lookout, continuous positional awareness, proper passage monitoring and experienced supervision."

MSIRA has recommended that Sail Caribbean review its "Challenge Day" risk assessments and safety-management arrangements, strengthen its procedures for appointing and supporting personnel with command and supervisory responsibilities, ensure that navigational-equipment defects are properly addressed before departure, and maintain an effective lookout during all vessel operations.

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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

- msira_#02_of_2026_sv_nohea_holokai.pdf
- nohea_grounding_report.pdf