Stakeholders' Report on the Consultations for the National Tourism Policy

GOVERNMENT OF THE
VIRGIN ISLANDS
Ministry of Tourism, Culture
and Sustainable Development

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Executive Summary

This document consolidates the minutes and stakeholder-led recommendations from a territory-wide consultation series to shape the Virgin Islands' new National Tourism Policy. The series combined island forums and sector sessions (e.g., Blue Economy/Marine & Yachting; Food & Cultural Heritage; Ecotourism; Accommodations; Cruise; Education & Capacity Building; Public Service), with additional youth and community consultations (e.g., Virgin Gorda, Anegada, West End).

The National Tourism Policy is deliberately organized around the OECS "policy house," using its eight pillars to frame consultations, synthesize minutes, and translate stakeholder proposals into policy instruments—grounding delivery in sustainable development, evidence-based decisions, robust public-private collaboration, and built-in monitoring and evaluation. The VI adapted this regional template to context by expanding sustainability to explicitly include service quality and a seamless, end-to-end visitor journey, while keeping the structure aligned with the National Sustainable Development Plan. The framework choice also reflects the Territory's contribution to—and subsequent adoption of—the OECS regional policy, ensuring coherence across the Eastern Caribbean and providing a tested scaffold for the VI's consultation design and drafting workflow. Finally, the eight-pillar model (inclusive growth; blue economy; climate & risk resilience; product & niche development; biodiversity & resource conservation; access & transport; destination management; and institutional capacity) offers a clear map for prioritizing actions and investments during implementation.

Consultations drew broad participation: marine and yachting operators, cultural practitioners, hoteliers, cruise interests, educators and students, agriculture and fisheries, public officers, and residents across sister islands. Sessions began with a shared policy/evidence framing, then moved to open dialogue; minutes were captured for transparency and subsequent drafting.

Cross-cutting findings (what stakeholders said most often)

- **Service culture & workforce quality are decisive.** A national, mandatory customer-service training regime—piloted by the public service and enforced via licences/work permits—was widely endorsed; stakeholders called for a K-to-career pipeline and a tourism institute at HLSCC.
- **Infrastructure and first impressions need urgent fixes.** Ports of entry (ferry terminals/immigration lines, shelter) and critical tourism nodes (e.g., Gun Creek, White Bay) were flagged for safety, crowding, and facility upgrades.
- **Capacity management and environmental safeguards are overdue.** Stakeholders asked for clear limits for yachts/cruise, pump-out/waste regulations, lifeguards at major beaches, and structured dispersal of visitors.
- **Simplify bureaucracy and modernize the investment climate.** A one-stop shop and consistent, published fees/policies were requested across labour, immigration, licensing; hotel-aid processes were cited as too slow.
- **Balanced cruise and high-value marine growth.** The consensus leaned toward selective, higher-spend cruise lines, while upgrading marinas and services for larger yachts and safeguarding the yachting experience.

- **Equity and local leadership.** Outer-island voices, notably Anegada, stressed reliable inter-island access, cleanliness, healthcare readiness, land-title barriers to local investment, and a preference for community-led tourism.
- **Culture as economic engine.** Stakeholders emphasized year-round cultural programming, protection/activation of heritage sites, culinary identity and sourcing, and leadership pathways for BVI nationals.

Priority policy directions (how the feedback maps to the eight pillars)

- **Inclusive Growth & Income Distribution:** Address land-title access (outer islands), promote community-owned enterprises, and ensure benefits reach local households and SMEs.
- **Blue Tourism:** Upgrade marinas/moorings; adopt anchorage capacity rules; enforce marine waste/pump-out; improve safety (e.g., White Bay).
- **Climate & Risk Resilience:** Embed reef/beach protection, coastal management, and risk-aware visitor dispersal in site plans and permits.
- **Product & Niche Development:** Scale cultural/culinary experiences, farm-to-table, food tours; diversify attractions to relieve peak-day pressure from cruise calls.
- **Biodiversity & Resource Conservation:** Expand beach/lifeguard standards, regulate vessel impacts, protect marine habitats through enforceable rules.
- **Access & Transport:** Improve ports of entry, inter-island ferries/air links, visitor-friendly immigration stays (e.g., longer initial stamps).
- **Destination Management:** Introduce site quotas/carrying capacities; publish uniform fees/policies; create a national events calendar to spread demand.
- **Institutional Capacity:** Establish a customer-service standard and licensing enforcement; build an HLSCC tourism institute; streamline "one-stop" approvals; consider CSR policy to mobilize private support.

Purpose and Mandate of the Consultation Process

The Ministry launched a territory-wide consultation to inform a cohesive national tourism policy and ground the same in current realities, stakeholder priorities, and regional best practice to guide sustainable growth. The process combined island-based community forums with sector-specific sessions scheduled across the first half of 2025. It built explicitly on earlier work: (i) OECS-supported consultations in January 2024, and (ii) the Tourism Summit, whose outputs seeded topics for deeper dialogue. Outreach was intentionally inclusive, spanning the sister islands— from Anegada to Jost Van Dyke—and pairing island meetings (e.g., Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke) with themed consultations (e.g., Events/Entertainment/Sports; Marine & Yachting; Education & Capacity Building.

Sessions were convened by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development, with opening and closing interventions variously by the Premier, Honourable Natalio Wheatley, the Junior Minister for Tourism and Culture, Honourable Luce Hodge-Smith, the Permanent Secretary, Mr. Joseph Smith Abbott and the Assistant Secretary, Sasha Flax. Technical officials from related ministries (e.g., Environment/Natural Resources/Climate Change) joined as relevant. Attendees included community members, private-sector operators, civil society, sports and events federations, and education stakeholders.

Each meeting followed a consistent structure: short framing presentations (economic context; sustainability frameworks; policy pillars) followed by an open floor for reactions and policy options. This ensured a shared evidence base before dialogue and linked feedback directly to the emerging policy structure.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development recorded detailed minutes and synthesized "Key Takeaways" for each session. The Ministry committed to compile and publish proceedings for transparency and to maintain stakeholder engagement as drafting proceeds. Leadership also acknowledged the need for visible follow-through so consultations translate into concrete reforms.

All inputs from island and sector meetings were synthesized to shape two near-term deliverables: (1) the consolidated proceedings (minutes and recommendations) and (2) the first official draft of the National Tourism Policy for broad review prior to Cabinet submission. The drafting is anchored in the OECS Common Sustainable Tourism Policy framework and aligned with the National Sustainable Development Plan.

Across sessions, the Ministry emphasized inclusivity, territory-wide coverage, evidence-based decision-making, and service-quality-as-sustainability—ensuring the policy addresses the full visitor journey while balancing environmental, cultural, and economic objectives.

Applying the OECS Framework to the Virgin Islands' National Tourism Policy: Synopsis of the OECS Common Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework

The OECS framework sets out a policy "house" (Figure 1) for Sustainable, Resilient, Innovative Tourism that promotes inclusive economic development. Its eight pillars organize the work of government and partners:

1. **Inclusive Growth & Income Distribution**—community tourism, MSME development, youth engagement, value-chain linkages;
2. **Blue Tourism**—expansion of marine tourism, reef restoration, coastal/Beach Use planning, MPAs, marinas/moorings, and workforce skills;
3. **Climate Change & Risk Resilience**—adaptation/mitigation, alternate and blue energy, carbon-neutral tourism, sargassum response, crisis preparedness;
4. **Product & Niche Development**—cultural heritage, events/festivals, culinary, regional marketing, accessibility, grading/standards and certification;
5. **Biodiversity & Resource Conservation**—waste minimization, circular tourism, plastics/Styrofoam reduction, efficient water/energy use;
6. **Access & Transport Services**—cost-effective inter/intra-regional air and ferry links, air/sea/ground transport, energy-efficient mobility;
7. **Destination Management**—research/statistics (including TSAs), technology use, labour/HR, PPPs/Destination Councils, public awareness, legislative infrastructure;
8. **Institutional Capacity**—strong national tourism agencies, added value of the tourism function at the centre of government, public-agency partnerships, regional cooperation.

Across all pillars, the foundational guiding principles are: sustainable development; evidence-based decisions; PPP, collaboration and integration; and systematic monitoring & evaluation.
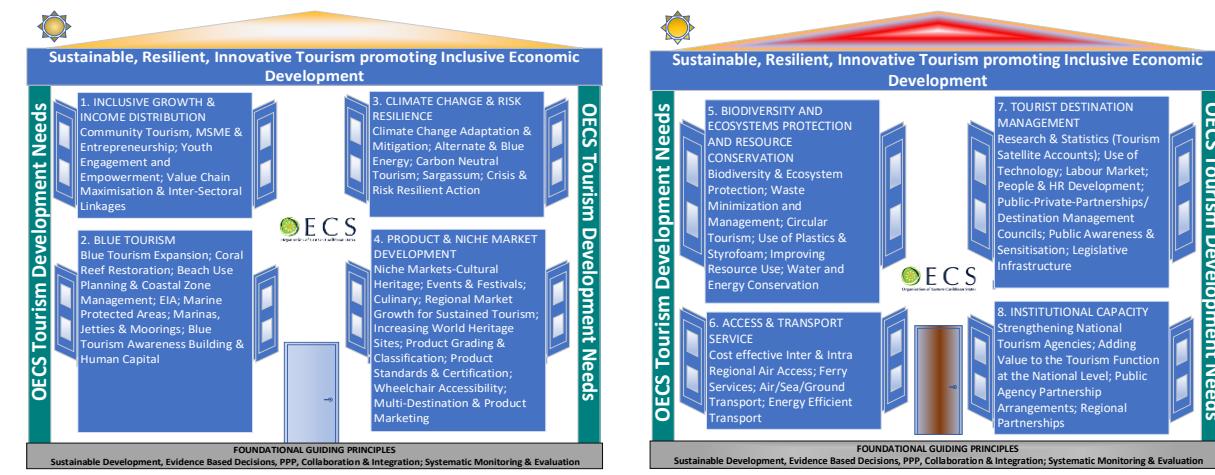
Figure 1

The National Tourism Policy adopts the OECS "policy house" as its organizing spine, structuring the Virgin Islands' approach around eight pillars—Inclusive Growth, Blue Tourism, Climate & Risk Resilience, Product & Niche Development, Biodiversity & Resource Conservation, Access & Transport, Destination Management, and Institutional Capacity—so that all priorities and actions are framed for sustainability, resilience, innovation, and inclusive growth.

The framework is adapted to the VI context in three ways: (1) sustainability explicitly includes service quality/guest experience as a policy lever (not only environmental and social factors); (2) a strong emphasis on the Blue Economy aligns marine tourism management with reef restoration, coastal planning, and marine protected areas; and (3) policy delivery is tied to a seamless visitor journey from pre-arrival to departure.

The OECS pillars also translate directly into instruments and standards in the VI: carrying capacity and site-by-site quotas for high-pressure sites (e.g., The Baths), regulatory upgrades for safety and environmental performance, and use of the Environmental & Tourism Levy to finance product development, national parks infrastructure, and climate resilience projects—complementing the budget rather than replacing it.

Implementation is anchored in national and regional alignment: the policy is grounded in the NSDP, guided by UNWTO/UNEP/IUCN sustainability definitions, and explicitly draws on the OECS regional policy work to ensure coherence across the Eastern Caribbean. Evidence-based decision-making, public-private partnership, and clear success metrics are stated delivery principles, informed by the Tourism Summit and ongoing consultations that feed minutes and stakeholder-led recommendations into the first public draft.

MINUTES OF CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS

Introduction to the Minutes

This section presents the official minutes from the territory-wide consultation series convened to inform the Virgin Islands' new National Tourism Policy. It includes island and sector sessions—ranging from Blue Economy/Marine & Yachting, Food & Cultural Heritage, Ecotourism, and Cruise, to sister-island community meetings and youth engagements—organized in the order shown in the table of contents.

Each session followed a common format: brief framing remarks and presentations to establish the economic and policy context, followed by an open floor for stakeholder inputs. The minutes capture that flow—opening remarks, agenda framing, key issues and options raised, and immediate next steps—for transparency and continuity into drafting.

Where available, a short "Key Insights/Key Takeaways" lead-in precedes the detailed minutes for rapid reference; these items reflect the themes stakeholders emphasized most strongly in each meeting record.

Finally, these minutes form part of the public proceedings that will be compiled and published, and they directly feed the first draft of the National Tourism Policy alongside the consolidated stakeholder-led recommendations.

Blue Economy/Marine & Yachting Tourism

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held at Maria's by the Sea, 4 March 2025

Key Insights from the Blue Economy and Marine Industry Sector Consultation

1. **Modernizing Marine Infrastructure** - BVI must expand and upgrade marinas, mooring facilities, and port services to accommodate larger yachts and improve visitor convenience. Underutilized assets like Gunn Creek and Cyril B. Romney Tortola Pier Park should be repurposed for marine tourism.
2. **Reducing Bureaucracy and Streamlining Processes** - Licensing, work permits, and yacht registrations need to be streamlined through a one-stop-shop system to reduce administrative delays and improve business efficiency.
3. **Managing Capacity and Sustainability** - Overcrowding at anchorages and tourism hotspots must be controlled through clear capacity limits for yachts and cruise ships, ensuring environmental sustainability and visitor satisfaction.
4. **Strengthening Environmental Protections** - Regulations on waste disposal, sewage pump-out facilities, and reef conservation need urgent implementation to protect the BVI's marine ecosystem.
5. **Enhancing Safety Regulations** - High-traffic areas like White Bay require stricter safety oversight, particularly regarding cruise ship tender operations and marine traffic management.
6. **Revising Immigration Policies** - Tourist entry and visa policies should be reformed to allow automatic 90-day stays, making it easier for long-term visitors to remain in the territory without bureaucratic hurdles.
7. **Targeting High-Value Cruise Tourism** - BVI should prioritize smaller, high-spending cruise lines over mass-market vessels, ensuring greater economic benefits with minimal environmental impact.
8. **Investing in Workforce Development** - Expanding hospitality and marine training programs is essential to develop a skilled local workforce and maintain service excellence in the industry.
9. **Improving Customer Service Across All Sectors** - A national customer service initiative is needed to ensure that immigration officers, hospitality staff, and government agencies create a welcoming visitor experience.
10. **Strengthening Regional Collaboration** - BVI should work with neighbouring territories to enhance joint yachting itineraries and tourism packages, maintaining its competitive edge in the Caribbean.

35 *Meeting's Discussion and Minutes*

Introduction

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development, Joseph Smith-Abbott, formally welcomes attendees. He introduces the meeting as the first in a series of sector-based and island-wide consultations, scheduled to take place throughout March and April.

40 **Remarks by the Junior Minister for Tourism and Culture**

Honourable Luce Hodge-Smith, the Junior Minister for Tourism and Culture, delivers opening remarks. She describes the consultation as a key milestone in shaping the National Tourism Policy, which aims to promote sustainable development, cultural preservation, and an improved visitor experience. Tourism is described as more than just an economic sector—it is integral to the identity and economy of the Virgin

45 Islands.

She highlights previous consultations in January 2024 as part of the OECS Regional Policy Development process, which engaged 70 local practitioners, civil society members, and government officials. Additionally, a recent tourism summit brought together key stakeholders to discuss challenges and solutions for tourism transformation. These past discussions serve as the foundation for developing a policy aligned

50 with regional best practices.

The Junior Minister urges stakeholders to participate actively in shaping an inclusive, innovative, and sustainable tourism policy. She reaffirms the government's commitment to developing a long-term strategic vision for the sector.

Presentation on the National Tourism Policy Framework

55 Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith-Abbott begins his presentation by outlining the format and structure of the National Tourism Policy. He emphasizes that this consultation builds upon previous exchanges and seeks to deepen discussions on tourism-related issues.

He presents economic data, referencing the macroeconomic review by the Ministry of Finance for 2023-2025. In 2024, tourism's contribution to nominal GDP was estimated at $1.75 billion, with a real GDP value

60 of $1.6 billion. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the sector contributed approximately 52% of GDP in 2023 when direct goods and services and tourism-related construction investments are aggregated.

The policy will be framed through the lens of sustainability, guided by three internationally recognized approaches:

65 1. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) – Ensuring economic, social, and environmental benefits for all stakeholders.
2. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – Addressing the viability of tourism while minimizing environmental impacts and preserving local culture.
3. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – Focusing on biodiversity conservation,
70 local economic support, and responsible tourism.

For the Virgin Islands, sustainability will be expanded beyond environmental and social aspects to include service quality and economic impact.

Defining Sustainability in Tourism

Sustainability is not only about environmental conservation but also about service delivery and guest satisfaction. The policy will consider both positive and negative guest experiences, recognizing their impact on economic success. It will assess how private and public sector efforts can enhance visitor satisfaction, ensuring long-term tourism growth.

The policy framework will cover the entire tourist experience, from the moment a traveller decides to visit the Virgin Islands to their departure. This requires an enabling environment that fosters meaningful experiences. A smooth, immersive, and seamless journey is central to sustainability, ensuring that cultural, natural, and hospitality elements contribute positively. Sustainability will also emphasize eco-friendly accommodations, responsible transportation, and ethical tourism activities.

Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Implementation

The policy development process is ongoing and builds on past consultations with stakeholders, government entities, communities, and NGOs. The aim is to create an enabling environment through regulatory frameworks and incentives that support sustainable tourism. The policy will provide a clear roadmap aligning tourism growth with environmental, cultural, and economic priorities.

Previous consultations, including tourism meetings across the Virgin Islands and the 2025 Tourism Summit, have shaped the approach. The policy framework will draw heavily from the OECS regional policy, expected to be issued at the end of the month. This ensures that the Virgin Islands' tourism policy aligns with broader regional strategies.

Policy Framework and Key Thematic Areas

The National Tourism Policy is rooted in the National Sustainable Development Plan and will ensure evidence-based decision-making. It will define partnerships between public and private sectors and establish clear success metrics.

The policy structure is visualized as a "house" with eight key pillars:

1. Inclusive growth and income distribution
2. Blue economy
3. Climate change and risk resilience
4. Product and niche market development
5. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection
6. Access and transport services
7. Tourist destination management
8. Institutional capacity

The meeting's focus is on Blue Tourism, addressing marine conservation, sustainable coastal development, and the economic opportunities linked to the ocean. Key initiatives include restoring coral reefs, managing beach use, improving coastal zone management, expanding marine protected areas, and promoting eco-tourism.

Consultation Process

110   The consultations will continue over the next few months, integrating stakeholder feedback to refine policy responses. The government aims to ensure evidence-based decision-making in shaping the final National Tourism Policy. The framework will be made publicly available for stakeholders to review, and the policy will be continuously informed by discussions with various tourism sector actors.

115   This marks the first step in a broader participatory process, ensuring that tourism development in the Virgin Islands is strategic, sustainable, and beneficial for all.

Presentation on Marine and Yachting Tourism

Assistant Secretary Ms. Flax delivers the second part of the presentation, focusing on marine and yachting tourism within the broader framework of shaping the future of tourism in the Virgin Islands. She highlights the British Virgin Islands (BVI) as a premier yachting and marine tourism destination, contributing

120   significantly to GDP and employment. The sector includes sailing, chartering, boat rentals, marinas, regattas, and marine services.

A growing focus on sustainability and the blue economy is emphasized. The blue economy is defined as a sustainable approach to utilizing ocean resources for economic growth while balancing tourism, conservation, and community benefits. Key sectors within this concept include:

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1. Yachting and charters
2. Marine conservation and ecotourism
3. Fisheries and ocean sustainability
4. Blue innovation and technology

Flax outlines key strengths and opportunities in marine and yachting tourism. Strengths include the

130   territory's natural beauty, ideal sailing conditions, and a well-established reputation as the "sailing capital of the Caribbean." There is strong demand for both crewed and bareboat charters, and the BVI benefits from a network of experienced marine professionals and businesses. Opportunities for growth include expanding ecotourism and sustainable yachting, investing in green marine infrastructure, enhancing regulations for better management, and leveraging technology for maritime innovation.

135   *Challenges in Marine and Yachting Tourism*

Despite its strengths, the marine tourism sector faces notable challenges:

- Environmental degradation, including damage from anchoring, pollution, and reef depletion.
- Overcrowding at key anchorages.
- Regional competition from other yachting hubs.

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- Rising costs and operational challenges for businesses.
- Regulatory gaps that hinder sustainable growth.

Policy Considerations for Sustainable Marine Tourism

AS Flax presents key policy questions to guide the development of sustainable marine tourism in the BVI:

1. Sustainability and conservation – How can marine tourism be managed to balance environmental

145   protection and economic growth?

2. Regulatory framework – What policies are needed for anchoring, waste disposal, and mooring regulations?
3. Business growth and support – How can local businesses benefit from the sector's expansion?
4. Infrastructure development – What investments are necessary for marinas, docks, and other marine facilities?
5. Innovation and training – How can the workforce be developed to support the future of marine tourism?

Stakeholder Engagement and

The session transitions to stakeholder feedback, beginning with an industry professional requesting a SWOT analysis revision to include the "line-of-sight sailing" feature of the BVI, which is a strong marketing advantage. The multi-island experience is also emphasized as a unique feature of BVI tourism.

The discussion shifts to the designation of the BVI as the "Sailing Capital of the World" versus the "Sailing Capital of the Caribbean." While BVI appears in online searches as the latter, Rhode Island claims the global title due to its rich maritime history, consistent sailing conditions, and hosting major international sailing competitions such as the America's Cup. Some stakeholders suggest marketing the BVI as the "Yachting Capital of the World" instead, as the industry includes a variety of boats beyond just sailing yachts.

Infrastructure Challenges and Industry Perspectives

Stakeholders discuss challenges related to mooring infrastructure, particularly the increasing size of yachts. The lack of suitable mooring options for larger vessels is becoming a significant issue, limiting available anchorages and impacting the visitor experience. The demand for mooring buoys continues to rise, but their placement does not always accommodate newer, larger yachts.

A stakeholder from the charter industry notes that many existing mooring buoys are designed for smaller vessels, making it difficult for larger crewed yachts to find suitable anchorage. As the BVI seeks to attract mega yachts, there is a growing concern about insufficient infrastructure to accommodate them.

Marketing the BVI's Unique Geography and Experience

A stakeholder emphasizes that the proximity of islands in the BVI is a major selling point. Unlike other Caribbean destinations where sailing between islands can take hours, BVI visitors can sail between multiple islands within a day, making it a highly attractive destination for both short-term and long-term charters. Many first-time visitors are unaware of this unique advantage, highlighting the need for better marketing and education on the ease of inter-island travel.

Concerns Over Overcrowding and Visitor Experience

A key challenge raised is overcrowding at popular sites. A stakeholder describes a personal experience where a large number of boats raced to anchor at a popular snorkelling site, indicating that high demand for limited anchorages is degrading the visitor experience. This highlights the need for better management of vessel numbers and visitor flow to ensure that the quality of the tourism experience is maintained.

The discussion emphasizes the importance of balancing tourism growth with sustainable visitor management, ensuring that the marine environment is not compromised and that guests continue to have high-quality experiences.

Challenges of Bureaucracy in the Yachting Industry

A stakeholder representing a crewed yachting agency, raises concerns about government bureaucracy in the BVI. He notes that regulatory hurdles and excessive red tape have made operating within the yachting

sector increasingly difficult, citing that ten years ago, administrative tasks did not consume four months of the year. He stresses the need for streamlining licensing, work permits, and other bureaucratic processes, suggesting that the government examine best practices from competitors such as St. Vincent, the Grenadines, and the Bahamas.

The speaker further questions when the industry will reach its capacity, noting that the lack of marina space is already a limiting factor. He emphasizes that while the BVI is often discussed as one of the world's leading yachting destinations, it lacks the infrastructure to support further expansion. Government officials encourage stakeholders to provide specific feedback on challenges related to bureaucracy so that these concerns can be addressed within policy reforms.

Another stakeholder highlights the Labour and Immigration departments as particularly problematic, stating that work permits for hiring yacht captains, chefs, and other crew members take an unacceptably long time to process—often up to two months. He argues that these delays hinder business operations and must be improved, particularly in an era where computerization should be expediting, not slowing, administrative tasks. A one-stop-shop approach for licensing and approvals is proposed as a potential solution.

The Need for Data-Driven Tourism Policy
A stakeholder stresses the importance of data collection and access in guiding tourism policy. He recalls a time when the BVI government provided detailed data on tourism, including breakdowns of overnight visitors, charter guests, and land-based tourists. Over the years, access to such granular data has diminished, making it harder to assess the true economic impact of the marine sector versus resorts and villas.

The stakeholder highlights the need for better GIS (Geographic Information Systems) data to understand the capacity of marinas, moorings, and boatyards. He asks whether the government has up-to-date figures on the number of berths available in marinas, the locations of mooring fields, and the potential for future expansion. Additionally, he points out the importance of hurricane season preparedness, suggesting that data on dry dock storage capacity should also be included in strategic planning.

In response, government officials acknowledge the importance of data and agree that policy decisions should be evidence-based. They note that while a significant amount of tourism data is already collected, there is often reluctance from both public and private sectors to share it. One of the challenges is ensuring that occupancy data for both land-based accommodations and yachts is reported accurately. The Ministry is working toward a more integrated spatial data infrastructure that could help visualize trends, opportunities, and challenges within the tourism sector.

Capacity Constraints and the Need for Smarter Growth
A government official reiterates that growth in the yachting sector must be managed carefully, as the BVI cannot physically expand its harbours, waters, or land to accommodate unlimited demand. Given these constraints, policy decisions must be made strategically to balance economic benefits with environmental and logistical realities.

On the issue of labour and immigration, the official acknowledges that digitization efforts through the Border Management System and the Labour Management System are intended to streamline processing. However, he requests continued feedback from the industry to assess whether these digital systems are effectively reducing bureaucratic delays.

A stakeholder then broadens the discussion by arguing that government agencies and statutory bodies are too focused on extracting revenue from businesses rather than creating a streamlined system for payments and approvals. He describes the situation where multiple agencies—such as the Shipping Registry,

230   Customs, the Finance Ministry, Labour, and Immigration—each impose separate fees and administrative burdens. He suggests a simplified, centralized payment system where businesses can pay a single, transparent fee rather than navigating multiple layers of government bureaucracy.

Safety Concerns in the Yachting Sector
A stakeholder raises safety concerns regarding the high density of boats in certain areas, particularly in Jost
235   Van Dyke's White Bay. He warns that the lack of regulations governing boat traffic in these areas could lead to serious accidents, such as propeller injuries or collisions. Given that the BVI has limited marketing funds, a major safety incident could result in a PR disaster that would be difficult to recover from. He urges policymakers to review yachting regulations to prevent overcrowding and improve safety measures before a crisis occurs.

240   **Concerns Over Regulatory Inconsistencies**

Another industry professional notes that inconsistency in the application of rules and fees is a persistent issue. The stakeholder highlights problems with the calculation of cruising permit fees, explaining that the charges vary depending on the port of entry or the officer handling the transaction. She suggests that clear, standardized signage displaying fee structures and policies at all ports would help eliminate confusion and
245   ensure fairness. This issue underscores a broader concern about the lack of uniform enforcement of regulations, which can create frustration and inefficiencies for businesses operating within the sector.

The Need for Clear and Consistent Policies
A stakeholder raises concerns about inconsistencies in regulations and fees within the marine tourism industry. The stakeholder suggests that publishing clear policies and fee structures at ports would help
250   eliminate confusion and ensure fair application of rules. This would prevent issues where different officers or ports apply varying charges for the same services.

The discussion shifts to broader policy improvements that could support the industry. While some believe the sector is already well-regulated, there is a pressing need for capacity planning. One stakeholder emphasizes the importance of setting limits on the number of yachts and cruise ships to prevent
255   overburdening marine infrastructure. The lack of waste management solutions for yachts is also highlighted. Currently, there are no pump-out facilities for yacht sewage, meaning that effluent is often discharged into the sea, exacerbating environmental concerns. The Marine Association has established an internal policy for sewage disposal, but there is no official government mandate.

Calls for Capacity Planning and Industry Collaboration
260   A stakeholder supports the idea of implementing a formal capacity policy to protect the environment and maintain sustainable tourism. She notes that previous reports on this issue have been written but not enforced, and urges the government to finally take action.

The stakeholder also calls for greater collaboration between policymakers and industry stakeholders before new legislation is passed. She proposes a structured consultation process, ensuring that industry
265   professionals have a chance to review and contribute to laws before they reach the House of Assembly. Another key point she raises is that marine tourism should not have a one-size-fits-all policy, as each island has different tourism needs and capacities. Safety, particularly the need for lifeguards at major beaches, should be a key focus, given that the BVI is a water-based tourism destination.

Another speaker echoes the need to reconsider tourism capacity, particularly in light of increasing yacht
270   sizes. He explains that while the BVI became a premier charter destination due to its calm waters and proximity of islands, larger yachts are less affected by open water conditions. This means that ultra-high-

net-worth travellers now have more destination options, making the BVI's exclusivity and service offerings more critical than ever. The industry must therefore not only consider the number of boats but also focus on attracting high-value visitors.

275 *Balancing Small and Large Charter Operations*
A debate arises about the economic impact of large yachts versus smaller charter vessels. Some argue that mega yachts bring in high-spending guests who arrive by private jet and spend tens of thousands of dollars per week. Others counter that smaller charter operations provide more employment opportunities for locals.

One stakeholder clarifies that charter companies do not make excessive profits, despite misconceptions.
280 Costs have risen dramatically since the hurricanes, with insurance premiums increasing by 30-40%, and expenses for storage, water, electricity, and labour also rising significantly. Additionally, the BVI no longer offers technical training for yacht maintenance, making it difficult to find skilled marine technicians. There is an urgent need to revive training programs to support local employment in the marine industry.

Debating the Value of Cruise Tourism
285 The conversation shifts to the role of cruise ships in the BVI economy. One stakeholder argues that the cruise industry primarily benefits the government treasury, with limited trickle-down effects to the local economy. The stakeholder points out that many cruise passengers spend very little money onshore, often purchasing only small souvenirs or bottles of water.

Environmental concerns are also raised, particularly regarding air pollution from cruise ships. A resident
290 describes the thick plumes of smoke emitted when ships arrive in port, warning that this pollution negatively affects residents living in Road Town.

However, not all stakeholders share this negative view. A small charter business owner explains that his company relies on cruise passengers for day tours. The stakeholder acknowledges that some ships have passengers who do not engage in local activities, but others, such as Disney Cruise Line, actively encourage
295 shore excursions. He stresses that eliminating cruise tourism would harm small charter operators who depend on these visitors.

A suggestion was made that the BVI can consider being more selective about which cruise ships it attracts. This would ensure that ships with passengers who engage in local activities are prioritized, while minimizing the environmental and economic downsides of mass tourism.

300 *Discussion on Training Programs and Workforce Development*
The conversation shifts to the status of marine training programs at the local college. A stakeholder expresses surprise that a previously established marine apprenticeship program had been discontinued, but another attendee clarifies that it has been restarted. There are currently 18 students set to graduate from the program, who will soon be looking for positions in the industry. This signals progress in addressing the
305 need for skilled labour within the marine sector.

Infrastructure Investments to Maintain BVI's Yachting Leadership
A local entrepreneur with decades of experience in the marine industry, shares insights on the changing landscape of yachting tourism. The stakeholder observes that larger yachts require more sophisticated infrastructure, and the BVI is falling behind in providing adequate facilities. While the territory remains a
310 top destination, competing regions such as St. Thomas, St. Martin, and the Grenadines are upgrading their marinas to attract high-end clientele.

The stakeholder stresses the importance of developing environmentally sustainable marinas that cater to luxury yacht visitors, who expect high-end dockside services. Without modernized marina infrastructure,

the BVI risks losing these lucrative guests to destinations with superior facilities. Investment in world-class marinas would not only attract high-spending visitors, but also create employment opportunities.

Safety Concerns and the Need for Infrastructure at White Bay
An entrepreneur based in White Bay, raises serious safety concerns regarding cruise ship operations. He reports that some cruise lines use their lifeboats as tenders to transport passengers directly onto the shore. This practice creates a dangerous situation for swimmers and smaller vessels, with frequent near-miss incidents.

Additionally, White Bay lacks proper docking facilities, forcing charter boats, cruise ship tenders, and other vessels to compete for limited space. The existing dock is deteriorating, and Henderson calls for government investment in new infrastructure. He also highlights an inconsistency in environmental levies, noting that cruise ships are not subject to the same environmental fees as visiting yachts. He suggests that levying similar charges on cruise ships could provide additional revenue for infrastructure improvements.

It is also noted that fewer luxury yachts visited the BVI for New Year's celebrations compared to previous years. He attributes this shift to St. Martin and Anguilla strengthening their regional partnerships, making them a more attractive destination. He recommends that the BVI collaborate with neighbouring territories to offer a more diverse and competitive tourism product. Lastly, he reiterates the need for a one-stop-shop approach to simplify business operations and reduce bureaucratic barriers.

Cruise Tourism Strategy and the Need for Alternative Attractions
A stakeholder reaffirms the importance of selecting the right cruise partners for the BVI. Not all cruise lines contribute equally to the economy, and some passengers have a much lower economic impact than others. It is suggested that BVI's tourism strategy should focus on attracting cruise lines with higher-spending guests.

Also highlighted is a lack of attractions to accommodate large volumes of cruise passengers on peak days. Without alternative tourism sites, an influx of cruise visitors can overcrowd key destinations, negatively impacting yachting tourists and other high-end visitors. As a potential solution, she suggests that one or more of the uninhabited islands could be developed into a controlled attraction site to disperse visitor numbers more evenly across the territory.

Investing in People and Preparing for Global Economic Changes
A stakeholder underscores that investment in people is the most important factor in maintaining BVI's tourism leadership. The quality of the visitor experience is directly tied to the skills, knowledge, and service quality of tourism industry professionals. The stakeholder stresses that training programs must be continuous and well-supported, ensuring that employees remain skilled, knowledgeable, and passionate about the industry.

Also raised are concerns about global economic uncertainty and how it may impact BVI tourism. With major economic shifts occurring worldwide—including trade tensions, inflation, and geopolitical instability—she urges proactive planning to ensure that BVI tourism remains resilient and adaptable.

Improving Ports of Entry and Immigration Policies
A stakeholder highlights serious issues at BVI's ports of entry, noting that current facilities struggle to handle visitor volume. At ferry terminals such as Road Town, West End, and Jost Van Dyke, passengers often wait in long lines outdoors without shelter, enduring rain or excessive sun exposure. The stakeholder calls for immediate investments in terminal infrastructure to improve the arrival and departure experience.

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355   The immigration process also presents challenges. Unlike the U.S., where visitors receive a 90-day stamp upon entry, BVI grants visas only for the exact number of days stated by visitors upon arrival. Tourists who wish to extend their stay must travel to Road Town, visit the Immigration Office, and undergo a bureaucratic process—a significant inconvenience that frustrates long-term visitors.

       Another stakeholder emphasizes that this restrictive policy discourages extended stays, particularly for villa
360   renters and long-term yachting visitors. Tourists who originally plan to stay for a few weeks but later decide to extend their visit should not have to waste a full day dealing with immigration paperwork. The government is urged to adopt a more visitor-friendly policy, potentially granting longer initial visa periods to accommodate extended stays without requiring additional approvals.

       Challenges in Visitor Experience and Hospitality
365   A stakeholder highlights major shortcomings in the visitor experience at BVI's ports of entry, criticizing the lack of a welcoming atmosphere. She argues that the first impression given to visitors is cold and uninviting, with immigration officers barely making eye contact or greeting tourists. This contrasts with other destinations where visitors are warmly welcomed, encouraged to explore, and made to feel valued.

       The stakeholder laments the decline in personalized service, recalling how in the past, tourists would
370   remember and praise individual hospitality staff by name, whereas now, that personal connection has diminished. It is stressed that tourism is no longer just competing within the Caribbean but on a global scale, and BVI must improve its service culture to remain competitive.

       Additionally, the stakeholder notes that local communities need to be more aware of the importance of tourism. Unlike in Porto Rico, where tourism is ingrained in the culture, many in the BVI see hospitality
375   jobs as just employment rather than a passion or a crucial part of the economy. The stakeholder warns that while financial services could decline, tourism is a long-term industry that must be nurtured, emphasizing that poor service and negative experiences are already affecting repeat visitation rates.

       Maximizing Underutilized Government Assets
       A participant suggests leveraging existing but underused government assets to enhance the tourism
380   experience. She specifically mentions:

       - Gunn Creek, which could be repurposed for vessel clearance services, relieving congestion at other entry points.
       - The unutilized waterfront section at Cyril B. Romney Tortola Pier Park, which has remained unrepaired since the hurricanes. She suggests rebuilding this space to serve as an additional docking
385   facility for visitors, including Puerto Rican boaters, who find Road Town's docks inadequate.

       The stakeholder highlights that these sites could cater to visiting yachts and provide shopping and dining experiences, making the BVI a more attractive destination for longer stays.

       Investment in Education and Workforce Development
       Another stakeholder emphasizes the need for long-term investment in education, particularly in tourism
390   and hospitality. He argues that training in hospitality should start from high school and continue into the college level, ensuring that future professionals understand customer service, tourism management, and industry best practices.

       He notes that while the BVI places heavy focus on fields like law and accounting, tourism—the territory's economic backbone—often lacks structured, formalized education pathways.

395 *Closing Remarks and Future Consultation Plans*
As the meeting concludes, officials encourage attendees to provide additional feedback via a digital survey, allowing those who could not attend in person to contribute.

They also emphasize that this is just the first of many consultations, with sector-specific and island-wide meetings planned. Future discussions will be held on Jost Van Dyke and the sister islands, ensuring a
400 comprehensive national tourism policy that incorporates diverse stakeholder perspectives.

Minister's Closing Remarks: Policy Direction and Industry Collaboration
The Junior Minister for Tourism and Culture expresses gratitude for the passionate and insightful discussions. She acknowledges that the goal is to complete the National Tourism Policy by June, necessitating a packed consultation schedule.

405 Key takeaways from the discussion include:

- Government does consider industry feedback in legislative processes. She cites the Commercial Recreational Vessels License Bill as an example, which was revised based on stakeholder input before being sent to the House of Assembly.
- The need for larger yacht accommodations was an "eye-opener." She commits to working with
410 industry leaders to determine the necessary investments in moorings, buoys, and docking facilities.
- Balancing cruise and yachting tourism remain a challenge. While some past policies limited cruise ship arrivals, the current approach seeks to diversify visitors while protecting the environment.
- Investment in customer service and training is critical. This includes not just front-line hospitality workers but all public service employees, as tourism impacts multiple sectors, including
415 immigration, customs, and local businesses.
- Ports of entry improvements are underway, including planned upgrades for the West End Dock and Road Town Jetty.
- Gun Creek and Pier Park redevelopment will be explored as potential solutions to enhance visitor convenience and experience.

420 The minister encourages continued engagement, inviting stakeholders to attend future consultations and contribute to refining policies that will ensure a sustainable and competitive tourism industry.

Meeting's Key Takeaways:

Stakeholders highlighted several critical challenges facing the BVI's marine and yachting tourism industry,
425 including:

1. Excessive bureaucracy and slow government processes, particularly in labour, immigration, and licensing.
2. The lack of comprehensive, publicly accessible tourism data, including yacht and land based occupancy rates, marina capacity, and dry storage availability.
430 3. Infrastructure limitations, as the BVI's harbours and marinas are struggling to accommodate increasing demand.
4. The need for regulatory reform, including clearer and more consistent rules on cruising permits and safety measures.
5. Concerns over uncontrolled growth, with stakeholders calling for a strategic approach to managing
435 visitor numbers to preserve the BVI's quality of experience.

Critical areas for improvement in BVI's tourism sector, particularly regarding visitor experience, infrastructure, education, and policy development include:

1. Improving visitor reception and hospitality training to create a warmer, more welcoming destination.
2. Maximizing government-owned assets like Gunn Creek and Tortola Pier Park to enhance yachting facilities.
3. Investing in tourism education and workforce development to ensure long-term industry success.
4. Enhancing infrastructure at ports of entry to reduce congestion and improve efficiency.
5. Balancing cruise tourism growth with environmental and economic sustainability.
6. Ensuring that new policies reflect industry feedback before legislative approval.

Critical policy gaps and opportunities in the marine tourism sector:

1. Clearer policies and enforcement – Publishing consistent regulations and fee structures at ports would reduce confusion.
2. Capacity planning – A formal policy is needed to determine the maximum sustainable number of yachts and cruise ships.
3. Collaboration on legislation – Industry stakeholders should have input on policies before they reach the House of Assembly.
4. Economic strategy – The government must balance the needs of large yacht tourism with those of smaller charter operations.
5. Workforce development – There is a pressing need to reintroduce technical training programs for marine sector jobs.
6. Cruise tourism review – The BVI should focus on attracting ships whose passengers actively contribute to the local economy while addressing environmental concerns.

Critical areas requiring urgent investment and reform:

1. Strengthening training programs – Workforce development is essential to maintaining service quality and industry competitiveness.
2. Upgrading marina infrastructure – Larger yachts require modern marinas with high-end facilities to remain competitive with rival Caribbean destinations.
3. Addressing safety concerns in White Bay – Unregulated cruise ship tender operations pose safety risks; the area needs better docking infrastructure.
4. Improving regional partnerships – The BVI should collaborate with neighbouring territories to offer a more diverse tourism product.
5. Refining cruise tourism strategy – The BVI must prioritize high-value cruise partners and develop alternative attractions to disperse visitor numbers.
6. Enhancing ports of entry – Long wait times, inadequate facilities, and inefficient processing at ferry terminals and airports damage the visitor experience.
7. Reforming immigration policies – Granting longer initial visa periods would encourage extended stays and increase tourism spending.

Food, Culinary, Culture and Cultural Heritage Sectors

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held at Maria's by the Sea, 6 March 2025

Key Takeaways from the Consultation on Food, Culinary, and Cultural Heritage Sectors

1. **Cultural and Culinary Tourism Must Be Prioritized** – Local food, music, and arts are central to the Virgin Islands' tourism identity but require greater visibility, investment, and structured policy support.
2. **Economic Potential of Culture Must Be Recognized** – Cultural industries—including culinary arts, performing arts, and artisan crafts—are key economic drivers that, if properly supported, can create jobs and boost local businesses.
3. **Local Cuisine Needs Greater Accessibility and Promotion** – Traditional BVI dishes must be consistently available in restaurants, hotels, and tourism venues, supported by policies that promote local sourcing and reduce dependence on imports.
4. **Cultural Education Must Be Strengthened** – Schools should embed Virgin Islands history, traditions, and culinary practices into the curriculum, with year-round programs to teach cultural identity and heritage preservation.
5. **Local Leadership in Hospitality and Tourism Must Increase** – More BVI nationals should hold leadership roles in the tourism and hospitality sectors, supported by scholarships, training programs, and hiring policies favouring local expertise.
6. **Island-Specific Branding Can Strengthen Cultural Tourism** – A targeted marketing approach should highlight each island's unique cultural identity, such as Anegada for seafood, Virgin Gorda for music, and Jost Van Dyke for immersive experiences.
7. **Year-Round Cultural Events Should Be Expanded** – Festivals and cultural activities must be distributed throughout the year to sustain visitor engagement and local participation beyond August and November.
8. **Heritage Sites and Museums Require Investment** – A dedicated fund for historical preservation and cultural infrastructure is needed to restore key landmarks, expand museums, and ensure their accessibility.
9. **Local Artists and Performers Need Greater Support** – Festivals and tourism events should prioritize local talent, with funding and platforms ensuring greater representation of BVI musicians, artists, and performers.
10. **A Stronger National Identity Must Be Promoted** – Public education campaigns and storytelling initiatives should reinforce BVI cultural pride, ensuring that traditions are preserved and passed on to future generations.

510   *Minutes*

Tourism Summit and Policy Framework
The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development, Joseph Smith-Abbott, formally welcomes attendees. He references the recently concluded tourism summit, which
515   provided further insights into the direction of the tourism policy. He further introduced a conceptual framework for the policy, likening it to a house with multiple windows and a strong foundation based on guiding principles of sustainability and development. The framework is structured around evidence-based decision-making, incorporating both public and private sector input. The policy also emphasizes collaboration, integration, and the ability to measure progress effectively.

520   *Key Policy Areas and Focus on Cultural Heritage*

The policy framework consists of eight key areas (or "windows"):

1. Inclusive growth and income distribution
2. Blue economy
3. Climate change and risk resilience
525   4. Product and niche market development
5. Biodiversity protection and resource conservation
6. Access and transport services
7. Destination management
8. Institutional capacity

530   The discussion for this meeting centres on the fourth area—product and niche market development, particularly cultural heritage tourism. The speaker highlights the importance of promoting cultural and culinary arts as part of this sector and encourages participants to provide their perspectives. Other policy areas, such as biodiversity, transport, and institutional capacity, will be covered in future consultations.

Culinary and Cultural Tourism: Importance and Opportunities
535   Sasha Flax, Assistant Secretary introduces the topic of culinary and cultural tourism, emphasizing its role in enhancing the visitor experience. They define culinary tourism as encompassing local cuisine, food festivals, and farm-to-table experiences, while cultural heritage tourism includes historical traditions, music, arts, and landmarks. Strengthening these areas would allow the Virgin Islands to differentiate itself in the tourism market.

540   Benefits of food and cultural tourism include:

- Increased visitor engagement and spending
- Strengthened local economy and job creation
- Support for small businesses, chefs, farmers, and artisans
- Preservation and promotion of traditions and identity

545   The speaker highlights strengths of the sector, such as a rich culinary tradition blending Caribbean and international influences, vibrant cultural festivals (e.g., Emancipation Festival, Lobster Festival, Virgin Water Festival), and strong community talent in food, arts, and music.

Opportunities include:

- Expanding food tours, cooking classes, and farm-to-table experiences
550
- Restoring and promoting cultural heritage sites
- Encouraging cultural performances, storytelling, and artisan showcases
- Creating policies to protect and market local food and cultural assets
- Fostering creative industries to promote locally made artisan products

Challenges Facing Cultural and Culinary Tourism

555 Despite its potential, the sector faces several challenges, including:

- Limited promotion of culinary and cultural assets
- Integration gaps where food and culture are not effectively included in tourism packages
- Infrastructure and investment shortfalls in heritage preservation
- Over-reliance on imported food products, which affects authenticity and sustainability
560
- Limited access to heritage sites, which are often privately owned
- Lack of formal policies to support cultural entrepreneurs

To address these challenges, the speaker proposes policy considerations such as:

1. Defining and branding the Virgin Islands' culinary identity
2. Protecting and revitalizing historical sites
565
3. Supporting local farmers, chefs, and artisans
4. Promoting farm-to-table dining and reducing reliance on imports
5. Showcasing traditions through cultural storytelling

Participants are encouraged to reflect on key questions, such as:

- What are the biggest challenges in food and cultural tourism?
570
- What policies or initiatives could strengthen the sector?
- How can the Virgin Islands better showcase its cultural and culinary heritage?
- What roles should the government and private sector play in preservation and promotion?
- What investments are needed for infrastructure, marketing, and product development?

A Taxi Driver's Experience: A Lesson in Cultural Authenticity

575 To illustrate the importance of cultural authenticity, the speaker shares a real-life story about a taxi driver who encountered a family of tourists looking for a traditional Virgin Islands dish. The father of the family requested a specific local fish dish, and the driver assured him it could be found. However, after visiting multiple restaurants, the driver was unable to locate the dish. As a result, the family refused to pay for their tour, feeling they had been misled by advertising that did not match reality.

580 The story underscores the importance of ensuring that local cuisine is readily available and incorporated into the tourism experience. The speaker encourages attendees to think critically about how cultural identity is reflected in tourism offerings and how authenticity can be maintained.

Open Floor Discussion: Community Initiatives and Government Support

The floor is opened for contributions. Hon. Dr. Karl Dawson shares their experience organizing Cultural
585 Thursdays, an initiative aimed at promoting local culture. While the initiative has generated positive online feedback and local interest, actual attendance remains inconsistent. Many people express enthusiasm but fail to attend in person.

The speaker raises an important policy consideration:

590 Should community groups receive government support if they demonstrate that their initiatives enhance the tourism experience?

They explain that financing Cultural Thursdays has been challenging, relying mainly on vendors and occasional business sponsorships, but there are ongoing costs that limit expansion. For example, live music performances would significantly enhance the experience but remain financially unfeasible without additional support.

595 The lack of consistency is another challenge. The speaker mentions an example where a Valentine's Day special caused a schedule shift, which might have confused visitors who had planned their trips around the usual event date. This highlights the importance of predictability in cultural tourism initiatives, ensuring that tourists can plan their visits around scheduled events.

The discussion remains open for further contributions, as attendees begin sharing their perspectives on 600 policy, community involvement, and practical challenges in integrating culture into the tourism sector.

Government Support for Cultural and Culinary Initiatives
A participant raises an important question about government support for community-led cultural and culinary initiatives. They emphasize that businesses and local groups are willing to invest time and effort into promoting culture and tourism, but there is uncertainty about the government's criteria for accessing 605 funding or official support. The speaker urges the government to clarify its position and establish a structured approach for partnerships.

Understanding Tourist Segments for Better Engagement
Another speaker stresses the need to segment tourist audiences to tailor experiences effectively. Different categories of tourists have distinct expectations:

610 - Cruise ship visitors come in large numbers but tend to spend less individually. However, cultural experiences and food offerings could help unlock more value from them.
- Sailboat tourists are typically middle- to high-income earners, with different preferences from cruise visitors.
- Luxury land-based tourists frequent high-end resorts and seek premium experiences.

615 The speaker highlights an example: Lobster Fest in Anegada is currently held on weekends, but most sailing tourists are away from the island at that time. To maximize participation, event planning must align with tourist behaviour and movement patterns.

Cultural Awareness and Education: Lessons from Barbados
A stakeholder discusses the importance of locals recognizing the value of their own cultural assets. She 620 references Barbados, where a deliberate national effort was made to promote local cuisine, including dishes made from breadfruit. A single cookbook by a dedicated advocate transformed public perception of local ingredients.

She highlights that many long-time residents of the Virgin Islands struggle to find traditional dishes, which affects both visitors and locals. Even though she has lived in the Virgin Islands for 22 years, she only knows 625 of one place to find a particular local dish, and only during Easter. This demonstrates the need for better accessibility and awareness of cultural foods year-round.

The Role of Schools in Preserving Cultural Heritage

A teacher at the Virgin Islands School of Technical Studies, expresses concern that students do not embrace local foods or cultural traditions. In her cooking classes, she makes an effort to incorporate traditional dishes, but students are often hesitant to engage.

One key issue is that culture is only formally celebrated during a single month (November), and then it is largely ignored. She argues that cultural education must be integrated into daily life and the school curriculum to ensure students develop a lasting appreciation for their heritage.

She also highlights the importance of the BVI Culinary Team, which used to prepare for international competitions by hosting cultural dinners. These events were highly successful, demonstrating that people are eager to support and experience local culinary traditions.

Revitalizing the BVI Culinary Team and Youth Engagement

Another participant, who has worked with the BVI Culinary Team and the Tourist Board, builds on Tanya's points. They stress that government support for the culinary team must be year-round, not just when competitions are approaching.

The speaker explains how efforts such as the Junior Chef Competition significantly boosted interest in culinary careers among young people. The first Junior Chef had opportunities to travel globally, representing the BVI at festivals and competitions.

They also reveal that they have personally raised over $100,000 in funding for the culinary team, with help from local sponsors and politicians. However, they argue that the team should be officially managed under the BVI Yachting, Hotel, and Tourism Association to ensure stability and growth.

A key takeaway is that cultural engagement must evolve with changing times. Younger generations consume content differently, relying more on digital platforms than traditional cookbooks. To keep traditions alive, cultural education must be modernized to blend heritage with contemporary appeal.

Challenges in Showcasing Local Arts and Music

The conversation shifts to performing arts and music, where similar challenges exist. The speaker acknowledges that local artists struggle to receive the same level of support as international performers.

For example, during major cultural festivals, foreign artists are often prioritized, with large amounts of money spent to bring them in. Meanwhile, local artists and bands receive significantly lower payments, limiting their ability to put on high-quality productions.

This results in a cycle where local artists cannot afford the elaborate performances that international acts deliver, further reinforcing the preference for foreign talent. The speaker calls for greater financial support for local musicians, painters, and performers to create a stronger, more self-sustaining cultural scene.

Historical Success of the BVI Culinary Team and Future Prospects

Honourable Hodge-Smith provides additional insight into the legacy of the BVI Culinary Team, referencing their participation in the 1990s Taste of the Caribbean competition. Although they didn't win, their dish was featured on the event's official booklet cover, highlighting the strong visual and cultural appeal of BVI cuisine.

She suggests that the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College's culinary program should serve as the training base for the team, ensuring a structured pipeline for developing local talent.

This segment of the discussion highlights key challenges and opportunities in promoting culinary and cultural tourism in the Virgin Islands:

1. Government Support: Local cultural initiatives need clear policies for financial and structural support.
2. Tourist Segmentation: Events and offerings must be strategically planned to align with tourist arrival and movement patterns.
3. Cultural Awareness: Both locals and tourists struggle to access authentic Virgin Islands cuisine and cultural experiences year-round.
4. Education: Schools play a critical role in embedding cultural appreciation into daily learning.
5. Performing Arts: Local musicians and artists need greater financial investment to showcase their talent effectively.
6. The Culinary Team: The BVI Culinary Team must be officially reinstated and supported year-round to train future chefs and represent the territory internationally.

Proposal for a Locally-Sourced Culinary Competition

Hon. Dawson discusses a recent conversation with the Permanent Secretary (P.S.) regarding the inclusion of a culinary competition during the annual cultural celebrations in November. This competition would require participating chefs to exclusively use locally grown, caught, or produced ingredients, aligning with the agriculture and fisheries sectors. The initiative aims to promote local products, encourage high-quality culinary standards, and integrate local cuisine more deeply into both cultural tourism and the restaurant industry.

Collaboration and Sustainable Cultural Policy Implementation

An online participant emphasizes the critical importance of collaboration in shaping sustainable cultural and tourism policies. She highlights a recurring issue in policymaking—the lack of funding allocations to support the marketing and execution of cultural events. Policies often lack "teeth" because there is no dedicated budget to sustain them over time.

She references previous initiatives that were highly successful, such as:

- A national culinary competition once managed by the BVI Tourist Board.
- Restaurant Week and BVI Food Fair, both of which were discontinued due to funding issues.

She argues that policy must address not only event organization but also strategic timing. Many cultural events are scheduled during peak tourist periods, but the off-season presents an opportunity to attract visitors when hotel occupancy is lower. Additionally, she underscores the importance of investing in the BVI's culinary education programs at H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC) and high schools. These institutions currently lack essential equipment, making it difficult to train future chefs and industry professionals.

Challenges in Promoting Local Cuisine in Restaurants

A stakeholder who hosts a food tour in Virgin Gorda, shares a key challenge: many local restaurants struggle to offer authentic Virgin Islands cuisine consistently. This is partly due to the high cost of local ingredients, which makes it difficult for restaurants to include traditional dishes as regular menu items. She provides the example of Wilkes (whelks), a traditional seafood delicacy, which can cost up to $30 per plate, making it less accessible.

She also notes that the BVI is not widely recognized as a cultural and heritage tourism destination, and policy must focus on changing this perception. She points out that there are too few heritage sites and

museums, and some, like the Sugar Works Museum, have remained closed since Hurricane Irma in 2017. There is also ongoing uncertainty about the future museum project on Main Street, and no clear framework for developing new cultural and historical attractions.

Island-Specific Cultural Branding and Destination Marketing

Another speaker reflects on past discussions about "destinations within the destination." While national branding is important, the BVI's tourism product should highlight the unique cultural identity of each island. The proposal includes:

- Anegada as the seafood capital
- Virgin Gorda as the music hub
- Tortola as the more cosmopolitan and high-end destination
- Jost Van Dyke as a unique, standalone tourism experience

By defining the cultural strengths of each island, tourism marketing could be more strategically targeted. Visitors often return to specific islands rather than the BVI as a whole, making it crucial to brand each island appropriately.

The speaker also suggests that budget allocations should be structured to support these targeted initiatives, with dedicated offices managing the promotion of each island's distinct cultural identity. This approach would not only drive tourist interest but also stimulate local economies by creating consistent, island-specific cultural events throughout the year.

Spreading Cultural Events Throughout the Year

A participant echoes the widely shared concern that cultural celebrations should not be confined to November. However, they point out that August—the Emancipation Festival—is the largest cultural celebration in the BVI, yet it is often overlooked in these discussions.

They stress that August should be seen as a major cultural period, alongside November, while also recognizing that events need to be spread more evenly throughout the year to drive continuous engagement and economic activity.

Investing in Heritage Infrastructure and Human Capital

The conversation shifts to the need for investment in heritage infrastructure and human capital. While funding is often discussed in terms of restoring historic buildings and developing museums, the speaker highlights a lesser-addressed issue—the need for specialized personnel to support cultural tourism initiatives.

For example, in order to properly document, preserve, and present BVI history and culture, there needs to be investment in:

- Researchers to study and document local heritage.
- Museum curators and exhibition designers who understand storytelling, spatial planning, and audience engagement.
- Cultural educators who can train and mentor young people to carry forward traditions.

Simply restoring a building does not make it a functioning museum or cultural centre—it requires knowledgeable professionals who can curate exhibits, create educational programs, and attract visitors. Without investment in human resources, heritage initiatives will struggle to be sustainable.

Ensuring Cultural Practices are Actively Passed Down

The speaker concludes with a fundamental principle from UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention—culture is not preserved unless it is actively practiced by young people. Simply teaching students about history and traditions is not enough; they must be engaged in cultural activities that allow them to experience, practice, and evolve these traditions.

For example, the art of storytelling is an essential part of Virgin Islands culture. If only elders can tell these stories, the tradition is at risk of disappearing when they are no longer around. The next generation must be taught how to tell these stories in an authentic BVI style, ensuring that cultural continuity is maintained.

This discussion continues to highlight critical policy gaps and opportunities for strengthening cultural and culinary tourism in the Virgin Islands:

1. Sustained Funding: Policies must include budget allocations to sustain cultural festivals, heritage initiatives, and culinary programs.
2. Local Cuisine Accessibility: High food costs and inconsistent restaurant offerings make it difficult to position the BVI as a culinary tourism destination.
3. Heritage Infrastructure: There is a lack of museums and cultural centres, with delayed restorations and limited development plans for new heritage sites.
4. Island-Specific Marketing: A "destinations within the destination" strategy could help differentiate and promote each island's unique cultural identity.
5. Year-Round Cultural Programming: Cultural events must be distributed across the calendar, rather than being concentrated in August and November.
6. Investment in Human Capital: Beyond physical infrastructure, investment is needed in researchers, museum professionals, and cultural educators.
7. Active Cultural Transmission: Young people must actively practice and engage in cultural traditions to ensure their survival.

Cultural Education and the Role of Educators

A speaker emphasizes the need for cultural education to go beyond passive learning and become a lived experience. They suggest that funding should be allocated to specialized educators who can integrate cultural education into schools and community initiatives. However, they acknowledge that collaboration with the Ministry of Education is necessary to assess needs and identify appropriate community resources to support this effort.

The Importance of Defining and Preserving Local Identity

A stakeholder supports earlier points made by other participants, particularly regarding the unapologetic promotion of local culture and identity. He criticizes the need to justify or differentiate local culinary terms, such as "BVI Peas," just because similar dishes exist elsewhere. He argues that there should be no hesitation in calling Virgin Islands cuisine by its traditional names, just as other countries do.

The stakeholder shares an anecdote from Singapore, where he went to great lengths to find a specific dish, illustrating that tourists actively seek out authentic local food. He insists that the language and terminology of BVI culture must remain intact and that residents should stand firm in preserving and promoting their unique traditions.

Challenges in Culinary Education and Industry Readiness

The stakeholder who has over 23 years of experience in the culinary field, discusses significant shortcomings in culinary education in the Virgin Islands. He notes that simply having a well-equipped

kitchen is not enough—the focus must be on building a robust infrastructure that prepares students for real-world professional kitchens.

He highlights the disconnect between culinary training and industry demands, pointing out that many graduates are not adequately equipped to compete internationally. He references his own experience advancing through the culinary ranks, emphasizing that students must be trained to compete at a global level, not just to cook for local settings.

Lack of Local Cuisine in High-End Resorts
The stakeholder criticizes the lack of local dishes on high-end resort menus, using Peter Island Resort as a rare example of a luxury establishment that includes traditional cuisine, such as oxtail. He expresses frustration that many high-end restaurants in the BVI offer the same generic menu items as international chains, instead of featuring local, culturally significant food.

He stresses that tourists do not travel to the BVI to eat the same food they can get at McDonald's or other international chains. Instead, they want an authentic culinary experience, which should be reflected in the menus of top-tier establishments.

Why BVI Chefs Choose to Work at Sea
A new speaker builds on Henry's points, raising the question: Why are many well-trained BVI chefs working on yachts instead of at land-based restaurants? They reveal that many BVI chefs, despite being highly qualified, struggle to find opportunities in local establishments.

One major factor is low pay. Many chefs working in high-end properties earn significantly less than they would on yachts. Some make in five days at sea what they would earn in a month at a resort. As a result, top-tier local chefs choose to work abroad or on yachts, depriving the territory of homegrown culinary talent.

The speaker highlights that BVI hospitality leadership is dominated by foreign professionals, despite many trained and experienced locals being available. They call for policy reforms to ensure that more local talent is placed in leadership roles within the tourism sector.

They also point to other Caribbean islands, such as St. Kitts and Nevis, where local professionals are promoted to top management positions in hotels and resorts. They argue that the BVI should follow suit by prioritizing the hiring and advancement of qualified Virgin Islanders in hospitality leadership.

Government's Role in Supporting Local Culinary Talent
The speaker insists that the government should integrate workforce development into tourism policy, ensuring that:

- Qualified local professionals have opportunities in leadership positions.
- There is investment in culinary training programs.
- There is financial support for Virgin Islanders pursuing careers in hospitality.

They note that many local hospitality professionals were trained abroad with government scholarships, yet they struggle to find high-level employment upon returning home. Without changes in hiring practices and policy enforcement, the speaker warns that this trend will continue, forcing Virgin Islanders to seek opportunities outside the territory.

Encouraging Local Cuisine in High-End Restaurants

Another speaker questions why high-end restaurants exclude local dishes. She acknowledges that hoteliers prioritize profitability, but asks whether this is due to actual guest preferences or a lack of effort in marketing local cuisine.

She references a similar issue in Barbados, where traditional dishes like "cuckoo and flying fish" were rarely featured in high-end restaurants for decades. However, through deliberate efforts to educate visitors and restaurateurs, local cuisine eventually became a staple in luxury dining experiences.

One potential solution suggested is government incentives. The government could offer tax breaks to restaurants that dedicate a portion of their menu to local cuisine, encouraging high-end establishments to feature BVI specialties while maintaining financial viability.

Lack of Local Representation in Top Hospitality Positions

A speaker reiterates the concern that many high-ranking positions in the BVI hospitality industry are held by expatriates, which influences the food and tourism experience. When decision-makers come from outside the region, they often bring their own culinary preferences rather than integrating authentic BVI cuisine into resort menus. Additionally, many hotels and resorts do not effectively use data to analyse customer preferences for local food, relying instead on high price points to sustain profitability.

This issue is compounded by the fact that many visitors do not come to the BVI specifically for the food but rather for relaxation and service experiences. As a result, resorts offer generic, internationally familiar food options rather than taking the opportunity to educate visitors on BVI culinary traditions.

The Global Rise of Culinary Tourism

The speaker emphasizes that food tourism is rapidly changing worldwide. In many destinations, local cuisine has become a major draw for visitors, and travellers now actively seek out authentic food experiences. They reference their travels in India and London, where food culture is deeply ingrained in the tourism experience. Restaurants in these cities compete to showcase their own cultural traditions, making authentic cuisine a defining part of the tourism product.

By contrast, in the BVI, there is a lack of innovation in presenting local cuisine, with many restaurants sticking to basic dishes without elevating them to higher culinary standards. The speaker provides an example of fish with mayonnaise sauce, which sounds unappealing in its basic form but could be rebranded as a fine-dining dish through better presentation and marketing techniques.

The Scarcity of Local Food Availability

A recurring issue is the limited availability of local food at both restaurants and casual dining spots. Many traditional dishes are hard to find, especially after certain hours, making it difficult for both locals and tourists to experience authentic BVI flavours.

The speaker shares their personal experience of returning to the BVI after a long absence and struggling to find local food on Tortola, particularly at night. Instead, they found that most available options were fast food or non-BVI cuisines, reinforcing the perception that local food is not a priority in the tourism sector.

The Need for Incentives to Support Local Cuisine

Another speaker supports the idea of introducing government incentives to encourage the promotion of local food and culture. They note that many successful tourist destinations—such as St. Martin—have fully embraced their local cuisine, offering authentic Caribbean food as the dominant option. Tourists in St. Martin do not seek out international cuisine because Caribbean food is the primary choice, and its quality and presentation make it appealing.

The speaker suggests that BVI restaurants and businesses need hands-on assistance, not just financial incentives. Many small businesses struggle with marketing and digital visibility, so government programs should include training and support in areas such as online marketing, social media engagement, and restaurant branding.

As an example, they recall an initiative where the BVI Tourist Board helped Anegada restaurants create Facebook pages, allowing them to reach a wider audience. Similar support programs could help restaurants and local vendors better market their businesses, making BVI cuisine more accessible to both locals and tourists.

Supporting Local Businesses and Cultural Preservation

The speaker expands on the need for structured programs to assist locally owned hotels, restaurants, and vendors. They propose a step-by-step approach to upgrading small businesses, rather than expecting them to immediately meet high-end tourism standards. This would include:

- Helping restaurants refine their menus with better descriptions and presentation to entice customers.
- Training in effective food marketing, including video content showcasing the preparation of local dishes.
- Providing structured assistance for small hotels and guesthouses to improve their services, accommodations, and visibility in the market.

They also mention a personal frustration with how traditional dishes are sometimes altered in ways that misrepresent BVI culinary culture. For example, some local versions of traditional dishes include unfamiliar ingredients, causing concern about losing authenticity in BVI cuisine.

Incorporating Cultural Diversity While Preserving BVI Identity

Another speaker acknowledges that the BVI has become more culturally diverse, with influences from various Caribbean and international communities shaping the local dining landscape. However, they argue that this should not mean losing or diluting BVI identity. Instead, foreign-owned or influenced restaurants should be encouraged to incorporate BVI flavours into their menus, ensuring that local food remains central to the tourism experience.

They suggest hosting workshops and educational seminars to help restaurant owners and chefs understand the importance of local cuisine and explore ways to integrate it into their offerings. Incentives could encourage fusion cuisine that respects traditional BVI flavours while embracing modern culinary trends.

Promoting Authentic Local Crafts and Souvenirs

A participant raises concerns about the lack of authentic BVI souvenirs, particularly in major tourism areas. They argue that many items sold as souvenirs are generic and mass-produced—often imported from other countries rather than being made locally.

They suggest promoting handcrafted BVI souvenirs, such as:

- Calabash shells
- Locally woven palm tree products
- Cassava bread and other traditional foods
- Handmade cultural artifacts

These types of souvenirs would not only support local artisans but also offer visitors a genuine piece of BVI culture to take home, rather than imported T-shirts and trinkets.

Changing Mindsets and Encouraging Cultural Engagement

A speaker emphasizes that transforming BVI's tourism and cultural landscape requires behavioural change, not just government policies. While government support is important, the community itself must take ownership of cultural preservation. This means:

- Passionate individuals ("foot soldiers") must actively promote BVI heritage.
- Education must extend beyond schools to the wider community.
- Workshops and local initiatives can help bridge gaps in awareness, training, and marketing.

They stress that a cultural shift must happen at all levels of society, ensuring that BVI traditions remain relevant and actively practiced.

Defining the BVI's Tourism Identity

The stakeholder concludes the discussion by stressing that the BVI must clearly define its tourism product. He recalls a successful marketing campaign in Barbados, where everything in the tourism experience was intentionally "Bajan"—from the food and music to the customer service and promotional materials.

He argues that the BVI must take a similar approach, ensuring that tourists are immersed in authentic local culture rather than experiencing a generic Caribbean resort experience. While cultural diversity should be acknowledged, the core identity of BVI culture must be preserved and promoted as the foundation of its tourism industry.

The discussion continues to highlight the challenges and opportunities in developing a stronger cultural tourism strategy for the BVI:

1. Local Representation in Hospitality – More BVI nationals should hold leadership positions in the tourism industry to ensure that local culture is prioritized.
2. Culinary Tourism Development – Local food must be made more available, and restaurants should be incentivized to include traditional dishes on their menus.
3. Marketing & Education Support – Programs should help businesses with digital marketing, branding, and menu development.
4. Authentic Souvenirs – Efforts should be made to replace mass-produced items with genuine BVI crafts and products.
5. Community-Led Initiatives – Cultural preservation should not rely solely on government; local advocates and businesses must actively engage.
6. A Defined Tourism Identity – The BVI must clearly establish itself as a cultural tourism destination, with a strong and distinct local identity embedded in every visitor experience.

Cultural Terminology and the Importance of Language in Identity

A speaker passionately defends the importance of preserving local terminology in culinary traditions, using the common dish "peas and rice" as an example. They emphasize that in the Virgin Islands, food is described in a culturally specific way, such as yellow rice, white rice, and seasoned rice, and the term "peas and rice" reflects this tradition. They push back against the notion that the name should change just because some visitors or expatriates expect it to be called "rice and peas," arguing that preserving this language is an essential part of maintaining BVI cultural identity.

The speaker recounts a recent incident where a restaurant menu listed "rice and peas" instead of "peas and rice", prompting them to write a letter to management to correct it. They argue that being apologetic about local culture leads to its erosion, stressing that cultural identity should be reinforced, not adapted to suit external expectations.

Shifting the Focus of Tourism to Local Residents

Another key point made is reconsidering the definition of "tourists". The speaker suggests that BVI residents themselves are an essential customer base and that local businesses should cater to their needs year-round, rather than solely focusing on seasonal visitors. They highlight the issue that restaurants frequently change menus or eliminate local dishes based on tourist demand, when in reality, locals consistently seek out and appreciate their own traditional food.

By focusing more on serving the local community, businesses can maintain cultural continuity and stabilize their offerings, instead of constantly adjusting for short-term tourist preferences. The speaker underscores that strong cultural tourism stems from a nation's ability to remain true to itself.

The Need for a Defined National Tourism Identity

The discussion shifts to a broader question: What do we want tourism in the BVI to look like? The speaker argues that successful Caribbean destinations maintain strong cultural identities by refusing to dilute their traditions. They state that many Caribbean countries embrace their uniqueness without feeling the need to conform to outside influences, yet in the BVI, there is often a tendency to "fit in" rather than stand firm in cultural traditions.

They reiterate that culture should be taught and celebrated unapologetically, providing the example of pea soup, which is traditionally made with milk and sugar in the BVI. The speaker stresses that traditions should not be altered or explained away to accommodate external expectations. Instead, there should be a deliberate effort to define and promote an authentic BVI experience.

They cite Dubai as an example of a destination that clearly educates visitors about its traditions, noting that informational books and guides help visitors understand local customs, food, and etiquette. The BVI, they argue, should take a similar approach by codifying and actively sharing its cultural identity.

Preserving the Virgin Gorda Easter Festival

The discussion shifts to a recent movement to change the timing of the Virgin Gorda Easter Festival, which has been celebrated for nearly 60 years. A speaker strongly opposes this potential change, arguing that traditions should not be altered simply because some individuals find them inconvenient.

They stress that maintaining longstanding cultural events is crucial for identity preservation, cautioning against external pressures or internal divisions leading to unnecessary changes. The speaker calls for community education and engagement to reinforce the importance of protecting cultural events from outside influences.

Cultural Knowledge Gaps Among Younger Generations

A mother recently reached out to one of the speakers, asking about a traditional ribbon pole dance because her child had an assignment on it, but she had no knowledge of the tradition. This anecdote highlights a growing disconnect between younger generations and their cultural heritage. The speaker notes that many parents themselves lack knowledge about BVI traditions, leaving children without reliable sources of information.

They suggest documenting oral histories from elders, pointing out that valuable cultural information is often found in funeral eulogies. Recognizing that funerals provide detailed life stories and historical insights, they propose preserving these records in local libraries as a research resource for students and educators.

Addressing Cultural Shame and Misconceptions Among the Youth
Malvern Brathwaite, Deputy Secretary raises an important question: Are younger generations ashamed of their cultural heritage? They reflect on how historical sites related to enslavement and colonial history are often avoided or dismissed by young people, who see them as negative or irrelevant.

The speaker recounts how, in the past, school trips were organized to historical landmarks, such as
995   dungeons, forts, and former plantations, to educate students on their heritage. However, modern students often resist learning about these sites, seeing them as symbols of oppression rather than resilience.

They further question why younger generations reject traditional foods, suggesting that a mindset shift is needed. They fear that local cuisine is being perceived as "peasant food," while expensive, foreign dishes are given more prestige. This creates a cultural disconnect, where younger generations fail to appreciate the
1000   value of their own traditions.

Teaching History with a Focus on Triumph and Resistance
Dr. Katherine Smith responds to the discussion on teaching the history of enslavement, emphasizing the importance of how it is taught. He explains that when history lessons start with enslavement, students may feel alienated, which is why it is crucial to begin with who Virgin Islanders were before enslavement.

1005   He stresses that stories of resilience and triumph must be included when teaching history, rather than focusing solely on suffering and oppression. This includes:

- Highlighting national heroes.
- Discussing acts of resistance.
- Framing historical events as stories of perseverance rather than defeat.

1010   This balanced approach ensures that young people see their heritage as a source of pride, rather than something to be ashamed of.

Challenges in Making Cultural Festivals Profitable
A participant from the festival organizing committee raises a critical issue: Cultural events often struggle to attract large crowds compared to international concerts. They cite the example of:

1015   - Jada Kingdom, a Jamaican artist, drawing 8,000 people to a festival village.
- A Fungi (local music) Festival attracting only 300 attendees.

This lack of attendance affects funding, as vendors and organizers prefer booking high-profile international acts that guarantee financial returns. As a result, there is a growing tension between promoting local culture and ensuring events remain financially viable.

1020   The speaker asks: Is our culture profitable? They highlight the economic pressures behind event planning, where local acts are sometimes excluded in favour of foreign artists who generate more revenue.

The Impact of Cultural Criticism and Expatriate Influence
The speaker touches on an underlying social tension between locals and expatriates, noting that negative comments about BVI traditions contribute to cultural disengagement. They share examples of how some
1025   expatriates openly criticize traditional BVI dishes, such as:

- Adding milk and sugar to pea soup.
- Serving hot souse instead of cold.

These criticisms lead to self-doubt among younger generations, making them less likely to embrace or promote their culture. The speaker suggests that this cultural erosion is exacerbated by external influences that challenge local customs.

This discussion highlights key cultural and tourism challenges in the BVI, including:

1. Defining a Clear Tourism Identity – The BVI must determine what kind of tourism experience it wants to offer and ensure that local traditions remain central.
2. Strengthening Cultural Education – Young people must be actively taught and engaged in BVI traditions to ensure cultural sustainability.
3. Resisting External Pressures – Traditions like "peas and rice" and the Easter Festival should not be changed to suit outside influences.
4. Addressing Cultural Shame – The narrative around BVI history, food, and customs must shift toward pride and resilience.
5. Making Culture Economically Viable – There needs to be a balance between cultural preservation and financial sustainability in event planning.

The discussion continues to explore solutions for ensuring the BVI's cultural identity is preserved, respected, and integrated into its tourism strategy.

Challenges in Cultural Expression and Acceptance

A speaker reflects on how younger generations struggle to express their cultural identity due to a lack of broad acceptance. They highlight the challenges faced by local artists, such as Julio, who promotes a modernized form of Virgin Islands music but faces criticism from older generations for not adhering to traditional Fungi Band music. This disconnect between generations makes it difficult for young artists to gain local support, even when they find international success.

Additionally, there is a double standard in how entertainment is supported, as local artists often struggle to gain recognition unless their music becomes associated with major events or crises, whereas foreign artists like Vybz Kartel or Jada Kingdom can easily draw large crowds at any time. The lack of institutional support for homegrown talent contributes to the difficulty of sustaining local cultural industries.

The Expatriate Influence on Local Culture

A non-BVI resident who has lived in the Virgin Islands for over two decades shares their perspective on how people respond to cultural differences. They note that acceptance of BVI traditions often depends on an individual's openness to learning, rather than a general sentiment among expatriates.

The speaker admits to having lived in the BVI for over 20 years without knowing why "peas and rice" was named as such, expressing appreciation for the newfound understanding. They argue that education and awareness-building can help counter external challenges to local customs, emphasizing that if BVI residents confidently explain their traditions, they will be less likely to be challenged or dismissed.

Cultural Identity Conflicts Among Local Youth

The conversation shifts to the cultural identity struggles of second-generation BVI residents, particularly those with parents from other Caribbean nations. A teacher recounts an experience with a student who was born and raised in the BVI but rejected traditional pea soup with milk and sugar, dismissing it as "a joke." This illustrates how even BVI-born individuals may not fully embrace local traditions if they grow up in households that follow different cultural norms.

The internal division among young people regarding what is "authentically BVI" creates challenges for preserving cultural traditions, as some children are not raised with a strong sense of Virgin Islands identity.

1070 *Owning the BVI Cultural Narrative*
A speaker highlights the demographic reality that expatriates outnumber native-born Virgin Islanders, reinforcing the importance of asserting and preserving cultural identity. They recount an instance where a newcomer to the BVI was introduced to Caribbean music, but instead of being taught about Virgin Islands artists, they were only exposed to other regional artists like Machel Montano. The speaker had to intervene
1075 and redirect the conversation to BVI musicians, emphasizing the need for locals to take ownership of promoting their cultural icons.

The discussion points to how Virgin Islanders often lack the same enthusiasm and pride in their culture that residents of other Caribbean nations exhibit, such as Jamaicans, Vincentians, or Antiguans. The speaker calls for greater confidence in promoting BVI identity and ensuring that local history and traditions are
1080 passed down with pride.

Internal Divisions and the Struggle for Cultural Unity
The conversation turns inward, focusing on internal divisions within the BVI community itself. A participant shares their personal experience as a child of a Virgin Islander and an Antiguan, noting that they and their siblings were labelled as "half-breeds" by some Virgin Gordians. This type of exclusion and intra-
1085 Caribbean prejudice further complicates efforts to promote a unified cultural identity.

Additionally, children born in the BVI to expatriate parents face social challenges, often being bullied or excluded because of their background. The speaker emphasizes that cultural preservation requires unity, meaning that BVI residents—regardless of background—must work together to sustain their traditions. They stress that if Virgin Islanders are divided among themselves, it will be even harder to gain respect and
1090 recognition from outsiders.

Closing Remarks and Acknowledgments
The Permanent Secretary and Junior Minister offer final reflections, acknowledging the passionate and engaging discussion. They express gratitude for the community's participation and emphasize that the goal of these consultations is to ensure that public input directly shapes the tourism policy.

1095 Key takeaways from the discussion include:

1. Government Support for Cultural Events – There is a need for structured government support, including financial assistance, to ensure the sustainability of cultural festivals.
2. Recognizing the Diversity of Tourists – Tourism policy should differentiate between cruise visitors and overnight tourists, rather than treating all visitors as a single category.
1100 3. Expanding Cultural Education in Schools – While social studies and cultural education exist in the school system, there is room for improvement and deeper integration of cultural knowledge.
4. Reviving the Culinary Team – There is strong agreement that the national culinary team should be revitalized to promote traditional BVI cuisine both locally and internationally.

The Economic Value of Culture
1105 A speaker challenges the misconception that culture does not contribute to the economy, arguing that cultural industries can generate revenue if properly supported. They emphasize that culture extends beyond food, dance, drama, and music—it is an economic driver. Investment in culture, particularly through artisanship, culinary arts, music, and performing arts, has the potential to sustain individual livelihoods and families, much like cottage industries did in the past. The speaker stresses that recognizing the economic
1110 potential of culture is essential to ensuring that it is preserved and promoted.

Preserving Cultural Identity and Traditions

The discussion shifts to the importance of defending and preserving Virgin Islands culture, including traditional food practices such as pea soup with milk and sugar and the distinction between "peas and rice" versus "rice and peas." The speaker encourages pride in local identity and calls on Virgin Islanders to be more assertive in defending their heritage. They propose incentivizing businesses to promote cultural traditions, possibly through non-monetary support mechanisms that encourage private sector participation in cultural preservation efforts.

At the same time, the diverse makeup of the community presents both opportunities and challenges. While some believe that external cultural influences should be limited, the speaker insists that it is the responsibility of Virgin Islanders to safeguard their own traditions, rather than expecting outsiders to do so. The emphasis is on respecting diversity while ensuring that BVI culture remains at the forefront.

Balancing Cultural Integration and Identity

The conversation explores the identity struggles faced by individuals born in the Virgin Islands to expatriate parents. Some of these individuals fully embrace BVI culture, while others gravitate towards the cultures of their parents. This disconnect creates social divisions, particularly among youth, and affects their perceptions of what it means to be a Virgin Islander.

One of the key challenges is finding ways to embrace and educate those who feel disconnected from local traditions. The speaker notes that in some cases, second-generation immigrants are more passionate about the Virgin Islands than native-born citizens, while in others, they reject local customs due to their upbringing. The solution lies in creating inclusive programs that educate all residents—regardless of their background—about the cultural history and traditions of the Virgin Islands.

The discussion also returns to the debate over imported entertainment versus local talent, particularly at festivals. While foreign artists attract large crowds, the speaker acknowledges the importance of showcasing local talent. Moving forward, there will be a concerted effort to strike a balance—ensuring that popular international acts are featured while also prioritizing local artists. This approach aims to elevate the visibility of homegrown talent without completely excluding internationally recognized performers.

Conclusion and Next Steps

As the meeting comes to a close, participants reflect on the significance of the discussions and the wealth of information shared. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development will review the recordings to extract key points for inclusion in the tourism policy.

Attendees are encouraged to continue participating in future meetings, as the discussions will cover additional topics related to sustainability and ecotourism. The next session is scheduled for Thursday, the 13th, where attendees will explore how the Virgin Islands can develop a more sustainable and eco-friendly tourism industry.

The meeting concludes with expressions of gratitude to all participants, with a reminder that their input is instrumental in shaping the future of tourism policy in the Virgin Islands.

Ecotourism and Sustainability

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held at Maria's by the Sea, Thursday 13th March 2025

1150   *Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation on Ecotourism and Sustainability*

1. **National Parks Are Under-Resourced and Overused:** Stakeholders expressed serious concern about the state of national parks—especially The Baths—and called for increased park fees, improved maintenance, and potential caps on daily visitor numbers to ensure long-term viability.
2. **Tourism Infrastructure Needs Immediate Attention:** Public restrooms, signage, trails, and other tourism-related infrastructure are poorly maintained. Participants called for a dedicated entity to manage and preserve these critical assets across the Territory.
3. **Environmental Enforcement Is Critically Weak:** Derelict vessels, unregulated beach activity, and illegal anchoring continue to degrade sensitive ecosystems. Stakeholders demanded stronger legislation and consistent enforcement to prevent long-term environmental harm.
4. **The Environmental Levy Must Be Used as Intended:** Many questioned how the Environmental and Tourism Levy is being used and urged Government to ensure that funds support product development, climate resilience, and the maintenance of key sites rather than replacing existing allocations.
5. **The BVI Must Clarify and Manage Its Carrying Capacity:** Several speakers emphasized the need to assess how many visitors the Territory and individual sites can sustainably accommodate, noting overcrowding, congestion, and degradation of visitor experiences.
6. **Beaches and Marine Areas Require Structured Management:** Stakeholders supported beach management plans like the one for Long Bay, Beef Island and advocated for similar plans elsewhere, including Cane Garden Bay and White Bay, to balance use, access, and environmental preservation.
7. **Sustainability Must Start with Government:** There was strong support for banning single-use plastics and adopting circular economy practices, but several participants insisted that Government agencies must first lead by example in their operations and procurement.
8. **Cultural and Heritage Sites Need Investment and Vision:** Participants called for the activation and better use of cultural and historical sites such as the Copper Mine and the Kingstown Church to tell the BVI story, drive local economic activity, and diversify the tourism offering.
9. **Tourism Safety and Quality Must Be Improved:** Concerns were raised about unregulated safari trucks, lack of lifeguards, and limited emergency response capacity at busy sites. Stakeholders urged investment in training, infrastructure, and safety standards.
10. **Consultations Must Translate into Action:** Many attendees noted that similar issues have been raised for years with limited follow-through. There was a strong call for the consultation process to result in measurable, timely implementation of policy and regulatory reforms.

Minutes

Premier's Opening Remarks

1185   Premier Wheatley addresses the gathering, expressing his enthusiasm for the consultation process. He highlights the significance of a national tourism policy, emphasizing that it should be both cohesive and consultative. The Premier refers to the discussions held earlier in the year at a tourism summit, noting that this consultation ensures that all voices in the industry are heard before any policy decisions are finalized. He stresses the importance of a structured approach to tourism, ensuring that future policies align with the

1190   needs of stakeholders and capitalize on the natural beauty of the Virgin Islands. He looks forward to feedback from the discussion, recognizing that a well-crafted policy will enhance both the visitor experience and local economic benefits.

Introduction to the Evening's Agenda

Following the Premier's remarks, the session facilitator outlines the structure of the evening's discussions.

1195   Two brief presentations will be given, followed by an open-floor session where participants will have the opportunity to share their reactions and provide feedback. The goal is to frame the conversation within a broad economic context before diving into specific aspects of the tourism industry.

Economic Context and Contribution of Tourism

The first presentation begins by examining tourism's economic significance in the Virgin Islands.

1200   According to the Ministry of Finance's macroeconomic review, the projected nominal GDP for 2024 is $1.75 billion, with real GDP at approximately $1.6 billion. Tourism remains the largest contributor to the economy, accounting for around 52% of GDP when considering both direct and indirect impacts. This includes not only visitor spending on accommodations and services but also construction and investment related to tourism infrastructure.

1205   The presentation then defines tourism from a sustainability perspective, emphasizing the balance between environmental, economic, and social impacts. Various international organizations provide frameworks for sustainable tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines it as ensuring benefits for all stakeholders while minimizing negative environmental impacts. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) highlights local participation in culture, environmental conservation, and

1210   long-term economic viability. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) links sustainable tourism to biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and responsible travel.

Sustainability and Guest Experience

The presentation expands on the concept of sustainability in tourism, stating that it should not be limited to environmental conservation but should also incorporate high-quality service experiences. Every point of

1215   interaction between a visitor and the destination influences overall satisfaction and economic impact. A positive guest experience leads to higher spending, repeat visits, and long-term economic sustainability. The policy aims to ensure seamless and enriching guest experiences from arrival to departure by focusing on:

- Smooth travel processes: Facilitating entry into the Virgin Islands.
1220   - Authentic cultural and natural experiences: Integrating heritage tourism with ecological attractions.

- Sustainable hospitality services: Promoting eco-friendly accommodations, responsible transportation, and ethical tourism activities.

The goal is to create an inclusive approach to tourism policy, ensuring that both the Government of the Virgin Islands and the private sector stakeholders contribute to a well-structured regulatory and incentive framework.

Developing the National Tourism Policy

The speaker introduces a structured framework for shaping the policy, using the analogy of a house. The foundational principles include:

1. Sustainability as a guiding framework, aligning with the National Sustainable Development Plan.
2. Evidence-based decision-making, ensuring that data informs policy choices.
3. Public-private collaboration, fostering partnerships to enhance service quality.
4. Performance measurement, tracking progress and outcomes over time.

The policy is structured around eight key focus areas:

1. Inclusive growth and income distribution
2. Blue economy and marine resources
3. Climate change adaptation and risk resilience
4. Product and niche market development
5. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection
6. Transport and access infrastructure
7. Tourism destination management
8. Institutional capacity and governance

Each of these areas is further detailed with examples, such as adaptation strategies for climate change, sustainable tourism certifications, waste reduction, and enhancing visitor satisfaction.

Additionally, the presentation references prior consultations, including those from the OECS Common Tourism Policy process and the recent National Tourism Summit. The OECS Common Tourism Policy, set for release at the end of the month, provides a regional framework for sustainable tourism, reinforcing the need for alignment between local and regional strategies.

Assistant Secretary's Presentation on Sustainable Tourism

Assistant Secretary Ms. Sasha Flax presents on building a greener, more sustainable tourism industry. She defines sustainable tourism as minimizing environmental harm while maximizing social and economic benefits. Ecotourism focuses on nature-based experiences, conservation, and responsible travel. The Virgin Islands' natural beauty is a core asset, and preserving it is essential for long-term success.

Why is sustainability important?

- Ensures long-term economic viability
- Protects natural resources and marine ecosystems
- Meets growing traveller demand for eco-friendly tourism
- Strengthens the Virgin Islands' reputation as a responsible destination

- Helps mitigate climate change impacts such as rising sea levels and coral reef degradation

Ms. Flax outlines strengths and opportunities in sustainability and ecotourism, which will be explored further in the open discussion. Her presentation sets the stage for an interactive session where stakeholders will share their perspectives on the role of sustainability in shaping the tourism industry.

Challenges and Opportunities in Sustainable Tourism

The discussion transitions into an analysis of both opportunities and challenges in sustainable tourism in the Virgin Islands. Some of the opportunities highlighted include expanding eco-friendly accommodations and sustainable tour options, strengthening waste management and plastic reduction efforts, promoting conservation programs, developing sustainable marine tourism, and enhancing ecotourism trails and cultural experiences.

However, there are significant challenges that must be addressed. These include the environmental risks associated with increased tourism, such as habitat degradation, pollution, and marine ecosystem damage. Another challenge is the limited enforcement of conservation policies, which exacerbates issues like plastic waste and pollution. Additionally, there is a need for better incentives to encourage sustainable tourism infrastructure and support eco-friendly businesses. The discussion also touches on the difficulty of balancing tourism growth with environmental protection and local community well-being, as well as managing overcrowding at key tourism sites.

Key Policy Considerations for Sustainable Tourism

The session then moves into policy considerations that should guide future sustainable tourism initiatives. Key areas of focus include:

- **Eco-friendly development**: Encouraging sustainable accommodations, tours, and visitor experiences.
- **Environmental protection**: Strengthening policies to safeguard marine ecosystems and reduce waste.
- **Visitor management**: Ensuring that increased tourism does not degrade natural resources or diminish visitor satisfaction.
- **Local economic benefits**: Creating long-term opportunities for local businesses through sustainability initiatives.
- **Regulatory measures**: Implementing policies that promote responsible tourism management.
- **Education and awareness**: Encouraging both businesses and visitors to adopt sustainable practices.

The discussion also references global best practices, such as green certification programs for hotels and tour operators, carbon offset programs, bans on single-use plastics, and marine conservation zones. More travellers are now interested in community-based tourism, which directly benefits local residents, and technology is increasingly being used for tracking tourism sustainability and managing visitor impact.

Engagement and Stakeholder Feedback

The session then shifts to open engagement, inviting industry stakeholders to provide their perspectives. The first comment comes from Mr. David Norris, who emphasizes the interdependence between marine

and terrestrial environments. He urges policymakers to consider both when developing sustainable tourism policies.

A member of the Rotary Club of Tortola raises concerns about the state of the National Parks Trust and its ability to accommodate increased visitation. She notes that while interest in nature-based experiences is growing, the infrastructure of national parks is inadequate to support more visitors. This leads to a discussion about the need for more investment in park facilities and management.

In response, the speaker acknowledges the capacity limitations of the National Parks Trust, not only in terms of visitor numbers but also in its ability to effectively manage tourism sites. He highlights the extensive network of national parks in the Virgin Islands, including land and marine parks, and underscores the need for careful planning to ensure long-term sustainability.

Premier Wheatley on National Park Fees and Sustainability

Premier Wheatley then provides further insight into the financial challenges of the National Parks Trust. He reveals that Cabinet is considering increasing entrance fees at national parks, particularly for high-traffic sites such as The Baths, one of the most visited attractions in the BVI. He acknowledges that the current entry fees are minimal, despite the site's global appeal, and that the National Parks Trust has been financially constrained.

The Premier explains that increasing entry fees would have two main effects:

1. Generating more revenue for the National Parks Trust, allowing reinvestment in infrastructure and conservation.
2. Reducing overcrowding by managing visitor numbers, thereby improving sustainability.

Additionally, he states that the government is considering visitor limitation at certain parks to prevent overuse. Another strategy being explored is opening up more tourism sites to distribute visitors across multiple locations rather than concentrating them in a few overcrowded areas.

Regarding funding, the Premier mentions ongoing discussions about allocating a larger portion of the environmental levy to the National Parks Trust, which would provide additional financial support without solely relying on government subvention.

Concerns Over Environmental Damage and Tourism Sustainability

A virtual participant then provides a first-hand account of environmental damage at The Baths. She expresses strong support for increasing fees, noting that the site has suffered significant degradation due to high visitor numbers. She warns that quantity does not equal quality and that a smaller, well-managed flow of tourists would be preferable to unchecked mass tourism.

From a retail perspective, she argues that having thousands of visitors per day does not necessarily translate into greater economic benefits for local businesses. Instead, there should be a focus on improving visitor experience and promoting high-value, low-impact tourism.

She also suggests expanding attractions beyond The Baths, pointing to the Copper Mine National Park as an underutilized site with significant tourism potential. She emphasizes the need for interactive tourism experiences, arguing that simply offering a scenic view is no longer sufficient to attract modern travellers.

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Call for Interagency Collaboration and Enforcement

Another virtual participant, reinforces the need for interagency collaboration in implementing sustainable
1335   tourism policies. She warns that without proper enforcement and interdepartmental coordination**,** policies
will simply remain on paper. She also criticizes the slow pace of policy implementation**,** pointing out that
discussions about increasing fees at The Baths have been ongoing for decades with little action.

She further highlights the broader issue of park mismanagement and lack of maintenance, arguing that
sustainability is not just about policy development but also about execution. Using the Copper Mine
1340   National Park as an example, she notes that while discussions on developing the site have existed for years,
no tangible progress has been made.

She expresses frustration over the Government's reliance on external frameworks, such as the OECS
Common Tourism Policy, while failing to fully leverage BVI's **own expertise** in sustainable tourism. In
her view, the BVI should be setting the standard rather than following external models.

1345   On the topic of green tourism incentives, she highlights the financial challenges that small businesses face
when trying to adopt sustainable practices. Eco-friendly products, such as biodegradable takeaway
containers and straws, are significantly more expensive, making it difficult for small businesses to transition
away from plastics. She urges the government to provide financial incentives or subsidies to make
sustainable options more accessible.

1350   Finally, she calls for less talk and more action, urging the government to prioritize maintenance and
sustainability funding rather than just focusing on new developments. She warns that without a structured
maintenance program**,** tourism infrastructure will continue to deteriorate**,** ultimately harming the long-term
viability of the industry.

Government Action on Green Tourism Incentives

1355   The discussion continues with a government response regarding green product incentives. It is
acknowledged that duty exemptions for eco-friendly products were previously implemented, and there is
an active Cabinet paper in circulation to reinstate and extend these zero-duty exemptions**.** This measure is
seen as the most effective way for the government to offset the higher costs of sustainable products, as they
cannot control supplier pricing. The intention is to make this a long-term policy, ensuring continued
1360   affordability for businesses seeking to adopt environmentally friendly practices.

The Premier also reiterates that fees for national parks, particularly The Baths, will be increased,
acknowledging that while these discussions have been ongoing for years, the government is now taking
action. He underscores that governance delivery mechanisms are being strengthened to ensure that policies
are not just created but implemented effectively. This structured approach is aimed at transforming the
1365   tourism industry by moving away from rhetoric and toward tangible actions.

Sustainable Tourism Infrastructure and Interpretive Trails

A participant expresses enthusiasm for interpretive trails, sharing that they are a common feature in global
tourism destinations. These trails, often including signs with descriptions of local flora and fauna, help
visitors engage with the natural and cultural landscape of the Virgin Islands. However, maintenance has
1370   been a recurring challenge, as some existing trails are frequently overgrown.

42

Another concern raised is the lack of a built-in mechanism for automatic fee adjustments for parks and attractions. The suggestion is made to introduce an annual incremental fee increase, similar to social security payments, which are adjusted based on inflation and cost-of-living changes. Such a system would prevent the need for repeated debates on fee increases and ensure financial sustainability for park
1375   maintenance and infrastructure.

Concerns Over Tourism Capacity and Overcrowding

A participant raised concerns about tourism capacity constraints across the territory. She highlights that charter yacht companies consistently expand their fleets, leading to a surge in vessel numbers and potential overcrowding of marine spaces. Similarly, beachfront development, such as the unchecked proliferation of
1380   sun loungers on Cane Garden Bay, threatens to commercialize pristine natural areas, eroding the very aesthetic that draws visitors to the BVI.

A participant suggests that the government introduce caps on tourism expansion, whether in the number of yachts, beach vendors, or the development of high-density tourism sites. She argues that if tourism growth is left unchecked, it will create significant waste management challenges and place unsustainable pressure
1385   on infrastructure. She emphasizes that many villa and hotel guests actively seek out uncrowded, natural environments, reinforcing the need for careful management of visitor numbers.

Another contributor agrees, noting that historical sites, such as the Copper Mine and Sage Mountain, have been left in disrepair despite previous investments. The speaker highlights that these sites were initially developed with grant funding, yet they have since been neglected, representing a lost economic opportunity.
1390   There is a call for the government to revitalize these locations and reintegrate them into the tourism economy to generate revenue.

Ongoing Infrastructure and Maintenance Concerns

A participant urges the institutionalization of roadside maintenance, arguing that clean roadsides and well-maintained landscapes contribute significantly to visitor impressions. While efforts have been made to clear
1395   overgrown vegetation, they should not be limited to peak tourism seasons or major holidays. Instead, a consistent year-round maintenance program should be established to enhance the destination's aesthetic appeal.

In addition to roadside maintenance, derelict vessels and abandoned vehicles in key tourism areas such as Trellis Bay, Soper's Hole, and Anegada are raised as significant eyesores. The speaker calls for immediate
1400   action to remove these unsightly wrecks, suggesting that they be temporarily relocated to the incinerator site at Pockwood Pond while a long-term disposal strategy is formulated. The speaker expresses frustration that these derelict sites remain untouched for years, even though they undermine BVI's reputation as a high-end tourism destination.

Additionally, swimming safety zones at popular beaches, such as Cane Garden Bay (Tortola), White Bay
1405   (Jost Van Dyke), and Long Bay (Beef Island), need to be reinstated. The participant notes that boats are now pulling up directly onto beaches, creating hazardous conditions for swimmers. In some cases, vessels are even tied to trees on the shoreline, further contributing to environmental degradation.

Marketing the BVI in the Canadian Tourism Market

The discussion briefly shifts to international tourism marketing, with an emphasis on the Canadian travel market. The speaker states that the BVI needs to act quickly to establish a stronger tourism presence in Canada, as other Caribbean islands are aggressively marketing to Canadian travellers. There is concern that the BVI is lagging behind in tapping into this market, despite strong demand from Canadian tourists.

Calls to Revive the 'BVI You Are Beautiful' Program

Another participant reflects on past beautification initiatives, specifically the "BVI Your Beautiful" program, which encouraged local communities to take pride in maintaining their properties and public spaces. The program incentivized individuals to keep their yards clean, plant flowers, and participate in community clean-ups, with certificates and prizes awarded for their efforts.

The speaker laments that the BVI no longer looks as well-kept as it once did and stresses that beautification efforts should be reinstated to ensure the islands maintain their reputation as a world-class tourism destination.

Premier Wheatley's Response and Government Initiatives

Premier Wheatley acknowledges the importance of roadside maintenance and notes that the Government has introduced a continuous maintenance program to ensure roadsides remain clean and visually appealing year-round. The program has also provided employment opportunities for unemployed individuals, allowing them to contribute to tourism beautification efforts.

The Premier further emphasizes infrastructure development, stating that over $30 million has been allocated for road improvements. Beyond just paving roads, the goal is to integrate proper drainage systems, sidewalks, and landscaping. He notes that landscaped roadways with trees and plants create a more aesthetically pleasing environment, improving both visitor perception and local quality of life.

The government is also working on an Environmental Protection Bill, currently being developed by the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change. This bill is expected to address broader environmental challenges, including waste management, conservation efforts, and sustainable tourism policies.

Upcoming Environmental Bill and Green Certification Initiatives

The Premier highlights the forthcoming Environmental Bill, which will introduce green certification programs to encourage sustainable business practices. The intent is to incentivize rather than burden businesses and residents, ensuring that eco-friendly practices are economically viable. He expresses strong support for this initiative and assures that efforts are being made to push the bill forward within the year.

Derelict Boats and Legislative Weaknesses

Addressing the longstanding issue of derelict boats, the Premier acknowledges weaknesses in the legislative framework, which currently fails to hold owners accountable. In contrast to other jurisdictions where daily fines are imposed, there is no enforcement mechanism in the BVI to compel owners to remove abandoned

vessels. This lack of oversight has led to environmental degradation, with oil spills and other pollutants
1445 affecting local waters.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the Premier announces that $2–3 million has been allocated to begin removing derelict vessels from Sea Cows Bay and Road Harbour, with plans to expand to other affected areas.

Enforcement Challenges and Interagency Cooperation

1450 The Premier also acknowledges enforcement issues concerning protected swimming areas, particularly in White Bay, where designated safe zones have been repeatedly cut down. This highlights the broader problem of poor enforcement mechanisms across various government agencies.

He emphasizes the need for interagency collaboration, particularly in marine enforcement, noting that different agencies such as Immigration, Customs, and Environmental Protection often operate in silos
1455 instead of sharing resources. He suggests that joint enforcement efforts using shared assets, such as patrol boats, would improve oversight and efficiency.

Additionally, he mentions that the European Union recently donated an enforcement vessel to the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change, which could be better utilized in multi-agency enforcement efforts.

1460 ### *Reviving the 'BVI Your Beautiful' Program*

The Premier acknowledges the importance of beautification programs such as "BVI Your Beautiful", which previously encouraged community-wide participation in maintaining the territory's appearance. He expresses support for reviving such initiatives, recognizing their value in fostering national pride and improving tourism aesthetics.

1465 ### *The Role of Urban Planning and Existing Laws*

A participant, representing Green VI, highlights the importance of urban planning in tourism and quality of life. He argues that the BVI already has several laws on the books, such as the Physical Planning Act, which grants the government authority to:

- Designate environmental protection areas
1470 - Issue amenity orders to enforce aesthetic and maintenance standards on private properties

However, he notes that these laws are rarely enforced due to reluctance to hold individuals accountable, particularly when personal or familial relationships are involved. He emphasizes that tourism aesthetics and urban planning should not be compromised by social dynamics, calling for greater enforcement of existing laws to ensure properties along main roads are properly maintained.

1475 Mr. Penn also recalls a local area development plan for Carrot Bay, which included proposals for hiking trails connecting the coastal village to Sage Mountain via natural waterways. He suggests that these plans, which have been sitting idle for over a decade, should be revisited and implemented, as they align with ecotourism objectives.

Circular Economy and Marine Plastic Waste Initiatives

1480   A participant transitions to the circular economy, emphasizing the need for waste repurposing rather than exporting recyclables, which is cost-prohibitive. He introduces PROMAR, a regional initiative aimed at reducing plastic waste in marine environments. Given BVI's limited landfill space, he stresses the importance of finding local uses for recyclables rather than relying on exportation.

Examples of existing local recycling efforts include:

1485   - Pollywood recycling bins, which are made from repurposed plastics
        - Exploration of 3D printing applications using recycled materials
        - Drafted legislation to ban certain single-use plastics, which needs to be pushed forward for implementation

        He urges the Government and private sector to collaborate on waste reduction initiatives and brand the BVI
1490   as a sustainable tourism destination, ensuring that eco-conscious travellers see the territory as genuinely committed to sustainability.

The Need for Sustainability Education in Schools

        Another contributor, representing Rotary Club of Road Town and Lead BVI, stresses the importance of integrating sustainability education into the school system. He questions how early sustainability principles
1495   are being introduced in BVI schools, noting that international models—such as those in Japan, India, and Brazil—successfully instil environmental responsibility in children from an early age.

He argues that cultivating eco-conscious behaviours in children will lead to long-term generational change, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship.

Proposal for Seasonal Park Closures for Maintenance

1500   Chef Mike Bogans draws a parallel between The Baths and Augusta National Golf Club, which hosts "The Masters" tournament but remains closed for maintenance for most of the year. He proposes closing The Baths and other national parks for designated periods to:

        - Allow for natural restoration
        - Conduct maintenance and infrastructure improvements
1505   - Ensure long-term sustainability

By rotating park closures, the BVI could protect its tourism assets while maintaining a steady flow of visitors to alternative sites. This approach would also help reduce overcrowding and mitigate environmental degradation.

Question on Long-Term Maintenance and Enforcement of Policies

1510   Mario Voice, a local Rotarian, raises concerns about long-term maintenance and enforcement in BVI's tourism policies. He asks whether the new National Tourism Policy includes explicit provisions for ongoing maintenance and management of beaches, facilities, and public spaces.

His concern stems from observations of other Caribbean destinations that have implemented effective enforcement mechanisms, ensuring that tourism assets remain in top condition. He argues that without proper oversight, even the best policies risk becoming ineffective due to lapses in enforcement.

Institutionalizing Infrastructure Maintenance

The discussion shifts to the management of tourism-related infrastructure, particularly public restrooms, lookout towers, and signage. The Premier acknowledges that historically, maintenance has been poorly managed, partly because institutions responsible for marketing and tourism management (such as the BVI Tourist Board) have been stretched beyond their primary mandate.

The new Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development is expected to alleviate some of this burden by assuming direct responsibility for infrastructure maintenance and allowing the Tourist Board to refocus on its core function: marketing the destination. Additionally, there are plans to establish a dedicated entity tasked specifically with maintaining tourism infrastructure to prevent facilities from deteriorating due to neglect.

A Holistic Approach to Beach Management

The Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change is currently developing a Beach Management Plan, aiming to address tourism pressure on beaches in a sustainable manner. The plan considers critical ecological components such as:

- Ponds and sediment trapping systems that influence beach stability
- Seagrass beds that support marine biodiversity
- Coastal infrastructure, such as beach chairs and vendor spaces

The first Beach Management Plan has already been completed for Long Bay, Beef Island, and there are plans to expand it to other beaches. Surprisingly, stakeholders from Cane Garden Bay have requested a management plan for their beach, despite it already being one of the most commercialized coastal areas in the territory.

The carrying capacity of beaches and other tourism sites remains a major concern, with increasing numbers of visitors impacting both the visitor experience and environmental health. The Government is considering visitor caps and commercial activity regulations as part of future beach management plans.

Integrating Environmental Awareness into Education and Government Operations

There is widespread agreement on the need to instil environmental consciousness in youth. The Premier references past initiatives, such as a plastic waste collection competition for students, and suggests that such programs should be revived and expanded. He notes that children are often more enthusiastic than adults about environmental issues and could play a key role in promoting long-term sustainability values.

Additionally, the Government itself needs to lead by example. The Premier acknowledges that while the Government is discussing banning single-use plastics across the territory, it has yet to ban plastics within its own operations. He commits to reducing plastic use and increasing paperless workflows within government departments.

Concerns About Vehicle and Beach Safety

1550   A member from Rotary Club of Tortola raises safety concerns about:

1. Tourism transportation safety: Observing that safari tour trucks frequently stall on steep hills due to poor maintenance, he warns that a high-profile accident could damage the BVI's tourism reputation. He suggests stricter regulation of tour vehicles to ensure that only properly maintained and inspected vehicles are used for passenger transport.
1555   2. Lifeguard presence on beaches: He highlights the lack of trained lifeguards at popular beaches, especially as tourism numbers increase. Additionally, there is growing concern about unregulated substances, such as "mushroom tea" and alcohol-based drinks marketed to tourists, which could lead to water-related emergencies. He calls for lifeguard programs to be expanded and properly resourced.

1560   The Premier acknowledges these safety concerns, stating that the Standing Finance Committee has already begun discussing additional funding for lifeguard services. He agrees that new lookout stations and training programs should be prioritized to ensure that tourists have safe experiences at BVI beaches.

Support for Banning Plastics and Managing Overcrowding

Delma Maduro, Chair of the BVI Tourist Board, voices strong support for:

1565   • Banning single-use plastics, noting that previous voluntary efforts by the retail sector failed due to a lack of government enforcement.
• Increasing park fees to reduce overcrowding while generating more revenue for conservation.
• Entering the Canadian tourism market aggressively, recognizing that political tensions between Canada and other Caribbean nations have created an opportunity for the BVI to attract Canadian
1570   visitors.

She confirms that the BVI Tourist Board is finalizing a marketing strategy for Canada, which will be submitted to the Premier for approval shortly.

Determining the BVI's Carrying Capacity

A participant underscores the need to define the BVI's carrying capacity which is the maximum number of
1575   visitors the islands can sustainably accommodate. They express concern that the rapid increase in tourism traffic, particularly in the yacht charter sector has significantly altered the visitor experience.

In the past, visitors enjoyed peaceful anchorages with minimal boat traffic, whereas now, many bays host up to 10 boats at a time, creating overcrowding and environmental stress. The speaker warns that if visitor numbers continue to increase unchecked, it could become detrimental to both residents and the
1580   environment.

Margaret Penn recalls that during her tenure as Managing Director of the BVI Ports Authority, the same carrying capacity concerns were raised in relation to cruise tourism. She suggests that without defining an upper limit on visitor numbers, it will be difficult to effectively price tourism services and manage demand.

Safety Concerns for Public Transport and Environmental Sustainability in Government

1585   A participant raises a serious safety concern regarding safari buses transporting tourists. They note that while private vehicles require seatbelts, these buses carry 25 or more passengers without any safety restraints, making them an accident risk, particularly given the BVI's hilly terrain. The participant stresses that a major accident could damage the BVI's tourism reputation, urging the Government to implement stricter regulations for safari tour vehicles.

1590   Another example of government inconsistency in sustainability efforts is pointed out at the BVI hospital, which continues to serve meals in single-use disposable containers instead of reusable plates and cups. This contradicts efforts to promote sustainability, further reinforcing the argument that the government must lead by example before imposing regulations on the private sector.

        The Premier acknowledges these concerns, agreeing that both transportation safety and environmental
1595   responsibility are areas that require immediate government action.

Defining the BVI's Carrying Capacity for Tourism

        The discussion returns to the concept of carrying capacity. The Premier admits that at present, the Government does not have an exact carrying capacity figure because the full potential of the tourism infrastructure has not yet been optimized.

1600   He explains that before setting a visitor limit, the BVI must:

        - Expand tourism sites to distribute visitors more evenly
        - Upgrade infrastructure to improve sustainability
        - Implement eco-friendly regulations to reduce the per-visitor impact
        - Pass key environmental and tourism-related legislation

1605   The Premier also emphasizes the need for a more scientific approach to carrying capacity, stating that it should not be calculated for the entire Virgin Islands as a whole, but rather on a site-by-site basis. For example, The Baths may have a maximum daily visitor threshold, whereas beaches, marine parks, or historic sites would have different limits.

        He further argues that visitor behaviour plays a crucial role in determining sustainability, noting that a
1610   higher number of eco-conscious visitors may have less impact than a smaller number of tourists who engage in environmentally harmful activities.

The Environmental and Tourism Levy Fund: Use and Distribution

        A participant asks for transparency on the Environmental and Tourism Levy Fund, inquiring about:

        1. The total amount accumulated since the fund was established
1615   2. How the funds have been used
        3. Future plans for fund allocation to enhance tourism sustainability

        The Premier provides a brief history of the fund, explaining that since its inception in 2017–2018, it has collected approximately $14–15 million. However, a legal oversight delayed fund distribution because the

law enabling its use was never officially brought into force. This issue was corrected through a validation
1620 bill passed last year, and funds have since begun being allocated to designated entities.

The fund is earmarked for specific uses, including:

- Marketing and promotion (BVI Tourist Board)
- National Parks infrastructure (National Parks Trust)
- Climate resilience projects (Climate Change Trust Fund Board)

1625 The Climate Change Trust Fund Board has been restructured and is now accepting applications from
government agencies, NGOs, and community groups for climate resilience projects. The Premier
emphasizes that the fund should supplement government allocations, not replace them, to ensure a higher
level of investment in tourism and environmental sustainability.

The Permanent Secretary adds that a portion of the fund is also allocated for product development, allowing
1630 for the improvement of tourism sites and infrastructure.

Expanding Cultural and Heritage Tourism

A participant asks whether historical and cultural sites not just natural parks would qualify for funding
under the Environmental and Tourism Levy. They argue that heritage tourism is underdeveloped in the BVI
and that improving the visitor experience at historical sites would enhance tourism diversification.

1635 The Premier agrees, noting that Culture and Heritage tourism is an untapped opportunity. He references the
Culture and Heritage Strategy and Policy, passed two years ago, which prioritizes integrating cultural
experiences into the tourism product. However, he admits that progress has been slow in implementing this
strategy.

He highlights three key challenges in developing heritage tourism:

1640 1. Ownership of historical sites – Many are privately owned making government involvement difficult.
2. Lack of an entity dedicated to heritage site management – The BVI Tourist Board's primary mandate
is marketing, and there is no institution responsible for maintaining historical sites.
3. Lack of visitor engagement experiences – Unlike other countries that profit from storytelling, guided
tours, and interactive exhibits, the BVI has not yet developed engaging visitor experiences at its heritage
1645 sites.

The Premier suggests creating dedicated visitor centres at heritage sites to provide interpretive displays,
souvenir shops, and local dining options, thereby enhancing visitor experience and revenue generation.

Additionally, he praises the recent rise of hiking and ecotourism, noting that better storytelling and heritage
experiences could be the next major development for BVI's tourism sector. He emphasizes that not all
1650 tourists visit for beaches and yachting, and diversifying the product is essential.

Closing Remarks and Acknowledgments

The Premier concludes the meeting by expressing appreciation to all participants, including those **from** the
Rotary Club, the Tourist Board, business sector representatives, and virtual attendees who joined the

discussion online. He also thanks the Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith Abbott, Assistant Secretary Flax,
1655   and other Ministry personnel for their contributions and support in facilitating the consultation.

He emphasizes the importance of these discussions, noting that while many of the themes have been
recurring from the previous Tourism Summit, each session allows for further refinement and deeper
understanding of the policy direction based on stakeholder feedback. The Premier assures attendees that
their insights will be carefully considered in shaping the National Tourism Policy and commends the
1660   Permanent Secretary for documenting and compiling reports from these meetings.

Upcoming Community and Sector-Based Consultations

The Permanent Secretary provided an overview of the upcoming consultations, highlighting that the
engagement process is ongoing and will expand to different islands and tourism sectors.

Sector-specific meetings will be held to gather insights from key industries, including:

1665   - Sports, events, and entertainment tourism
- Cruise and transportation tourism
- Data and tourism
- Jasper Lake tourism development

The consultation process continued through the end of April, and attendees were encouraged to participate
1670   in as many meetings as possible to ensure that their perspectives are included in the final policy formulation.

Conclusion

The National Tourism Policy consultation provided a valuable platform for dialogue, allowing stakeholders
to voice their concerns, propose solutions, and influence policy direction. The Premier and ministry officials
reaffirmed their commitment to incorporating this feedback into a structured policy framework that
1675   balances economic growth, environmental sustainability, and quality visitor experiences.

As the consultation process moved forward, the government sought continued engagement from all sectors
to ensure that the final National Tourism Policy was comprehensive, inclusive, and reflective of the needs
and aspirations of the Virgin Islands' tourism stakeholders.

Virgin Gorda Community Consultation – The Valley

1680 *Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held at Monday 17th March 2025*
Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation

1. **Urgent Infrastructure Upgrades Needed:** Stakeholders repeatedly called for improvements to drainage systems, particularly near the marina to prevent flooding during heavy rainfall.
1685
2. **Congestion and Parking Challenges at the Ferry Dock:** The ferry terminal is overcrowded and disorganized. There is a critical need for additional parking space, especially to accommodate daily commuters to Tortola, and better traffic flow.
3. **Inadequate Visitor Facilities:** The lack of functioning trolleys and public restrooms at key tourist locations like Savannah Bay was highlighted as a major flaw in the guest experience.
1690
4. **Declining Visitor Experience at the Baths:** Residents and business owners raised concerns about overcrowding from cruise ship passengers, environmental degradation, and diminished enjoyment for overnight guests.
5. **Call for Better Management of Cruise Tourism:** Cruise visitors were described as contributing less economically while straining local resources. Stakeholders urged better regulation of cruise
1695 traffic and enforcement of visitor caps at natural attractions.
6. **Need for Balanced Festival Planning:** The relocation of the Easter Festival Village impacted businesses on the south side of the island. Suggestions included rotating venues or offering booth opportunities to affected businesses.
7. **Opportunities for New Attractions:** Residents proposed creative ideas such as an aquatic centre,
1700 expanded cultural experiences, and nature-based attractions like goat-feeding or marine life exhibits.
8. **Tourism Product Differentiation by Island:** Virgin Gorda's identity as a high-end, tranquil destination must be preserved. Stakeholders emphasized tailoring policies and promotions to reflect each island's unique tourism appeal.
1705
9. **Greater Support for Local Entrepreneurs:** There was a strong call for empowering small business owners, including taxi operators, to organize and invest in improving their own infrastructure and services.
10. **Data Transparency and Local Revenue Recognition:** Stakeholders requested disaggregated data on hotel accommodation tax and other tourism revenues generated by Virgin Gorda, to ensure the
1710 island's economic contributions are recognized and reinvested appropriately.

Premier's Opening Remarks on Tourism Development

Premier Wheatley expressed his admiration for Virgin Gorda, describing it as a "crown jewel" of the Virgin Islands' tourism sector. He emphasized the necessity of developing a strategic approach to tourism, in alignment with the National Sustainable Development Plan. He highlighted that the population of the Virgin Islands had increased fivefold over recent decades, necessitating expanded government services and economic growth.

The Premier acknowledged that while financial services had historically played a crucial role in the economy, it was unrealistic to expect them to maintain their current level of contribution in the future. Consequently, tourism was identified as a sector capable of driving economic growth and diversification. He recognized that changes in tourism might be met with resistance from long-standing visitors who wish to preserve the region's past charm. However, he stressed that a balance must be struck between maintaining the Virgin Islands' heritage and ensuring economic sustainability.

The Importance of a National Tourism Policy

Premier Wheatley outlined the need for a well-structured National Tourism Policy, which would be informed by public consultations and data-driven insights. He referenced the National Tourism Summit held earlier in the year, stating that the true measure of its success would be the creation of a clear policy and implementation roadmap. The policy must reflect the diverse interests of tourism stakeholders rather than being dictated by any one group. It should also leverage the Virgin Islands' natural advantages while ensuring sustainability for future generations.

The Premier noted that regional discussions on tourism policy had taken place within the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and that prior consultations led by Permanent Secretary Smith-Abbott had provided valuable insights. He emphasized that this meeting was part of a broader effort to refine the policy through continued stakeholder engagement.

He assured attendees that their input was essential and that all views would be recorded, summarized, and published transparently. The policy would not be developed in isolation but would incorporate the perspectives of all relevant parties. He encouraged those present to spread the word and invite others to participate in shaping tourism policy, as it was a matter of national economic importance.

Introduction to Presentations

The Permanent Secretary thanked the Premier and introduced the structure of the meeting. Two presentations were planned: one by himself, providing an overview of the policy framework, and another by Ms. Flax, which would focus specifically on Virgin Gorda.

Economic Impact of Tourism on the Virgin Islands

The discussion then turned to the economic significance of tourism. The Ministry of Finance's macroeconomic review projected the nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2024 at $1.75 billion, with a real GDP growth projection of 1.6%. Tourism was identified as a major driver of the economy, contributing an estimated 52% of GDP when both direct and indirect impacts were considered. The data, derived from the World Travel and Tourism Council's 2024 Economic Impact Report, encompassed direct revenue from travel, accommodations, and restaurants, as well as indirect contributions from tourism-related construction and other associated sectors.

Defining Sustainable Tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism was framed within three key dimensions: economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Three major organizations provided guiding definitions:

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1. **World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)** – Focuses on balancing economic, social, and environmental impacts to ensure long-term benefits for all stakeholders.
2. **United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)** – Emphasizes respect for local culture, minimizing environmental impact, and fostering economic viability.
3. **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** – Highlights conservation of biodiversity,
1755 support for local economies, and preservation of cultural heritage through responsible tourism.

Additionally, the presentation introduced a service-quality perspective on sustainability. This approach underlined that every interaction with tourists represents an opportunity to influence their experience, thereby impacting long-term economic success and sustainability.

Ensuring a Sustainable and High-Quality Tourism Experience

1760 The discussion emphasized that sustainability should not only be understood in economic and environmental terms but also through the lens of service provision. The approach focused on:

- **Guest Experience**: Ensuring seamless and high-quality interactions with visitors from pre-arrival through departure.
- **Public and Private Sector Responsibility**: Aligning government, business, and individual efforts to
1765 improve service standards.
- **Measuring Impact**: Assessing how guest satisfaction correlates with economic benefits, as satisfied tourists are more likely to return and contribute to the local economy.

The vision for tourism in the Virgin Islands involves creating a seamless and enriching experience that begins even before a visitor arrives, continues through their stay, and ensures a smooth departure. This includes promoting:

1770
- **Authentic and Immersive Experiences**: Integrating cultural and natural heritage into tourism offerings.
- **Eco-Friendly Practices**: Encouraging sustainable accommodations, responsible transport, and ethical tourism activities.

The discussion concluded with a reinforcement of the need for a structured approach to sustainable tourism, ensuring long-term benefits for both visitors and local communities.

1775 **Engaging Stakeholders and Defining the Tourism Vision**

The discussion continued with a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement, ensuring that tourism sustainability and visitor satisfaction are integrated across all aspects of the sector. The Premier's earlier remarks were reiterated, underscoring the importance of direct dialogue with stakeholders, including government agencies, businesses, communities, and non-profit organizations. The consultation process was described as an ongoing effort, with plans
1780 to return to Virgin Gorda, particularly to the North Sound area, to continue the conversation.

The focus was on defining an enabling environment—establishing regulations, incentives, and frameworks that support sustainable tourism. A clear vision was being developed to align tourism growth with environmental, cultural, and economic priorities, creating a roadmap for sustainable development.

Previous Consultations and Policy Framework Development

1785 It was noted that a wealth of information had already been gathered from previous consultations, including meetings held in Virgin Gorda the previous year. These discussions contributed to the formulation of a common tourism policy under the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). The tourism summit, referenced earlier by the Premier, also played a significant role in shaping policy direction.

1790 The tourism policy was being structured using the OECS framework as a model, conceptualized as a house with different "windows" representing key policy areas. These policy areas included:

- Inclusive growth and income distribution
- The blue economy
- Climate change and risk resilience
- Product and niche market development
1795 - Biodiversity and ecosystem protection
- Access and transport services
- Tourism destination management
- Institutional capacity for policy implementation

1800 Each of these areas was subject to further development, and the community consultation process was intended to ensure that policies reflect local realities.

Community-Centred Consultation Approach

Given that this consultation was at the community level, no single policy area was prioritized. Instead, the discussion was meant to be broad, focusing on what was most relevant to the local community. For example, niche market development was highlighted as an area of focus, covering:

1805 - Cultural heritage
- Events and festivals
- Culinary tourism
- World heritage site recognition
- Product grading and certification standards

1810 Similarly, institutional capacity development was discussed, emphasizing strengthening national tourism agencies, fostering public-private partnerships, and encouraging regional cooperation.

The Permanent Secretary concluded his segment by inviting the Assistant Secretary, Ms. Flax, to present on the specific needs and priorities of Virgin Gorda.

Tourism Priorities for Virgin Gorda

1815 Ms. Flax's presentation focused on preserving and strengthening Virgin Gorda's distinct tourism identity. She emphasized that the island plays a crucial role in the Virgin Islands' overall tourism strategy due to its:

- Natural beauty, including the Baths, pristine beaches, and marine biodiversity.
- Exclusive tourism appeal, with high-end resorts such as Rosewood Little Dix Bay and Oil Nut Bay Resort.
- Strong local hospitality culture, driven by community engagement and entrepreneurship.

1820   Virgin Gorda's tourism appeal was described as unique, attracting affluent travellers who seek exclusivity and relaxation. However, there was also an opportunity to expand into eco-luxury tourism, providing high-value sustainable experiences.

Challenges and Opportunities in Virgin Gorda's Tourism Industry

Several key challenges were identified in Virgin Gorda's tourism sector:

1825
- Limited accessibility, particularly the need for improved air connectivity.
- High operational costs, which make it difficult for local businesses to compete with those on larger islands like Tortola.
- Environmental concerns, particularly balancing tourism development with sustainability.
- Infrastructure deficits, including inadequate public spaces and attractions.

1830   Opportunities for growth and innovation included:

- Expanding sustainable tourism through conservation-focused activities.
- Investing in heritage tourism to enhance local historical storytelling and restoration efforts.
- Strengthening local food tourism, incorporating farm-to-table experiences and culinary tours.
- Enhancing marine and adventure tourism, leveraging the island's diving and sailing opportunities.

1835   **Community Engagement and Policy Considerations**

Ms. Flax presented several key questions that the community was encouraged to address, focusing on:

1. Balancing tourism growth with environmental conservation.
2. Policies to support local entrepreneurs.
3. Improving accessibility for visitors.
1840
4. Ensuring high-end tourism benefits the wider community.
5. Prioritizing public infrastructure development.

The floor was then opened for public comments and questions, inviting attendees to share their concerns and suggestions.

Community Concerns: Transportation and Infrastructure

1845   The first community member to speak raised concerns about **transportation issues**, particularly the shortage of taxi drivers in Virgin Gorda. The individual noted that despite repeated inquiries, taxi licenses appeared to be on hold, even though new licenses were being issued in Tortola. This shortage resulted in tourists being stranded upon arrival, while existing taxi drivers were overworked and exhausted.

The speaker also highlighted parking issues at key tourism sites, such as:

1850
- The Baths, where tour buses struggle due to lack of designated parking.
- Gorda Peak National Park, where visitors are forced to park dangerously along the roadside.
- The ferry port at St. Thomas Bay, where parking congestion creates logistical challenges, especially for car rental businesses.

1855 A proposed solution was the construction of a multi-level parking facility near the ferry terminal, addressing congestion and improving the visitor experience.

Concerns About Tourism Management and Cultural Promotion

The community member expressed disappointment with the lack of a strong tourism board presence on Virgin Gorda. While the local tourism officer was making efforts, there was insufficient institutional support for the island's tourism development.

1860 The absence of a tourism sub-office since the hurricane was noted as a critical gap, with plans underway to establish one.

Concerns were also raised about the Virgin Gorda Easter Festival, an important cultural event that was receiving insufficient promotion. The speaker emphasized that to attract regional visitors, planning and marketing efforts needed to begin much earlier in the year. There was a call for a dedicated tourism fund to support cultural events, 1865 ensuring they were properly financed and promoted.

Final Remarks and Policy Recommendations

The speaker briefly touched on the cruise versus overnight tourism debate, suggesting that while discussions on this topic had been extensive, decisive action was still needed.

A key legislative issue was also raised—the Preservation of Names and Places Act (2001). The community member 1870 urged the Premier to enforce this act, which had been passed 24 years earlier but remained largely unimplemented. This act was seen as critical for preserving Virgin Gorda's historical and cultural identity.

Preservation of Traditional Place Names and Cultural Identity

A community member raised concerns about the Preservation of Names and Places Act (2001), which was passed in the House of Assembly but never enacted. The speaker emphasized the need for this legislation to be enforced to 1875 protect the cultural and historical integrity of the Virgin Islands. Specific examples were cited, such as the renaming of Mosquito Island (Moskito Island) and Mango Bay, which do not align with traditional local names. The issue of Hodges Creek being renamed as Maya Cove was also mentioned as an example of external influences altering local heritage for marketing purposes.

The speaker stressed that the Virgin Islands' cultural identity is one of its main attractions, and allowing name 1880 changes undermines this authenticity. Visitors are drawn to the territory for its people, history, and traditions, which should not be altered for commercial gain. The Premier was urged to review the act, determine whether it required amendments, and take the necessary steps to bring it into force.

Premier's Response: Addressing Taxi Licenses and Transportation Issues

The Premier acknowledged the speaker's concerns and noted that the Ministry of Communications and Works had 1885 placed taxi licenses on hold due to concerns about market saturation. The rationale was that too many licenses could result in excessive competition, reducing the earning potential for taxi drivers. However, he recognized that the current shortage in Virgin Gorda was negatively impacting both residents and visitors.

He suggested that a scientific approach be adopted to determine an optimal ratio of visitors to taxi licenses, ensuring a balance between supply and demand. The Premier committed to raising the issue with the

1890   Ministry of Communications and Works, emphasizing that Virgin Gorda's tourism experience was being hampered by inadequate transportation options.

Parking and Infrastructure Development

The discussion then shifted to the issue of parking and broader infrastructure needs. The Premier highlighted that with over 20,000 registered vehicles in the Virgin Islands and no reliable public transportation system, parking
1895   shortages had become a significant issue. While Town and Country Planning has regulations requiring adequate parking for new developments, these are not always enforced.

The Premier noted that the Recovery and Development Agency (RDA) was working on identifying land for additional parking in Road Town and suggested conducting a similar study in Virgin Gorda. He also proposed pedestrianization in certain areas and improving handicap accessibility, as many visitors struggle with the lack of
1900   sidewalks and wheelchair-friendly infrastructure.

He reaffirmed the need for a dedicated tourism infrastructure entity, responsible for:

- Building and maintaining tourism facilities, such as parking areas, bathrooms, and lifeguard stations.
- Ensuring tourism spaces remain accessible and functional, rather than falling into disrepair.

Virgin Gorda Easter Festival: Challenges and Future Planning

1905   The discussion moved on to the Virgin Gorda Easter Festival, a key cultural event. The Premier agreed with concerns that planning and promotion needed to start much earlier. He noted that other major Caribbean festivals, such as Crop Over (Barbados)**,** Caribana (Toronto)**,** and Miami Carnival, are successful because their dates are set and marketed well in advance, regardless of performer line-ups.

Key recommendations included:

1910   - Announcing festival dates at least a year in advance, making the festival itself the main attraction rather than specific performers.
- Earlier allocation of funds, ensuring organizers have sufficient resources for marketing and event planning.
- Increasing financial support, with the government raising its contribution from **$**100,000 to $250,000, though festival organizers were requesting more funding.

1915   Additionally, the Festival and Fairs Act was set to be amended to create **a** permanent executive structure responsible for year-round event planning. The goal was to separate tourism marketing from event management, ensuring a dedicated executive team could coordinate logistics, funding, and promotion for cultural festivals.

Revisiting the Preservation of Names and Places Act

Returning to the Preservation of Names and Places Act (2001), the Premier committed to reviewing the legislation.
1920   He admitted uncertainty about why it was never enacted and stated he would investigate the matter with the Minister of Planning, Works, and Infrastructure (Hon. Fraser), under whose purview the law might fall. He emphasized the importance of preserving historical names, agreeing that external influences should not dictate changes to the Virgin Islands' cultural and geographical heritage.

Lack of Welcome for Tourists at the Ferry Dock

1925   A new speaker raised concerns about the lack of a welcoming experience for cruise ship passengers arriving in Virgin Gorda. She described witnessing hundreds of tourists arriving at the ferry dock with no formal greeting, entertainment, or cultural representation. Tourists were often left wandering and unsure of where they were, with one visitor even mistaking Virgin Gorda for St. Barts.

1930   She noted that while a representative from the BVI Tourist Board was present, she was essentially idle due to a lack of structured engagement activities. The speaker suggested that tourism arrival experiences be improved, drawing inspiration from St. Thomas, where visitors are greeted with steel pan music, Moko Jumbies (stilt dancers), rum punch, and other cultural elements.

Lack of Tourist Engagement and Inadequate Facilities

1935   A community member expressed frustration over the lack of a welcoming experience for tourists arriving in Virgin Gorda, particularly at the ferry dock. Visitors often seemed confused about their location, with one mistakenly believing she had arrived in St. Barts. The BVI Tourist Board's presence was minimal, with only one representative occasionally stationed under a tent with no structured engagement activities.

1940   The discussion then shifted to the lack of proper restroom facilities at beaches and tourist sites, which was causing discomfort for both visitors and event organizers. A specific incident was shared in which an elderly group visiting for a convention had to use makeshift restrooms in a storeroom at Mango Bay, as there were no public facilities available. This was described as an embarrassment for the island, underscoring the need for proper tourism infrastructure.

Cruise Tourism's Limited Economic Impact

1945   Concerns were raised about the economic benefits of cruise tourism for Virgin Gorda. Many cruise passengers only visit The Baths and return directly to their ships without engaging with local businesses. The community member suggested creating additional points of interest or marketplaces where visitors could shop for local crafts and products before returning to their ships.

1950   Similarly, the same pattern was observed with overnight tourists, who tend to stay at their hotels, visit the beaches, and then leave without significantly contributing to the local economy. The suggestion was made to establish attractions or activities that would encourage visitors to explore more of Virgin Gorda and engage in local commerce.

Concerns Over Low Entry Fees for The Baths

1955   The discussion moved to the entry fee for The Baths, which is currently only $3 per person. A comparison was made to other Caribbean attractions, such as Bob Marley's house in Jamaica, which charges $150 per person, highlighting that The Baths' fee was severely under-priced given its popularity. The community member suggested a substantial increase in fees to ensure the government and local economy benefit more from this prime attraction.

It was also pointed out that cruise ships were profiting from The Baths while the local government was not. Cruise lines charge hundreds of dollars for tour packages that include The Baths, yet the local revenue remains minimal due to the low entry fee.

1960   **Premier's Response: Fee Increase and Cultural Integration in Tourism**

The Premier responded by confirming that Cabinet had recently reviewed a proposal to increase The Baths' fee from $3 to $20. The approval was delayed due to other fee adjustments for the charter boat industry, but he assured that the increase would be implemented.

He agreed with concerns about enhancing the tourism experience at ports of entry, acknowledging that seaports and airports lack welcoming amenities such as music, cultural displays, or informative signage. He stressed the importance of starting the tourism experience the moment visitors arrive, through visual marketing, entertainment, and hospitality.

The Premier also reaffirmed the government's commitment to integrating culture into tourism, an effort reflected in Culture and Tourism Month. He emphasized the need to restore and develop historical sites, providing restrooms and gift shops to enhance the visitor experience.

Creating Cultural Tourism Villages to Distribute Cruise Tourists

To reduce congestion at The Baths and diversify tourism experiences, the Premier proposed the creation of cultural villages at key locations across the Virgin Islands. These villages would feature:

- Permanent booths for local vendors
- Bathrooms and other essential facilities
- Live cultural performances, such as Moko Jumbies
- Demonstrations of traditional crafts, like straw hat weaving

He suggested that multiple cultural hubs be established across Tortola, North Sound, The Valley, Anegada, and Jost Van Dyke, ensuring that tourism dollars are distributed beyond just the major tourist hotspots.

Community Response: Concerns About Cruise-Only Spaces

A community member raised concerns about dedicating specific areas exclusively for cruise passengers, warning that this could lead to a segregated tourism industry. They stressed that any new infrastructure should remain accessible to all visitors, not just cruise passengers, since cruise tourism is seasonal and many facilities could sit empty when ships are absent.

The Premier acknowledged this concern, clarifying that his intent was not to create exclusive cruise areas but rather to ease congestion and improve distribution.

Designated Venue for the Easter Festival

The discussion shifted to the location of the Virgin Gorda Easter Festival, with some business owners voicing concerns that the new location at the ferry dock negatively impacted local restaurants that previously benefited when the parade passed their establishments.

The Premier admitted he hadn't considered this impact and acknowledged the need for a long-term, dedicated festival site. The Minister for Health and Social Development, Hon. Wheatley, provided historical context, explaining that the festival had been moved multiple times over the years, with each new location generating similar concerns about economic fairness.

She emphasized that finding a perfect location to satisfy all stakeholders is difficult, but further discussions would be needed to determine whether the current site is the most beneficial.

Acknowledging the Need for Year-Round Tourism and Infrastructure Investment

The discussion continued with an acknowledgment that while no single Easter Festival venue will satisfy everyone, the government remains committed to finding a dedicated festival site. The Premier's team was praised for conducting tourism policy consultations across the districts, particularly in Anegada, which, along with Virgin Gorda, is considered a tourism hub.

An emphasis was placed on investment in tourism infrastructure, particularly in street lighting, sidewalks, and overall improvements to maintain Virgin Gorda's appeal as a high-end tourist destination. The speaker also stressed the need for a return to year-round tourism, recalling that before the 1980s, there was no off-season as different tourist demographics arrived at various times of the year. The hope was expressed that with government support, Virgin Gorda could return to this model.

Challenges of Festival Relocation and Economic Impact on Local Businesses

The conversation returned to the economic impact of moving the Easter Festival from the South Side to the North Side. The relocation affected local businesses that depended on festival foot traffic, as they were accustomed to benefiting from the event's proximity. Previously, many businesses on the South Side prepared for the influx of visitors and saw significant revenue during Easter weekend. However, with the shift to the North Side, they suffered financial losses due to lower customer engagement.

A suggestion was made that businesses impacted by the relocation be given priority booth space at the new festival venue to help compensate for lost revenue. The speaker recognized the importance of festival planning but stressed the need for a more balanced economic approach that considers all stakeholders.

Preserving Historical Sites: The Neglected Plantation-Era Gravesite

A new topic was introduced regarding the neglect of historical sites, particularly a plantation-era gravesite near the St. Thomas Bay Jetty. The site, dating back to the 1600s, had become dilapidated and disrespected, as it was currently being used as a taxi stand. Visitors were observed drinking alcohol and urinating on the graves, which was described as a disrespectful and economically short-sighted misuse of a historical site.

The speaker proposed restoring and properly maintaining the gravesite, potentially turning it into an educational and cultural attraction where visitors could learn about Virgin Gorda's history while waiting for their ferry. Additionally, it was suggested that the taxi stand be relocated to a more appropriate site.

Reintroducing Unique Tourist Attractions: Swimming with Dolphins and Farm-Based Experiences

The speaker reminisced about swimming with dolphins, an attraction that once existed in the Virgin Islands and was inspired by similar experiences in Mexico. While recognizing the concerns of animal rights activists, they argued that if dolphins were treated humanely, this type of attraction could be revived. Other destinations, such as the Bahamas and the Cayman Islands, successfully operate similar programs despite opposition.

An alternative attraction was suggested—integrating local farm animals into tourism experiences, similar to the "swimming with pigs" experience in the Bahamas or feeding stingrays in the Cayman Islands. Given the large number of goats in Virgin Gorda, the speaker humorously proposed a "swimming with goats" experience, which was met with some amusement.

Expanding Tourism Sub-Sectors: Medical Tourism

The discussion shifted to the importance of diversifying the tourism industry, particularly in the area of medical tourism. The speaker noted that medical tourism was historically strong in the Virgin Islands, particularly when Bougainvillea Clinic was privately owned, attracting international patients for specialized surgeries.

With significant private investment in medical facilities, there was an opportunity to revive and formalize medical tourism as a key sector. The U.S. visa restrictions for Caribbean nationals were identified as a potential driver for medical tourism in the Virgin Islands, as patients from neighbouring countries without U.S. visas might opt to receive medical procedures in the BVI instead of traveling to the U.S.

Premier's Response: Medical Tourism and Tourism Diversification

The Premier acknowledged that medical tourism was a growing interest and revealed that a medical school was set to open in the Virgin Islands later in the year. This institution would enhance the territory's ability to attract medical tourists by improving local healthcare services and training medical professionals.

Additionally, the Premier shared that investors from the U.S. had expressed interest in establishing recovery centres for plastic surgery patients, reinforcing the potential of medical tourism as a lucrative industry for the Virgin Islands.

On the topic of reintroducing dolphin attractions, the Premier acknowledged the controversy surrounding captive animal tourism but remained open to further discussion on the matter. He humorously entertained the "swimming with goats" idea, though he questioned whether it would face opposition from animal rights activists.

Concerns Over Cruise vs. Land-Based Tourism

A representative from Guava Berry Spring Bay, a well-known local accommodation provider, emphasized the importance of land-based (overnight) tourists rather than cruise ship passengers. Virgin Gorda is marketed as a high-end destination, attracting visitors who seek peace, natural beauty, and exclusivity. These visitors spend significantly more money than cruise passengers, often staying for extended periods, dining at local restaurants, renting villas, and engaging in higher-value tourism activities.

The speaker expressed concerns that land-based tourists do not want to be overcrowded with cruise passengers, as their main attraction to Virgin Gorda is its seclusion and tranquillity. They planned to read a letter from a frequent visitor who shared first-hand concerns about tourism congestion and its impact on Virgin Gorda's experience.

Concerns Over Mass Tourism at The Baths

A long-time visitor to Virgin Gorda, wrote to express concerns about the increasing number of cruise ship passengers arriving at The Baths. Having visited annually for over 30 years, he had always appreciated Virgin Gorda as a peaceful, unspoiled retreat. However, during his most recent visit, he observed a significant decline in the experience due to overcrowding.

He described a daily onslaught of cruise passengers being taxied in large numbers to The Baths, causing congestion, environmental degradation, and unsafe conditions due to overloaded and speeding taxis. He emphasized that Virgin Gorda's infrastructure has not been upgraded to accommodate mass tourism, nor should it be. Furthermore, cruise passengers contributed little to the local economy, as they spent minimal time and money on the island before being shuttled back to their ships.

He urged the government to take immediate steps to mitigate the impact on this delicate natural resource, cautioning against overexploitation and concluding with the phrase: **"Please don't kill the goose that laid the golden egg."**

Noise Pollution from Unregulated Street Performers

A local accommodation manager, supported the concerns about The Baths and raised an additional issue regarding unregulated street performers. She highlighted that a steel pan musician stationed at the top of The Baths played the same repetitive tune all day long, causing complaints from guests staying in nearby villas. Many of these guests refused to return after their initial stay, resulting in direct financial losses for property owners.

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Despite multiple written complaints to the government, tourist board, and district representative, no action had been taken. She warned that allowing such unregulated activities would lead to further commercialization, with an influx of unsanctioned vendors, ultimately diminishing Virgin Gorda's upscale tourism appeal. She demanded immediate intervention to remove the performer.

Call for Island-Specific Tourism Strategies

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The person further emphasized the importance of differentiating the tourism strategies for each island in the British Virgin Islands. She stressed that Virgin Gorda, Anegada, Jost Van Dyke, and Tortola each attract different types of visitors, and the government should tailor its policies accordingly. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, she urged officials to consult residents to understand what truly draws visitors to each island and develop policies that preserve these unique attractions.

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She also posed a direct question to the government: How much revenue does Virgin Gorda contribute to the government through hotel accommodation taxes? She suggested that such data would illustrate the economic importance of overnight tourism compared to cruise tourism.

The Impact of Overcrowding on The Baths Experience

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The discussion returned to the excessive number of tourists at The Baths. The speaker noted that many overnight guests now avoid the site altogether because it is constantly overrun with cruise passengers. Previously, The Baths were a peaceful experience, but now, from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM daily, it is congested and unenjoyable.

She supported raising the entrance fee from $3 to $20 but suggested further limiting the number of cruise passengers allowed per day. By reducing visitor numbers and increasing the excursion fee, the experience would improve, and tourists would be more likely to return.

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She warned that current crowd levels made the site unpleasant, describing the situation where hundreds of people squeeze through the narrow trails and caves, ruining the natural serenity.

Premier's Response: Regulation and Carrying Capacity Studies

The Premier acknowledged the concerns and stated that the government had already discussed raising the fee at The Baths and creating additional tourism sites to distribute visitors more effectively. He also mentioned the concept of carrying capacity, the idea of setting a maximum number of visitors allowed per site at any given time. He noted that a study on The Baths' carrying capacity had been conducted in the past and suggested that it might be time to review and implement its findings.

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Regarding hotel accommodation tax data, the Premier admitted that the government does not currently separate revenue by island but agreed that such information would be useful for policy decisions. He stated that he had requested a breakdown of accommodation tax data between villas and hotels, but the figures were not yet segregated properly.

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He also acknowledged that Virgin Gorda generates significant revenue from stamp duty on land sales, further emphasizing the island's economic importance.

Challenges in Tourism Recovery and the Need for Maintenance

Jeff McNutt, co-owner of Dive BVI, shared his perspective on tourism challenges post-hurricane and post-COVID. He described the initial wave of "guilt tourism"**,** where **visitors** came to support the recovery effort, but noted that this phase was over. Similarly, the post-pandemic travel boom has ended, meaning that Virgin Gorda must refocus on providing exceptional experiences to attract long-term visitors**.**

He lamented that despite the island's natural beauty, maintenance remains a major issue. He pointed to the Copper Mine Ruins, where a building was constructed but left unused, and suggested using it as a training site for local youth to learn skills in restoration and preservation**.**

He emphasized that projects are often started but not maintained, leading to a cycle of deterioration and missed opportunities. He cited the need for better signage, including diagrams and multilingual explanations, so visitors can better understand the island's geological and historical significance**.**

Marketing and Sustainability in Tourism

A dive industry veteran with extensive experience in the Caribbean and beyond, highlighted how Virgin Gorda's natural beauty remains unparalleled compared to other destinations. However, he noted that other islands excel in marketing their tourism product, while the BVI is not fully leveraging its assets**.**

As part of Dive BVI's 50th anniversary, McNutt proposed an initiative to promote reef-safe sunscreen to protect marine life. The high import duty on sunscreen (40%) makes it prohibitively expensive, deterring tourists from purchasing environmentally friendly options. He advocated for reducing duty fees on reef-safe sunscreen to encourage its use, arguing that this minor policy change would demonstrate the government's commitment to marine conservation while benefiting businesses, tourists, and the environment.

He also emphasized the importance of enhancing the national parks mooring system to protect the seabed. By installing more moorings and subsidizing their maintenance, the BVI could reassert itself as a leader in marine conservation and limit damage from anchoring. He suggested **engaging** local youth in marine conservation projects, such as diving, snorkelling, and turtle tracking, to foster environmental stewardship.

McNutt concluded by stressing that visitors come to the BVI for tranquillity, natural beauty, and warm hospitality. He urged the government to preserve these qualities rather than jeopardizing them through unchecked tourism expansion, stating, "Let's not ruin it before we lose it."

The Impact of Cruise Tourists and the Changing Visitor Demographics

A local business owner, who has operated at The Baths for decades, emphasized the stark difference between spending patterns of cruise passengers and overnight tourists. She noted that Americans and Europeans exhibit different spending behaviours, with American visitors typically spending more while European cruise passengers contribute very little to the local economy.

She pointed out that while cruise tourism generates revenue through head taxes, this does not necessarily translate to local economic benefits, especially if passengers spend little to no money while on the island. She warned that

increasing visitor numbers does not always mean greater revenue, particularly if the overall visitor experience declines. She called for a balance between cruise and overnight tourism to ensure sustainability.

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Festival Village Debate: North vs. South

The discussion returned to the controversial relocation of the Easter Festival Village from the South Side to the North Side. While some business owners in the South expressed concerns about lost revenue, a resident from the North argued that businesses in the South benefited from the festival for years without complaints. Now that the venue has shifted, it is only fair to allow businesses in the North their turn to benefit.

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She emphasized that wherever the festival is held, some businesses will profit while others may lose out. She also pointed out that businesses in the South can still attract customers during festival season if they market themselves effectively.

Proposal for an Aquatic Centre at The Baths

A participant suggested that the government should consider building an aquatic centre at the top of The Baths using a piece of land the government previously purchased. This facility could feature glass enclosures showcasing marine life such as turtles, parrotfish, and other local species, offering tourists an interactive educational experience.

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He cited the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta as an inspiration, recalling Premier Wheatley's time studying in Atlanta, where he may have seen similar facilities. The attraction could generate additional revenue while promoting marine conservation.

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The Role of Music and Street Performers in Tourism

The discussion returned to the topic of street performers at The Baths, with one participant defending the presence of musicians playing for tourists. He referenced locations such as Wall Street in New York, where musicians play in public spaces and receive generous tips.

While he acknowledged concerns about the quality and repetitiveness of the music, he emphasized that some tourists enjoy local music and suggested a more organized approach to street performances rather than banning them outright.

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Infrastructure Concerns and Flooding Issues

A participant raised concerns about flooding near the marina following recent heavy rainfall. He attributed the issue to poor drainage design during the construction of a drive-thru at Yacht Harbour, where the installed drainage pipes were too small to handle the volume of water.

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He recommended that the Yacht Harbour Committee and Investment Club revisit the drainage system to prevent future flooding, which disrupts businesses and tourism activities in the area.

Infrastructure Issues: Drainage and Road Conditions

A participant emphasized the urgent need to address poor drainage infrastructure, particularly near the marina drive-thru. Small drainage pipes (six inches in diameter) are insufficient to handle heavy rainfall, resulting in frequent flooding and water accumulation. The issue has been noted by local representatives, and there is a call for larger pipes to be installed to prevent recurring problems.

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Returning Resident's Perspective: Water Runoff, Speed Bumps, and Parking Congestion

2180   A resident of Virgin Gorda, expressed her concerns about various quality-of-life issues on the island. She highlighted three major concerns:

1. **Water runoff from private properties**—She found it unacceptable that businesses and homes were releasing wastewater onto public streets, creating an unsanitary and unattractive environment.
2. **Speed bumps without proper markings**—While some have been marked, others remain **invisible to drivers**,
2185   posing a risk of accidents. She urged the government to complete the painting of speed bumps for road safety.
3. **Congestion at the ferry dock**—She described the stressful experience of arriving at the dock, where visitors and residents struggle with inadequate trolley availability, often dealing with broken or missing carts. The lack of proper transport infrastructure at the dock leads to chaos, delays, and frustration.

She called for immediate action on these issues, stating that they were that should not require extensive government
2190   intervention.

Parking Challenges: Daily Commuters to Tortola

An individual elaborated on the parking problem at the ferry dock, emphasizing that long-term parking by daily commuters to Tortola reduces availability for short-term visitors and tourists. She suggested that the Government secure land for a designated commuter parking lot to free up space at the ferry dock.

2195   One potential solution she proposed was negotiating with Little Dix Bay for parking space where vehicles could park in a more organized manner, rather than lining up along fences and blocking access routes. She urged Premier Wheatley to explore this public-private partnership to alleviate congestion.

Flooding at Key Locations: Urgent Need for Drainage Repairs

Echoing earlier concerns, a participant described severe flooding in various locations, including near the Banco
2200   Popular area and the taxi stand. During recent rainfall, water levels reached knee-high levels, forcing vehicles to reroute through private properties to pass through.

She urged the government to prioritize drainage repairs, warning that the problem would persist indefinitely if not properly addressed. Her account reinforced previous complaints that current drainage infrastructure is inadequate.

Concerns About Taxi Operations: Accessibility and Professionalism

2205   Another issue she highlighted was the state of taxi services in Virgin Gorda. Tourists arriving at the Gun Creek Dock face difficulties in accessing taxis, often navigating through muddy and uneven terrain.

She urged taxi operators to be more proactive and organized, recommending that they collaborate to purchase and improve infrastructure at the taxi stand. She suggested that they work with the BVI Investment Club to create a cleaner, more professional transport hub.

2210   **Gun Creek Dock: A Deteriorating Entry Point for Visitors**

She expressed embarrassment over the poor conditions at Gun Creek Dock, calling it a disgrace given that Virgin Gorda is considered a tourism hub for the BVI. The lack of proper facilities, poor road conditions, and unappealing environment create a negative first impression for visitors.

2215 She feared that tourists arriving at Gun Creek might question the island's infrastructure and tourism appeal upon seeing its current state. She concluded by calling for urgent upgrades to the dock and its surroundings, emphasizing the need for Virgin Gorda to maintain a world-class standard in tourism infrastructure.

Anegada Community Consultation

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held on Sunday 16th March 2025

Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation

1. **Reliable Transportation Access Is Essential**
   Stakeholders emphasized the urgent need for daily and reliable ferry and air services to and from Anegada. Current inconsistencies in the ferry schedule, lack of coordination with flights, and limited inter-island transport—especially with Virgin Gorda—are hindering both resident mobility and visitor satisfaction.
2. **Cleanliness and First Impressions Matter**
   The dock and port of entry facilities are in poor condition, lacking basic amenities, seating, waste management, and signage. Tourists have complained about the untidiness and disorganization. Community members called for designated personnel to be hired to clean and manage the area regularly.
3. **Healthcare Infrastructure Is Inadequate**
   Multiple participants raised concerns about emergency response limitations, a lack of consistent medication supply, and overall poor conditions at the clinic. These issues directly affect residents and jeopardize the island's capacity to host and respond to tourist-related incidents.
4. **Land Title and Access Are Major Barriers to Local Investment**
   Residents consistently voiced frustration about not being able to secure titles for ancestral land. Without legal deeds, locals are unable to access financing or invest in tourism infrastructure, creating an uneven playing field between local entrepreneurs and foreign investors.
5. **Community-Led Tourism Is Strongly Preferred**
   There was strong resistance to the introduction of large-scale foreign-owned resorts, with residents emphasizing that Anegada's tourism success must remain locally led. The current small-scale, authentic, family-run businesses define the island's identity and should be supported, not displaced.
6. **Environmental Sustainability Must Be Central**
   Concerns were raised about the degradation of Anegada's reef, beaches, and community cleanliness. Locals stressed that the tourism policy must prioritize environmental conservation through partnerships, regulation, and public education to protect the island's fragile ecosystems.
7. **Cultural and Heritage Tourism Needs Investment**
   The potential of heritage tourism, including graveyards and cultural food events, was noted, but infrastructure (like fencing and signage) is lacking. There is interest in revitalizing Anegada's cultural calendar through more diverse events beyond Lobster Fest, including heritage and food festivals throughout the year.
8. **Lobster Fest Should Be Locally Managed and Rebranded**
   Residents expressed readiness to take over the planning and implementation of Lobster Fest, requesting support from the Tourist Board. There were also calls to broaden the event's focus to showcase a variety of local cuisine rather than over-relying on lobster as the singular attraction.
9. **Uneven Enforcement Undermines Trust in Government**
   A recurring theme was the perception of selective enforcement of rules and regulations. Locals felt that while some are forced to comply strictly, others operate businesses in breach of laws without consequence. This inconsistency undermines community trust and breeds frustration.
10. **The Policy Must Deliver Equity, Not Just Growth**
    A repeated refrain was the distinction between "equality" and "equity." Residents want a tourism policy that accounts for Anegada's unique challenges and ensures that development translates into tangible, fair benefits for locals—especially in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power

Minutes

Opening Remarks and Introduction to the Meeting

2265 The meeting began with a warm welcome and an invitation to participate in the development of the national tourism policy. This was noted as the fifth public consultation in a series of meetings across the Territory, following sessions on Tortola and Virgin Gorda, now taking place in Anegada. After a prayer, the Premier delivered opening remarks, thanking attendees and emphasizing the importance of their involvement in shaping tourism policy, particularly given Anegada's significance in the Virgin Islands' tourism offering.

2270 He acknowledged key officials present, including the Minister for Tourism and Culture, the Chair of the Tourist Board, and the Permanent Secretary and team from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development.

Economic Overview and Tourism Trends

The Premier provided recent data on tourism trends, noting a 6% increase in overnight arrivals from
2275 approximately 100,000 in the first quarter of 2024 to around 160,000 in 2025. While cruise passenger numbers slightly declined from a record high the previous year, this was seen as a healthy rebalancing of the tourism sector. The Premier highlighted that although cruise tourism supports many jobs, the increase in overnight visitors reflects a more sustainable and economically beneficial trend, inviting discussion on what kind of tourism the Territory should prioritize and how to strike a balance.

2280 **Strategic Role of Tourism in Economic Development**

Tourism has been a vital part of the economy since the 1960s. Due to growing population needs, limited government funds, and the demand for jobs, the Premier emphasized the importance of finding new ways to drive economic growth. Tourism, he argued, holds the potential to generate more employment, business opportunities, and revenue. With financial services under growing pressure, currently contributing 60% of
2285 government revenue, the Premier warned this sector might not remain as dominant, making diversification through tourism critical.

The Importance of a Forward-looking Tourism Policy

The Premier emphasized that leaders must have a clear economic plan to avoid deepening societal and infrastructural challenges. The government has chosen to focus on tourism growth but is committed to
2290 ensuring environmental preservation and high standards. The policy process seeks to define what the Virgin Islands' tourism product should look like, recognizing that different islands (like Anegada and Tortola) offer distinct experiences. A June deadline has been set for completing the tourism policy, which will guide the creation of a national tourism plan—a roadmap for the sector's development. He stressed the inclusive nature of the consultations and encouraged attendees to provide input while it can still meaningfully
2295 influence the outcome. The goal is to create a policy that supports all businesses and citizens, with clear guidelines for action.

Tourism's Economic Significance and the Case for Sustainable Development

The first presentation highlighted the macroeconomic context, noting the national GDP is estimated at $1.6 billion, with tourism accounting for a significant share. According to the World Travel and Tourism
2300 Council, tourism, including related services and infrastructure, represents about 52% of GDP. The policy aims to promote sustainable tourism, drawing on definitions by major international organizations. These

frameworks emphasize balancing economic growth with environmental protection, cultural respect, and community benefit. The Ministry intends to incorporate these dimensions into the national policy.

Defining and Improving Service Quality and Visitor Experience

2305 Sustainability also includes high-quality service delivery, which directly impacts guest satisfaction and economic returns. The policy framework aims to ensure consistency in service excellence across both public and private sectors. Satisfied tourists spend more, return more often, and contribute to long-term growth. The Ministry aims to create a seamless visitor experience from the moment guests decide to travel to the Territory, including their transition to places like Anegada. The policy will focus on authenticity, cultural

2310 immersion, eco-friendly accommodations, and ethical tourism activities to enhance the visitor journey and ensure every stakeholder understands their role in upholding sustainability and quality.

Policy Implementation, Collaboration, and Regional Influence

The process involves extensive stakeholder engagement—including businesses, government, and civil society—to ensure the policy is well-supported. Implementation will include a blend of regulations,

2315 incentives, and frameworks aimed at fostering a pristine environment, vibrant culture, and solid economic base. The Virgin Islands' influence on the recently launched OECS Regional Tourism Policy was noted, underscoring the Territory's leadership in regional tourism planning. The Junior Minister had just returned from a formal launch in St. Vincent, reinforcing the policy's regional importance. Previous local consultations and a recent tourism summit have helped lay the groundwork for this national effort.

2320 *Tourism Policy Framework and Thematic Windows*

The presentation resumed with a detailed explanation of the policy framework being used to shape the national tourism policy, anchored in the broader sustainable development agenda. This framework, promoted by the OECS and aligned with the Virgin Islands' National Sustainable Development Plan, draws from principles of evidence-based planning, collaboration, integration, and continuous monitoring and

2325 evaluation. Each thematic area—described as "windows" of the tourism policy "house"—reflects critical components, including inclusive growth and income distribution, blue economy integration, climate change and risk resilience, and institutional strengthening.

For example, inclusive growth includes promotion of community tourism, micro and small enterprises, youth empowerment, and sectoral linkages. The blue economy window emphasizes maritime tourism,

2330 charters, fishing, and water-based activities like sport and artisanal fishing, relevant particularly to coastal communities like Anegada. Each thematic window will guide the specific areas of policy development, shaped by input gathered through the ongoing public consultations.

Focus on Anegada: A Unique Tourism Landscape

Ms. Flax then introduced a focused presentation on Anegada as a unique frontier in the tourism landscape

2335 of the Virgin Islands. Anegada's singular status as the only coral island in the archipelago gives it ecological, geographical, and tourism significance. Surrounded by the Horseshoe Reef, the third largest barrier reef in the eastern Caribbean, the island boasts distinctive features such as pink sand beaches, salt ponds, flamingos, and ideal conditions for eco-tourism and adventure sports like kite-surfing and bone-fishing.

2340 The island's appeal lies in its tranquil and unspoiled charm—offering visitors a laid-back, off-the-beaten-path experience that is low on crowds and high on authenticity. With no traffic lights and few commercial

disturbances, Anegada is positioned as a haven for eco-tourists, sailors, and those seeking serenity. Its hospitality sector is small-scale but authentic, characterized by family-run inns and villas, and a close-knit community that also fuels cultural tourism, especially through events like the popular Lobster Festival.

2345   *Challenges and Opportunities in Anegada's Tourism Development*

The presentation then turned to the current challenges facing Anegada. Limited transportation access, particularly by air and ferry, restricts visitor numbers. Development pressures risk threatening the fragile ecosystem and cultural identity of the island. Furthermore, infrastructure deficits in roads, waste management, internet connectivity, utilities, emergency and healthcare services pose serious barriers to
2350   sustainable tourism growth.

Despite these challenges, the island has significant untapped potential. The policy should explore opportunities for expanding eco-lodges, offering boutique, low-impact adventure tourism experiences such as guided bike tours and snorkelling. Culinary and food tourism based on local seafood, as well as heritage tourism highlighting Anegada's history, are additional growth areas. However, environmental sustainability
2355   must be central to all development strategies. The reefs, beaches, and ponds require protection from overuse and pollution, and the island remains highly vulnerable to climate change effects like sea-level rise and erosion. Strong partnerships with the National Parks Trust, NGOs, and local stakeholders will be crucial in ensuring conservation efforts align with tourism development.

Community-Centred Policy Recommendations

2360   The presentation concluded by outlining what the national tourism policy should specifically do for Anegada. It must support improved access and infrastructure without compromising the island's unique character. Community-led models should be prioritized so that locals directly benefit from tourism initiatives. The policy must also allocate resources to environmental protection and waste management while effectively marketing Anegada's identity as a pristine eco-luxury destination. Above all, input from
2365   Anegada's residents must be central to the design and implementation of the policy.

Initial Community Feedback and Discussion

The public feedback session began with a local resident emphasizing that Anegada's identity, its remoteness and simplicity, is exactly why many tourists are drawn to it. Visitors often find the island by exploring maps and are enchanted by its quiet, undeveloped charm. However, the resident also highlighted the need for a
2370   community-wide clean up, noting that hurricane damage and neglect have left visible scars, particularly within the settlement. Neglected properties and debris (abandoned satellite dishes) diminish the island's image, even if residents have grown used to seeing them. A territory-wide push to beautify communities would improve the Virgin Islands' overall tourism product.

The resident praised the Tourist Board's outreach efforts and acknowledged the ongoing challenge of
2375   organizing community-based initiatives like the Lobster Festival. While the Tourist Board encourages local ownership of the event, logistical challenges like coordination and budgeting often hinder execution. The suggestion was made that the Tourist Board provide a dedicated budget and framework to support the event without expecting Anegada residents to cover costs or develop plans independently.

The conversation then shifted to infrastructure, where concerns were raised about electricity and water
2380   access. The speaker cited increased demand with new developments like the upcoming reopening of Neptune's Treasure, noting that the current system, already strained, may require backup generators unless

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solar solutions are enhanced. It was clarified that the Virgin Islands Electricity Corporation has a residential solar program, which could help alleviate infrastructure strain on the island.

Solar Energy Access and Sustainable Infrastructure

2385   The conversation continued with a clarification that the Virgin Islands Electricity Corporation's solar program is currently limited to residential customers, but there was interest expressed in expanding it to include commercial properties. This would support Anegada's eco-tourism identity and ease the energy burden on growing businesses. One speaker underscored how sustainability efforts, like solar adoption, should align with the island's branding and infrastructural needs.

2390   *Challenges with Ferry Transportation and Proposals for Improvement*

Transportation, especially ferry access, emerged again as a central concern. One resident emphasized the long-standing difficulties in securing consistent ferry service to Anegada. Although some progress has been made, daily service remains elusive. The Premier acknowledged these concerns and indicated he had been exploring ways to make a daily service financially viable. A proposal was offered to add a midday ferry
2395   run on off-days (e.g., Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday), scheduled around midday to allow tourists and locals to make roundtrips for business and emergencies. While this plan aimed to offer some relief, it was met with mixed responses.

Equity, Equality, and the Need for Full Access

A passionate community member rejected the idea of partial solutions like half-day ferry service, arguing
2400   that Anegada deserves the same level of access and services as the other islands. She framed this as a matter of equity and equality, noting that limited transportation stifles tourism potential, undermines the community's well-being, and perpetuates feelings of marginalization. Without full and fair access, it becomes difficult to sustain or grow the tourism sector meaningfully.

Land Title Issues and Economic Disempowerment

2405   The speaker further elaborated on the systemic barriers faced by Anegadians, focusing on land ownership and access to financing. Without proper land titles or deeds, residents cannot secure loans to invest in tourism ventures, boats, or infrastructure. This lack of collateral makes it impossible for many locals to participate fully in the tourism economy, leaving them dependent on external investors who have the means to develop and profit. She stressed the need to address land titling and empower locals to contribute to and
2410   benefit from economic development on equal footing.

Healthcare, Emergency Services, and Personal Testimonies

The discussion turned to the inadequacies in healthcare and emergency services. The speaker, who is a healthcare worker herself, emotionally described the crumbling state of facilities and the challenges she faces trying to serve the community with minimal support. Recounting recent scooter accidents and her
2415   own deteriorating work environment, she highlighted how infrastructural neglect puts both residents and visitors at risk. Despite making repeated appeals to government agencies for assistance, improvements have been slow or absent. She emphasized that the brunt of these failings often falls on individuals like herself who are simply trying to help.

Call for a Dedicated Anegada Roundtable and Local Representation

2420   The speaker concluded with a strong call for action, urging the government to convene a roundtable specifically focused on Anegada's unique needs. She proposed gathering key community members, including business owners and service providers, to have a focused, problem-solving dialogue. She recounted how the Anegada Resilience Team had emerged from previous such collaborations and underscored how local initiative had historically been critical in pushing for the island's inclusion in
2425   national discussions. Anegada's vulnerabilities—particularly to climate events—make this even more urgent. The speaker expressed both her frustration and determination, pointing out that with the right resources and support, local actors are fully capable of making meaningful contributions to the Territory's tourism sector. She closed by stressing the importance of land ownership, small business support, and equitable economic investment as foundational elements for any successful tourism policy on Anegada.

2430   **Inclusivity in Tourism and Local Community Value**

A speaker emphasized that Anegada's tourism appeal extends beyond traditional markets, pointing to the growing interest from visitors from Toronto, Portugal, and elsewhere, especially during the off-season. Weekly events such as Friday and Saturday night barbecues have become informal social hubs, attracting visitors who enjoy the island's authentic and relaxed vibe, even if not for food. The speaker reiterated that
2435   Anegada plays a legitimate and valued role in the broader Virgin Islands tourism offering but requires dedicated funding, infrastructure, and policy support to maintain and grow its unique identity.

Policy Response: Acknowledgment of Equity and Systemic Issues

In response, a government representative affirmed the importance of moving beyond equality to true equity, where remote communities like Anegada receive the same level of services, even if it costs more to provide
2440   them. He admitted the Government is not yet where it needs to be, but committed to working toward this goal. He also acknowledged frustration over delays in the issuance of land titles, sharing his own disappointment over the lack of progress and affirming that Cabinet action is still needed. Though updates are periodically encouraging, tangible results have yet to be delivered.

Healthcare, Infrastructure, and Risk Mitigation in Tourism

2445   The discussion turned to healthcare and infrastructure. The speaker agreed that for tourism development—especially in niche sectors like adventure tourism—there must be adequate supporting infrastructure, including roads and emergency services. Without these, tourism-related risks increase and economic potential diminishes. He underscored the need for a policy that not only envisions tourism growth but also includes mechanisms to mitigate the inherent risks associated with that growth.

2450   *Support for Regular Stakeholder Engagement and Disaster Preparedness*

The suggestion of a community-specific roundtable for Anegada was welcomed, with proposals to hold such a session at least twice a year. Disaster preparedness was also flagged as an ongoing concern, particularly given Anegada's vulnerabilities. Regarding economic empowerment, the speaker highlighted that while small business grants from Trade are available, access to loans remains constrained without land
2455   deeds. He posed a reflective question to the community about whether they supported the introduction of large resorts like Sandals or Marriott on the island, prompting an impassioned response.

Firm Opposition to Major Hotel Chains on Anegada

A strong and immediate response from a resident firmly rejected the idea of large-scale hotel development on Anegada. The speaker argued that such developments would displace small, locally owned businesses and erode the island's character. She emphasized Anegada's exceptional status in the Territory as an island still dominated by local ownership, and voiced concerns that external investors could crowd out residents and reduce their ability to maintain control over their heritage and economy. Instead, she called for Government support to strengthen and scale existing local businesses, giving them the tools to thrive.

A Balanced Perspective on Tourism Development Models

While acknowledging the potential economic benefits of resort-driven tourism, the government representative offered a balanced perspective, citing examples from Mexico and other destinations where large resorts boost visibility and attract more tourists, some of whom then support surrounding smaller businesses. He argued that clustering businesses can drive collective growth through stronger marketing and greater visitor footfall. However, he also posed a critical follow-up question: if land titles are granted to locals, how might policymakers ensure they are not quickly sold to external developers?

Community Responses: Balancing Growth with Protection

Another community member responded thoughtfully, recognizing that large developments can bring benefits, but also highlighting how past attempts to expand infrastructure in support of local businesses (like barges and ferries) have failed due to sustainability issues. The central concern remained: without secure land titles, locals cannot effectively leverage their assets or engage in partnerships with outside investors on equitable terms. The speaker shared personal testimony about multi-generational struggles to access capital and opportunity. Even with entrepreneurship and family-run businesses dating back decades, Anegadians still lack the financial means to grow without meaningful government support and legal backing.

The speaker called for a deeper Governmental commitment to empowering the local business base with land rights, financing opportunities, and trust. She urged the administration to show Anegadians that their contributions to the tourism economy are valued and that support for their livelihood is genuine and sustained. Only then, she argued, would the door open for beneficial partnerships, rather than exploitative ones.

Lobster Festival and Community Engagement

The final section of this segment touched on the iconic Anegada Lobster Festival. The speaker, a long-time participant, shared that she has been involved for over a decade, attending nearly every meeting. However, in recent years, issues between the Government and local organizers have disrupted participation. She signalled an intention to re-engage and emphasized the importance of consistent and transparent collaboration between government and community stakeholders to preserve and strengthen events that form the backbone of Anegada's tourism identity.

Reviving the Lobster Festival: Ownership and Community Readiness

The conversation shifted back to the organization of Anegada's signature event, the Lobster Festival. A speaker shared their experience running a food booth at a past festival, noting they were fortunate to recover their investment. They explained that discussions had been ongoing about forming a dedicated committee

to manage the event, but concerns remained. One major concern was the potential shift in format—from an island-wide, business-led celebration to a centralized, booth-style event. Such a change, they warned, would undermine the core concept of Lobster Festival, which is meant to drive visitors directly to the local businesses themselves.

2500   The Premier inquired about the community's willingness to organize the festival for the current year. The speakers affirmed their readiness, revealing that a small volunteer group had already been working behind the scenes for several years. However, a recurring challenge has been that discussions with the Tourist Board often begin too close to the event date, limiting proper planning and execution.

Calls for Local Leadership with Government Support

2505   Community members made it clear that they wanted to lead the planning of the Lobster Festival themselves, with support and guidance from the Tourist Board—not control. The suggestion was made to maintain the multi-location format with a potential grand finale in one venue. There was evident enthusiasm, with speakers mentioning that they already had entertainers in mind and were just waiting on structural backing, like budget guidance and training in public accounting.

2510   The community's request was for the Government to equip them with the necessary skills and resources so they could independently manage the event in the long term. The speaker also reiterated their deep community involvement, highlighting their work in resilience, healthcare, and local events like Christmas tree lightings. The overall sentiment was that Anegada needs autonomy paired with reliable support to ensure sustainable cultural tourism.

2515   *Concerns About Lobster Supply and Event Expectations*

A significant concern was raised about the overselling of "lobster" as the exclusive attraction of the festival. One speaker explained that some visitors, especially during slower seasons, arrive with high expectations—demanding large quantities of lobster—and walk away disappointed when those expectations are not met. The overemphasis on lobster creates pressure on local businesses and risks undermining the visitor
2520   experience.

The speaker recommended repositioning the event as a broader celebration of seafood and Anegada culture, rather than focusing solely on lobster. This could help set more realistic expectations, avoid disappointment, and better showcase the diversity of the island's culinary offerings.

Anegada Cultural Identity and Culinary Heritage

2525   The discussion moved into the role of food in promoting Anegada's cultural heritage. Speakers highlighted the potential to broaden the culinary branding of Anegada by introducing other traditional dishes such as pea soup, corn soup, and fish soup into upcoming events. One speaker mentioned an event planned for June that would feature a menu designed to reflect Anegada's cultural roots as authentically as possible. Others supported the idea of more food-centred gatherings throughout the year, which could bring the community
2530   together while reinforcing local identity and attracting visitors beyond the November Lobster Festival.

Port of Entry Experience and First Impressions

The conversation then returned to infrastructure, specifically the visitor experience upon arrival. A speaker stressed the importance of first impressions, beginning with the condition of the port of entry whether the

airport or, more commonly, the seaport. She described typical challenges that visitors might face: overcrowded or poorly maintained ferry boats, rough rides, and getting soaked in the rain without adequate shelter upon arrival. Furthermore, surprise fees for baggage (e.g., $10 per piece) can create frustration, especially for tourists who had not budgeted for these extra costs. These conditions undermine the guest experience from the outset and were flagged as areas urgently needing attention to improve Anegada's tourism reputation and sustainability.

Poor Port Conditions and Lack of Infrastructure

The discussion continued with a powerful critique of the port infrastructure at Anegada's main ferry terminal. A speaker outlined the disorganized and unpleasant experience visitors face upon arrival: there is no proper waiting area, no covered seating, and people are often exposed to the elements while waiting for transportation or cargo. Passengers are left standing in crowded, chaotic spaces alongside cargo and pallets, with birds flying overhead and waste accumulating in public areas. The port lacks basic cleanliness, seating, or shelter—fundamental expectations for a tourism destination.

The speaker emphasized that the area is unmaintained due to the absence of designated staff for cleaning. While the BVI Ports Authority has discussed designating Anegada as an official port of entry, progress remains slow. Meanwhile, visiting tourists have been observed voluntarily cleaning up the port—a situation described as both embarrassing and unacceptable. The speaker called on the government to create employment opportunities by assigning locals to maintain the port and ensure a more welcoming environment for visitors.

Basic Services and Tourism Presentation

Building on this, the speaker urged the government to address glaring deficiencies at both the airport and seaport. At the airport, fire gear is reportedly laid out in plain view, and staff do not appear to be operating in a dignified, professional facility. In terms of heritage tourism, tourists often stop at the island's graveyard, but it is in poor condition with broken fencing, roaming animals, and trash strewn throughout. The speaker proposed making the graveyard a respectful, educational site that honours notable Anegadian figures with proper signage, landscaping, and maintenance.

Customer Service Failings and Lack of Accountability

Attention then turned to customer service, or the lack thereof. Delays in ferry services are met with no apologies or accommodations for travellers, even when they miss critical connections. The speaker stressed that even a simple gesture like an apology or a discount on future travel could make a significant difference in how visitors perceive their experience. She explained that poor service, dirty infrastructure, and neglect send a message that visitors and residents alike are not valued. These issues not only degrade the tourism product but also erode community pride, particularly among youth who see little reason to care about their surroundings if the government and business leaders don't model that care.

Ferry Schedule and Inter-Island Connectivity Challenges

Another speaker elaborated on the frustrations surrounding ferry schedules. Anegada's ferry is scheduled to depart at 8:30 a.m., but it often leaves late, causing visitors especially those connecting through St. Thomas or trying to return home to miss critical onward connections. The rigidity and poor coordination between ferry services means that travellers arriving on the 2:00 p.m. ferry from St. Thomas often cannot catch the 3:30 p.m. Anegada ferry, forcing them to stay overnight on Tortola unnecessarily. A call was

2575   made for the ferry departure to be shifted to 4:30 p.m., allowing more realistic connection windows for arriving passengers.

Misalignment Between Boat Operators and Service Providers

The discussion revealed a structural problem in the way ferry services are managed. The operators of the boats are not always the same as the service providers, which complicates accountability when things go wrong. When delays happen, both entities often blame each other, leaving passengers caught in the middle
2580   with no recourse. The frustration boiled down to a clear message: transportation services should adhere to their published schedules. Predictability, punctuality, and reliability are non-negotiable in tourism, and without them, visitor satisfaction and confidence are severely undermined.

The final reflections touched on the broader theme of planning and visitor expectations. Tourists, like the residents themselves when they travel abroad, anticipate a structured experience. When that expectation is
2585   disrupted—especially due to avoidable delays and a lack of basic amenities—the entire tourism product suffers. The speaker ended on a poignant note, saying visitors often arrive home from their travels to Anegada physically and emotionally drained, having spent their time navigating chaos instead of enjoying their holiday.

Unreliable Ferry Scheduling and Missed Connections

2590   The conversation revisited the issue of ferry timing. One participant stressed that while the scheduled 8:30 a.m. ferry departure is acceptable, it must leave on time. Delays undermine the ability of residents and tourists to complete their tasks, attend meetings, or make travel connections. People traveling from Tortola to Anegada already make significant sacrifices such as waking early and commuting long distances. When ferries are late, some travellers are forced to charter expensive flights at the last minute, which is
2595   unaffordable for many. There was also a call for more frequent ferry service, or at least a late afternoon option (e.g., 4:00 or 4:30 p.m.) to allow for same-day return trips and avoid unnecessary overnight stays on Tortola. Additionally, the lack of ferry connections between Anegada and Virgin Gorda limits both residents and visitors from enjoying inter-island travel and activities like visiting The Baths. The speaker proposed incorporating such routes into the national tourism policy and promoting them through local
2600   businesses.

Need for Integrated Air Services and Medical Transfers

Building on the transportation discussion, another speaker advocated for subsidized air services on days when ferries do not run. This would benefit tourism and address medical emergencies. Air travel between Anegada and Tortola takes only eight minutes but is cost-prohibitive for many, with a typical flight costing
2605   around $1,000. Integrating a regular, affordable air service into the transportation plan would serve both residents and tourists more effectively.

Frustration and Real-Life Consequences of Systemic Failures

A community member shared a deeply personal and emotional story to underscore the real-world consequences of transportation unreliability. Recounting an incident where a group of tourists missed their
2610   connecting flight due to a delayed ferry and were forced to charter an $800 flight, he expressed frustration and shame. His pride in promoting Anegada was undercut by the lack of dependable infrastructure. Despite being law-abiding and community-focused, he lamented the systemic failures that led to his and others'

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hardships, particularly when the guests who had planned carefully were left stranded. This experience, he noted, damaged Anegada's reputation and deterred repeat visitors.

2615 *Breakdown in Waste Management and Environmental Neglect*

The speaker transitioned to the issue of waste management, placing direct blame on the failure to maintain the garbage dump and the removal of containment fencing. Without proper barriers, trash is blown throughout the community, worsening the island's appearance and deterring tourists. He called for an immediate directive to reinstate perimeter control at the dump and criticized the lack of enforcement. This,
2620 he stressed, is not a new issue but one that has been allowed to fester for too long.

Economic Viability, Business Saturation, and the Collapse of Taxi Services

He then raised deeper concerns about Anegada's economic landscape. Despite the number of restaurants and hotels on the island, there is insufficient demand to sustain them all, and many local businesses are suffering. The taxi industry, in particular, has collapsed due to oversaturation and unregulated competition.
2625 New licenses are being issued while older drivers see fewer customers. With few attractions being marketed or developed, there is little for tourists to do, reducing demand for taxi services and related industries. The speaker also pointed out that many entrepreneurs lack title deeds to their land, making it impossible to secure financing or invest in business growth, perpetuating economic stagnation.

Reputation Damage and Loss of Pride in Place

2630 In closing, the speaker emphasized how these compounding issues have led to reputational damage for Anegada. He recalled a tourist telling him they wouldn't return because of the filth and disorganization they encountered at the dock. Worse still, long-time visitors who once held the island in high esteem have begun scolding locals for the deteriorating conditions. This loss of pride is devastating, especially for those who see themselves as ambassadors of Anegada's unique culture and heritage. He urged the government to take
2635 action, recommending the installation of cameras at key sites to monitor illegal dumping and hold offenders accountable. This, he concluded, is essential if the island is to recover its image and attract more responsible, repeat visitors.

Environmental Neglect and Accountability in Waste Management

The speaker continued to express frustration over the garbage situation on Anegada, citing the burning of
2640 plastic as one particularly dangerous and unsanctioned practice. They urged government officials to take tangible action by installing surveillance cameras at waste sites, identifying perpetrators, and enforcing accountability. While community clean-up efforts were acknowledged, the speaker emphasized that systemic, institutional support is necessary. They reiterated that these environmental issues are central to the tourism product, and failure to address them undermines efforts to promote Anegada as a desirable
2645 destination.

Social Injustice, Unequal Enforcement, and Rule-Breaking

A powerful and emotional appeal followed, in which the speaker described how they and others in the community are being held to higher standards than others with more resources or influence. Those who follow the rules face penalties, while others operate with impunity. This disparity creates feelings of
2650 disenfranchisement and frustration, particularly when legitimate concerns raised through official channels

are ignored or dismissed. The speaker called on government representatives to acknowledge and correct the unequal application of policies, particularly in trade and business regulation.

Impact of Reputation and Lack of Action on Livelihoods

2655 The speaker described a situation in which tourists who had a negative experience spread word of their disappointment, leading to reputational damage for the island. They warned that such incidents have far-reaching implications and may discourage repeat visitors. Tourism and fishing, both key sources of income for residents, are declining, with some fishermen considering abandoning their trade altogether. A plea was made for either a specialized policy for Anegada or tailored provisions within the national tourism policy to address its distinct challenges. The speaker emphasized that local people want to help themselves but
2660 need structural support from Government.

Inequities in Trade Regulation and Business Compliance

The discussion shifted back to the regulation of local businesses. The speaker pointed out inconsistencies in how rules are applied. Some businesses, especially those with access to capital or connections, appear to operate without adhering to government regulations, while small businesses owned by locals are penalized
2665 for even minor infractions. This dual standard, they argued, discourages compliance and erodes trust in public institutions. The speaker requested that the Government empower individuals who are following the rules rather than allowing those with influence to bend them.

Breakdown in Institutional Responsiveness and Reporting Mechanisms

Further frustration was expressed regarding Government departments' failure to respond effectively to
2670 public complaints. The speaker described how reports to agencies like Trade and Consumer Affairs, BVIEC (electricity), and telecom providers are often ignored, even when damages (e.g., electrical appliances destroyed by power surges) are documented. They questioned why constituents must navigate multiple layers of bureaucracy just to have a basic complaint acknowledged, emphasizing that issues should be resolved within the responsible department. The overarching theme was that there is little follow-through,
2675 and the "chain of command" designed to protect consumers rarely delivers results.

Final Remarks: Breakdown of Trust and the Rise of Defiance

As the meeting drew to a close, a final participant acknowledged the grievances aired by others and offered a sobering reflection: people are not acting out of malice, but from frustration and desperation. In the absence of meaningful action, many residents feel compelled to bypass regulations and fend for themselves.
2680 Rather than fighting one another, the speaker suggested a unified approach, noting that internal conflict only weakens collective progress. They warned that if government continues to be unresponsive, defiance will increase, and so too will the breakdown in social cohesion, public order, and trust.

This final segment encapsulated the deep-seated dissatisfaction and disillusionment felt by residents who want to comply with the rules and contribute to the island's development but feel systematically neglected
2685 or penalized. It called for not only policy reforms, but a transformation in the way government engages with and supports its citizens—especially those working tirelessly to sustain their communities and preserve the island's identity.

Call for Collective Action and Health Infrastructure Concerns

The final segment of the meeting opened with an impassioned call for unified community pressure to drive action. One participant reiterated the urgent state of healthcare on Anegada, sharing personal experiences of inconsistency in receiving essential medications—particularly loss medication—since the passing of a loved one. They described serious public health incidents, such as multiple children becoming ill after exposure to contaminated beach areas. These anecdotes underscored the broader concern that the island's medical services are not keeping pace with the needs of the community or the demands of increased tourism activity.

Broad Appeal for Inclusion in National Tourism Policy

The participant emphasized that issues raised throughout the meeting—such as land rights, infrastructure, clean and welcoming ports of entry, and heritage site maintenance—should be reflected in the national tourism policy. They commended the Tourist Board's existing work but urged that additional improvements be made to heritage and tourism sites like the botanical garden, scenic lookouts, and other National Parks Trust properties. These sites, they argued, are valuable tourism assets but require better maintenance, enhanced signage, and landscaping to improve the visitor experience and offer more structured stops for taxi tours.

Gratitude, Final Reflections, and Cultural Identity

The discussion began winding down with expressions of thanks to all attendees and contributors. Participants acknowledged the significance of tourism for Anegada's economy and expressed appreciation for the open dialogue. One speaker highlighted the uniqueness of Anegada's community values, stressing that when a local person wishes to develop their land for business, the community generally supports them. The concern lies instead with outsiders who exploit land ownership ambiguity to build or invest without proper authorization—actions that the speaker believed were not being properly addressed by authorities.

Distinguishing Good Faith Development from Encroachment

Building on this theme, another speaker made a distinction between two types of land use situations: locals who are frustrated but striving to build legitimate businesses and outsiders who deliberately build on land to which they have no rightful claim. The speaker warned against letting these bad actors go unchecked and pledged a willingness to legally fight such cases. The comment resonated with the meeting's broader themes of fairness, equity, and empowerment for native Anegadians.

Conclusion

This final portion of the meeting reflected a shared sense of urgency, frustration, and hope. Participants made it clear that without sustained investment in healthcare, infrastructure, equitable land access, and environmental stewardship, Anegada cannot fulfil its potential as a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable tourism destination. However, there was also a sense of resolve among community members to continue pressing for change, and a clear willingness by officials to listen and incorporate their insights into national planning. The meeting ended on a note of cautious optimism, with actionable steps suggested and commitments made to follow through on key community concerns.

Virgin Gorda Community Consultation – North Sound

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held at Monday 14th March 2025

2730   **Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation**

1. **Protect Local Charter Operators from Foreign Competition**
   Stakeholders expressed deep frustration with foreign-based vessels, particularly from St. Thomas, operating commercially in the BVI without work permits or contributing to the local economy.
2735   They called for stricter enforcement of port-to-port regulations and licensing conditions to safeguard BVI-based operators.

2. **Reinstate and Properly Staff Gun Creek Port**
   There was unanimous support for reactivating Gun Creek as a fully functioning port of entry. Stakeholders noted that this would facilitate marine tourism, especially for events like regattas, and ease the burden on Spanish Town.

2740   3. **Improve Visitor Entry Experience**
   Customs and immigration services were cited as inconsistent and sometimes unwelcoming. Participants urged for better customer service training and frontline accountability, stressing the importance of positive first impressions for tourism.

4. **Modernize and Streamline Infrastructure**
2745   The community highlighted repeated disruptions from roadworks caused by failing water pipes. There were strong calls for the use of HDPE (high-density polyethylene) piping and smarter utility layouts, including above-ground conduit systems, to avoid recurring repairs.

5. **Develop Local Capacity through HR and Training**
   Stakeholders supported the upcoming CTO HR Conference and emphasized the need to
2750   professionalize the tourism workforce at all levels—from frontline workers to management—by attracting and training skilled personnel.

6. **Enhance Support for Local Entrepreneurs**
   The need for a fully functioning Small Business Bureau and access to low-interest loans or grants was stressed. Entrepreneurs called for policy frameworks that enable them to innovate and
2755   participate meaningfully in tourism-related ventures, including reconsidering outdated restrictions like the jet ski ban.

7. **Balance Tourism Growth with Environmental Protection**
   Participants emphasized the importance of protecting mangroves and seagrass beds, particularly in North Sound, noting that unchecked development could irreversibly damage the marine ecosystem
2760   that sustains the tourism product.

8. **Regulate Visitor Flow at Sensitive Sites**
   Concerns were raised about overcrowding at The Baths, particularly from cruise ship excursions. Stakeholders proposed limiting daily visitors and diversifying tour routes to reduce pressure on the site and preserve its integrity.

2765   9. **Address Accommodation Shortages for Marine Events**
   Major events like the MAXI regatta expose the Territory's lack of accommodations for large crews. Stakeholders recommended strategic infrastructure investments to meet demand and retain high-value nautical tourism.

10. **Create a Coordinated Transportation and Parking System**
2770   Suggestions included a centralized ferry landing with scheduled shuttles to improve mobility,

reduce congestion, and provide a more seamless visitor experience, especially in North Sound and surrounding areas.

Invocation and Opening Statement by the Premier

A prayer was offered thanking God for the opportunity to meet in the tourism capital and asking for divine
2775 guidance in moving tourism forward. The Premier then took the floor and welcomed everyone, reiterating
the apology for the delayed start due to transportation issues.

He highlighted the purpose of the meeting: to discuss the national tourism policy, stressing the significance
of tailoring tourism strategies to the unique characteristics of each location within the Virgin Islands.
Drawing from a recent visit to Anegada, the Premier noted that tourism challenges and opportunities differ
2780 significantly between islands, underscoring the value of localized consultations.

He affirmed the critical role of North Sound in the Territory's tourism product, acknowledging its global
appeal and the necessity of including its stakeholders in the policy development process. Contextualizing
the discussion within broader economic trends, the Premier pointed to the historic growth of the Territory's
economy, fuelled largely by financial services and tourism. However, he cautioned that financial services
2785 face mounting international pressures, making tourism the likeliest candidate to drive future growth.

He emphasized the importance of sustainable tourism growth that does not compromise the environment
or the well-being of future generations. He framed the core challenge as one of balance—managing the
diverse needs of cruise and overnight tourism, various stakeholders, and environmental concerns—while
still promoting growth. The Premier expressed confidence in the local population's ability to devise
2790 thoughtful, inclusive strategies and encouraged open dialogue, highlighting the value of community
consultation to avoid policy rejection and foster shared ownership of tourism development.

Overview of the Presentations and Tourism's Economic Role

The facilitator then introduced two brief presentations, explaining that the meeting was being recorded to
document public input. The first presentation contextualized tourism's economic importance, citing the
2795 Ministry of Finance's economic review. The total GDP of the Virgin Islands was approximately $1.67
billion in 2023, with tourism contributing roughly 52%—a combination of direct services and tourism-
related construction.

Defining Sustainable Tourism

The speaker emphasized that the aim is not just to have a robust tourism sector, but one that is sustainable.
2800 Multiple definitions were shared:

- The World Tourism Organization emphasizes economic, social, and environmental considerations
  that benefit all stakeholders.
- The United Nations Environment Program highlights long-term economic viability and
  environmental footprint assessment.
2805 - The International Union for the Conservation of Nature ties sustainability to biodiversity, local
  economies, and cultural heritage.

Sustainability through Service Quality and Guest Experience

Beyond managing tourism as a product, there is concern about the quality of service, which directly impacts
sustainability. A guest's overall impression—shaped by their experiences—affects their likelihood of
2810 returning or recommending the destination, thus influencing long-term economic outcomes. The speaker

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advocated for strong partnerships between the private and public sectors to align service delivery and enhance guest satisfaction.

The presentation emphasized the importance of offering authentic, immersive experiences supported by eco-conscious accommodations, responsible transportation, and ethical tourism practices. A seamless visitor experience, from booking to departure, was identified as central to sustainable tourism. The ecosystem of services and interactions must collectively contribute to a positive and lasting impression.

Policy Development Process and Regional Context

The speaker reinforced that the National Tourism Policy is being built inclusively, guided by regional precedents and frameworks. The Virgin Islands had previously influenced the OECS regional tourism policy, which has since been published. Additionally, some local stakeholders participated in a regional tourism summit earlier in the year.

The forthcoming national policy will align with the Territory's National Sustainable Development Plan and is intended to be evidence-based, incorporating public-private partnerships, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms. The structure of the policy was likened to a house, with multiple "windows" or sections, including: inclusive growth, climate resilience, niche markets, biodiversity conservation, transportation, destination management, and institutional capacity to deliver on these goals. The speaker concluded this segment by noting that upcoming slides would provide further detail, which would be elaborated on later.

Virgin Gorda's Role in the National Tourism Policy

The presentation transitioned into a specific focus on Virgin Gorda and its contribution to the national tourism policy. Virgin Gorda's unique identity and how it should shape the broader tourism framework was emphasized. Renowned for its natural beauty, upscale tourism appeal, and strong community involvement, Virgin Gorda is viewed as a cornerstone of the BVI's tourism product. The island boasts pristine beaches such as Savannah Bay and attractions like the Copper Mine ruins, along with exclusive resorts and high-end accommodations. These attributes attract discerning travellers seeking privacy and luxury.

The island's strengths also lie in its vibrant local entrepreneurship, cultural assets, and community-driven hospitality. Yet, it faces notable challenges: limited accessibility, high operational costs for local businesses, environmental concerns regarding sustainable development, and a need for more investment in infrastructure and public spaces. Opportunities for growth through eco-luxury tourism, heritage and food tourism, and expanded marine and adventure offerings were outlined. To engage attendees in meaningful discussion, she posed key questions around balancing tourism and environmental sustainability, supporting local entrepreneurs, improving accessibility, ensuring benefits from high-end tourism reach the wider community, and identifying infrastructure priorities.

Stakeholder Intervention: The Case of Gun Creek Parking

The discussion opened with local stakeholder Richard Leonard raising the longstanding issue of congestion and inadequate parking at Gun Creek. He criticized both past and current governments for failing to act on this concern, urging immediate action rather than repeated consultations. Leonard emphasized that the lack of parking is a significant deterrent to tourism, particularly at peak times, creating difficulties for both visitors and residents. He demanded real, visible progress and highlighted the frustration felt by the community due to inaction.

In response, Premier Wheatley addressed the Gun Creek parking issue directly. He firmly rejected any notion that the area should not be developed and instead reiterated the Government's commitment to enhancing the area, including building proper parking infrastructure. He noted ongoing consultations with the BVI Ports Authority and revealed that recent engagements had taken place with key officials, such as Mr. Pickering, to develop plans. The Premier acknowledged the community's frustration and assured attendees that investment would be made to resolve the problem.

Junior Minister for Tourism, Luce Hodge-Smith echoed these sentiments, highlighting that she too had visited Gun Creek and seen the challenges first hand. She stressed the area's strategic importance as a gateway and expressed support for properly expanding the parking facilities. Plans to introduce paid parking and additional spaces from the ferry terminal to Abbot's Corner were discussed, with designs currently in development and funding being sought. She mentioned discussions with the managing director of the BVI Tourist Board and affirmed that this was a pressing issue that needed coordinated action.

Balancing Development with Environmental Protection

A suggestion was made to remove mangroves in the Gun Creek area to make room for additional parking, based on the claim that some of these mangroves are growing on land and are no longer ecologically useful. This sparked a response from Premier Wheatley, who gently pushed back, emphasizing the ecological importance of mangroves as a critical habitat. He acknowledged the speaker's point but reminded everyone that development must be balanced with environmental stewardship. As a former Minister of Environment himself, he emphasized the need to protect mangrove systems and explained that any development affecting them would require replanting or restoration efforts in line with existing environmental policy. He concluded that while development may be necessary in some cases, it should always aim to preserve environmental values to the greatest extent possible.

Urgent Call to Reopen Gun Creek Port and Immigration Access

Another pressing concern was brought up: the need to reopen the Gun Creek port for customs and immigration services. He explained that the closure was hindering business, particularly for charter operators and food service providers who often receive short-notice requests for day trips. Because Gun Creek is currently not operational for customs clearance, operators must travel to Spanish Town to complete formalities. This delay makes it impossible to accommodate early-morning charters and leads to the loss of business opportunities.

The participant further pointed out that attempting to operate without official clearance carries a significant risk—reportedly a $5,000 fine. He argued that the solution was simple: stationing an officer with a computer and necessary tools at the existing Gun Creek facility, which remains physically intact. He also highlighted inefficiencies affecting boats arriving from St. Martin and St. Kitts, which are forced to reroute unnecessarily to Spanish Town to clear customs. He urged the government to act swiftly, noting that the issue had been discussed for years with no resolution.

Barriers to Access and Entry into the BVI

The conversation continued with a heartfelt plea to reopen the Gun Creek port. The speaker emphasized that facilitating easier access directly impacts revenue generation for the Territory, asserting that tourism and charter business suffer from limited entry points and bureaucratic delays.

He transitioned into broader access issues, sharing feedback from tourists who often complain that getting to the Virgin Islands is too complicated. Although the new direct flight from Miami to the BVI was

welcomed, the process of entering the Territory remained cumbersome, especially when passing through Puerto Rico. The speaker recounted a recent experience where he was nearly denied boarding because he hadn't completed online entry requirements—something he found overly repetitive and inefficient.

He contrasted this with Puerto Rico's streamlined customs process, which simply involves a passport check. In his view, the BVI must modernize its entry system to match global expectations. Ease of access, he argued, would directly translate to more visitors and greater revenue. He stressed that a tourist's first impression is often shaped by customs and immigration officers, and currently, that impression is not always positive.

The Importance of Courtesy and First Impressions

Continuing his point, the speaker criticized the attitude and conduct of some immigration and customs officers. Despite the convenience of new air links, the welcoming experience at the border could still discourage tourists from returning. He shared a story about an elderly visitor who vowed never to return due to unpleasant treatment upon arrival. The underlying message was that all frontline personnel must understand their role in shaping visitor perceptions and ensuring repeat business.

Underutilized Tourism Assets and Missed Opportunities

The speaker then shifted focus to the underdevelopment of heritage and cultural sites on Virgin Gorda and throughout the BVI. He criticized the narrow tourism narrative that centres almost exclusively on The Baths, pointing out that the Territory has numerous historical sites and old buildings that could be restored and turned into attractions. These assets, he argued, could diversify the visitor experience and encourage longer stays.

He compared the BVI to destinations like Aruba, where even minor attractions are marketed effectively. In one anecdote, he recalled standing atop a rocky mound in Aruba and overhearing another tourist say the BVI's attractions were far superior. This reinforced his belief that the Virgin Islands possess more compelling offerings than they currently promote. He closed his remarks by encouraging action and broader vision.

Guest Satisfaction, Accountability, and the Need for Quality Assurance

A pointed question was raised regarding accountability in customer service, especially at the immigration and customs levels. The individual wanted to know how the national tourism policy would ensure high standards in service delivery and actual guest satisfaction. Her concern was that current frameworks lacked clear mechanisms for holding service providers accountable or rectifying negative experiences in real-time.

In response, Premier Wheatley acknowledged the importance of regulatory oversight and explained that discussions were already underway regarding the creation of a dedicated quality assurance body for tourism. He referenced successful examples from other Caribbean territories, such as Turks and Caicos, where regulatory entities monitor accommodations and service standards. He also noted that similar models, backed by regional organizations like the Caribbean Tourism Organization, could be adapted for the BVI.

The envisioned entity would cover both private sector services and government departments, including immigration and customs. The Premier stressed that the tourism product being marketed must match what visitors actually experience or else it becomes false advertising. This regulatory concept would form a critical part of both the national policy and subsequent implementation plans.

Existing Mechanisms for Service Complaints

The discussion was further enriched by a representative from the ministry who clarified that a customer service framework already exists under the Deputy Governor's Office. This framework includes a public feedback mechanism via a centralized contact number and an online system called RATES (Rates.gov). Through these channels, visitors and residents can submit both commendations and complaints about public service delivery.

Complaints are tracked and addressed by a dedicated customer service manager. Reports are compiled and shared with relevant heads of department, who are expected to follow up on any issues. The speaker emphasized that while these systems are operational and regularly used, they are not well-known by the general public. More outreach is needed to ensure residents and tourists know their feedback matters and can lead to real accountability.

She added that while the existing customer service centre serves a broad public function, there is a clear need for a tourism-specific entity to monitor and enforce service standards within the industry. Both systems could eventually work in tandem to deliver better overall outcomes.

Improving Real-Time Oversight and Staff Supervision

Returning to the topic of accountability, another participant questioned whether live, in-person interventions could be implemented at ports of entry to address service failures immediately. She shared anecdotal experiences of guests being discouraged from investing or returning to the BVI due to unpleasant interactions with immigration staff.

Premier Wheatley acknowledged the validity of the concern and suggested that poor supervision might be part of the problem. Ideally, a supervisor should be present at each port to whom complaints can be immediately directed. He also raised the idea of employing "mystery shoppers", undercover evaluators who test and report on the quality of service at ports and tourist-facing facilities. This approach, already used in the private sector and some public organizations, could enhance transparency and service excellence.

Calls for Greater Accountability and Training in Customer Service

Premier Wheatley and other participants acknowledged the pervasive issue of weak accountability within the public service system, especially at critical visitor entry points like immigration and customs. One speaker lamented that public officers who deliver poor service rarely face consequences, reinforcing a culture where poor performance goes unchecked. The Premier emphasized that while no one wants to see employees lose their jobs, there must be a system in place to ensure that those in customer-facing roles provide courteous and professional service or face repercussions if they fail to meet that standard.

Another speaker highlighted the lack of immediate recourse for dissatisfied visitors at ports of entry. Unlike private establishments, where a manager can be summoned to address issues, such a mechanism is often absent at Government-run facilities. This gap makes it difficult to resolve complaints in real time.

A recurring sentiment emerged: the need for mandatory, professional customer service training. One contributor emphasized that such training must be prioritised and treated as an investment in the Territory's tourism economy. He argued that strong communication skills and the ability to remain composed are essential, especially in challenging customer interactions.

The Right People for the Right Jobs

Another stakeholder offered a practical perspective rooted in years of experience working with BVI Airways. He observed that not everyone is naturally suited for front-line customer service roles. Some people, he noted, are better fit for behind-the-scenes duties, like kitchen work, rather than interfacing with the public. Misplacing individuals in inappropriate roles leads to negative experiences for visitors.

He praised the consistently warm and welcoming service provided at ports in the USVI, particularly St. Thomas, which he described as festive and inviting with music, drinks, and a streamlined entry process that only requires a passport. In contrast, the BVI's approach felt bureaucratic and unwelcoming. He argued that the USVI has learned from the BVI's mistakes and is now outperforming it in hospitality delivery, using effective messaging like "All you need is a passport."

Redirecting Resources for Better First Impressions

The conversation then shifted to how the BVI Tourist Board allocates its marketing budget. A participant pointed out that while considerable funds are spent promoting the Territory abroad, little is invested in ensuring that the first point of contact—immigration and customs—reflects the BVI's marketed image. These interactions, often visitors' first experiences in the Territory, can either reinforce or undermine the Tourist Board's promotional efforts.

This speaker suggested that the Tourist Board should dedicate a portion of its budget to training frontline personnel. Otherwise, the extensive promotional work risks being undone by negative in-person encounters. The comment received broad agreement, highlighting a systemic gap between marketing and service delivery.

Environmental Concerns, Mangroves, and Cruise Tourism

The next contributor raised the issue of environmental sustainability, responding directly to the opening question about balancing tourism growth with conservation. She praised Virgin Gorda's generally eco-conscious tourism infrastructure, especially among long-established resorts. However, she warned against allowing new developments to undermine environmental protections by destroying mangroves or building artificial beaches.

Her primary concern was the unchecked influx of cruise ship passengers to sensitive areas like The Baths. While she recognized the economic benefits for Tortola and supported its cruise market strategy, she argued that Virgin Gorda cannot sustain the volume of daily visitors it currently receives particularly at The Baths. Overuse risks damaging the site permanently, something that once lost, cannot be restored. She urged the authorities to explore alternative tourist routes and attractions on Virgin Gorda to ease pressure on this iconic site.

The speaker also defended the ecological importance of mangroves and seagrass beds around North Sound. These areas act as natural filters, protecting the bay and preventing erosion and runoff. She warned that removing them, even partially, could lead to irreversible environmental damage, affecting not just marine life but also human infrastructure like roads and cemeteries.

The Case for Reopening the Port at Gun Creek

In closing, the speaker circled back to the issue of port access at Gun Creek. She noted that the port had once been fully functional, with customs, immigration, and other services on-site, until the building was damaged during a storm. Since its repair, however, those services have not returned. She questioned why the facility remained inactive and advocated for the simple solution of assigning staff back to the site.

3010 Given the level of tourism activity, especially during high-profile events like the Maxi Regatta, she stressed the importance of having a functioning port to accommodate the hundreds of visitors arriving by sea. She also pointed out that local communities, like those in Leverick Bay, depend on the tourism economy and benefit directly when clearance services are provided locally, avoiding the need for inconvenient rerouting to Spanish Town.

Port Operations and North Sound Event Tourism

3015 A participant highlighted the economic value and logistical efficiency of maintaining functional port operations in the North Sound, particularly during sailing and water-based events. The ease of using online entry forms for sea arrivals has significantly improved the visitor experience, enhancing the destination's marketability for nautical tourism. The speaker endorsed keeping the port operational to support continued growth in this niche.

3020 **Human Resources as the Heart of Tourism Excellence**

Building on the topic of training, the speaker turned to the importance of human resources (HR) in shaping the tourism experience. They shared that the BVI will host the Caribbean Tourism Organization's annual HR Conference in October. This event aims to spotlight the role of HR in tourism and encourage the industry to attract not only service workers but also highly skilled professionals such as accountants, 3025 managers, and more who can elevate the sector's overall quality.

The goal is to shift perceptions that tourism jobs are limited to low-skilled roles and instead recognize the sector's need for excellence across all functions. Through the conference, local HR managers will be encouraged to adopt best practices and actively seek out the best talent. The speaker closed by reaffirming the mantra that "tourism is everybody's business," underscoring the idea that every resident has a role to 3030 play in creating a memorable and hospitable visitor experience.

Support for Local Entrepreneurs and Jet Ski Regulations

A speaker strongly advocated for the establishment of a Small Business Bureau to provide financial support particularly low-interest loans to entrepreneurs in tourism-related ventures. They explained that despite tourism being the backbone of many local businesses, access to financing remains a major barrier.

3035 They also questioned restrictive jet ski policies, pointing out that only two companies are currently allowed to operate jet skis in the BVI. They proposed expanding access to this type of business, suggesting that with proper regulation and safety measures, more entrepreneurs could participate in this lucrative sector.

Premier Wheatley responded by acknowledging the jet ski policy had been reviewed in the past but put on hold due to other legislative priorities and mixed feedback from the marine industry. He expressed openness 3040 to revisiting the discussion, provided strict controls are in place. On the Small Business Bureau, he confirmed it had already begun issuing grants and was in talks with banks to support low-interest loans. However, he noted challenges from past government-backed loans that went unpaid, emphasizing the need for strong repayment mechanisms.

Public Infrastructure and Water Pipe Upgrades

3045 The dialogue then moved to public infrastructure, with a focus on water distribution and road maintenance. A speaker raised concerns about recurring excavation of newly paved roads due to outdated water

infrastructure. They referenced a previous plan from 2014 to install durable polyethylene pipes, which have proven highly effective in areas where they were implemented.

3050   Despite their success, the pipes remain unused in many parts of the Territory, particularly Virgin Gorda. The speaker expressed frustration that projects frequently disrupt communities shortly after completion and suggested that improved planning and use of available resources could prevent such inefficiencies. They also called for more skilled labour in roadworks and construction, stating that a lack of proper training contributes to poor outcomes, such as improperly laid concrete over pipes.

3055   This portion of the discussion highlighted the critical need for coordinated planning, appropriate materials, and workforce training to ensure long-term success in infrastructure projects that benefit both residents and tourists.

Road Damage and the Cost of Negligence

A resident shared concerns about the poor condition of roads, especially between The Valley and North Sound, where machinery and illegal concrete dumping have left damaging effects. A specific example was 3060   given of a hole left by heavy equipment in December, which remains unrepaired. The speaker suggested increasing fines from a nominal $50 to at least $1,500 to deter such negligence and encourage accountability. They called for better enforcement and maintenance to prevent ongoing road deterioration.

Water Infrastructure: The Need for Modernization

Premier Wheatley commended the community's constructive feedback and acknowledged the systemic 3065   failures in water infrastructure across the Territory. He explained that the water distribution network is outdated, leaky, and often results in repeated roadworks for temporary fixes. The government has started investing in more durable HDPE (high-density polyethylene) pipes, which can reduce long-term maintenance needs.

The Premier advocated for a more modern approach—placing lines alongside roads rather than underneath 3070   them and pre-installing junction cut offs for easier access. He recognized that better planning and involvement from skilled individuals within the system could drastically improve results. To that end, he shared a proposal to transfer water and sewage services to the BVI Electricity Corporation. This integration would leverage the Corporation's established administrative capacity and ensure better service delivery. The overarching goal is to make the water sector self-sustaining and efficient, given the high public demand.

3075   **Innovative Infrastructure Solutions and Utility Planning**

Continuing the infrastructure discussion, Premier Wheatley described an alternative model that uses covered trenches or conduits to house utility lines above or near the ground. This setup would make leak detection and repairs easier and less invasive. However, he noted that under-road space is already congested with conduits for electricity, internet, and sewer systems, complicating planning.

3080   He stressed the need for comprehensive infrastructure mapping and zoning to ensure utility lines are strategically placed. This would prevent the current problem where repeated digging damages roads and compromises long-term planning. The broader theme was clear: Virgin Gorda and the wider Territory must adopt smarter utility practices aligned with modern engineering standards.

Accommodation Shortages for Marine Events

3085   The conversation then turned to challenges related to hosting large marine events, particularly the MAXI regatta. While these events attract significant tourism interest, Virgin Gorda lacks the accommodation capacity to host the full crews—let alone spectators—associated with 20 large yachts. Each boat carries around 25 crew members, totalling about 500 people.

3090   Stakeholders reported that visiting sailors expressed frustration at the lack of available rooms, which has driven them to bypass the BVI for other destinations. These missed opportunities were a concern not only for tourism operators but also for the broader economy. Participants emphasized that the Territory must strategically plan for the scale of events it wishes to attract and develop the infrastructure necessary to support them, particularly housing and hospitality services.

Tensions Over Foreign Competition and Local Economic Marginalization

3095   A new topic emerged around rising resentment toward foreign-owned businesses operating in the BVI. Locals expressed that wealthy homeowners and international charter companies particularly from St. Thomas and the U.S. are undercutting local service providers. They accused these outsiders of occupying valuable business space, exploiting economic opportunities, and doing so without reinvesting in the community.

3100   One speaker lamented that during and after the pandemic, foreign companies acquired more property and influence while local operators were side lined. They noted the absurdity of paying extravagant amounts to foreign charter operators, calling it a form of economic displacement. Examples included foreign entities booking hotels for extended periods and bringing their own staff from abroad, thereby cutting out local labour and businesses entirely.

3105   The discussion became increasingly impassioned, with speakers stressing that such practices stifle local entrepreneurship and prevent the growth of a sustainable, locally rooted tourism economy. They called for a policy reset to prioritise homegrown businesses and prevent the outsourcing of core tourism services.

Illegal Water Taxi Operations and Enforcement Measures

3110   The discussion intensified around the issue of illegal operations by foreign-based day charter boats and water taxis, especially those arriving from St. Thomas. The Premier clarified that under new legislation, it is illegal for foreign-registered day-trippers or water taxis to operate freely within the BVI unless they are properly licensed. Foreign water taxis must travel port-to-port only—such as from Red Hook to Spanish Town—and not directly to non-port areas like resorts or docks unless designated as official ports of entry, such as Gun Creek if reinstated.

3115   He emphasized that while day-trippers are allowed to visit for the day and return, water taxis must follow strict protocols, and the law has been amended to create clearer licensing categories. These include day-trip permits, water taxi licenses, and home-based versus foreign-based operations. Enforcement, he added, now rests on whether vessels comply with the conditions stated in their licenses.

3120   **Loopholes in Licensing and Local Displacement**

Stakeholders raised concerns about foreign charter operators exploiting loopholes to register their vessels in the BVI—often with assistance from locals—thereby gaining the same privileges as local businesses. These vessels, although effectively based in the U.S. Virgin Islands, are registered as BVI home-based

3125 vessels to bypass restrictions. The Premier acknowledged this issue and emphasized the need for better verification of licensing statuses to prevent abuse and ensure fairness.

The sentiment expressed was that foreign operators often sell the BVI experience from St. Thomas, benefitting economically from BVI's tourism brand while marginalizing local operators. One stakeholder even recalled an STCW certification course in St. Thomas where students were explicitly told that to make real money, they had to operate in the BVI.

3130 **Foreign Competition and Economic Inequality**

As the meeting drew to a close, a passionate local operator voiced frustration over the blatant economic displacement caused by St. Thomas-based charter boats. These vessels, often owned by wealthy individuals or corporations, dock at local marinas for extended periods, operate commercially without work permits, and monopolize the tourism market, all while locals watch their own boats sit idle.

3135 Despite being deeply rooted in the community and familiar with the islands, local operators felt powerless to compete against the scale and funding of foreign operators. This dynamic was seen as a major threat to the viability of the local charter industry, fuelling resentment and a strong call for policy enforcement and protection of locally owned businesses.

Preserving Local Industry and Restoring Balance

3140 The dialogue circled back to the idea that each island has enough business to sustain its own operators. Local charter professionals emphasized that they stick to their regions—Virgin Gorda or Tortola—and don't cross into others' territories unnecessarily. They called for mutual respect and urged the Government to step in and enforce boundaries so that local operators can survive and thrive.

There was a consensus that locals should not be forced to compete on uneven ground with companies that 3145 benefit from foreign wealth, strategic loopholes, and little reinvestment in the local economy. Collaboration, regulation, and shared responsibility were seen as necessary for the sustainability of the tourism industry.

Harnessing Infrastructure for Sustainable Growth

In closing, participants recommended infrastructural improvements to support orderly transport and enhance the visitor experience. For instance, a common ferry dock could be established as a central point, 3150 supported by shuttle services to distribute passengers efficiently to their destinations. This could relieve congestion and better manage visitor flow, particularly in North Sound, which has become a luxury destination hub. Such enhancements, they argued, would not only improve tourism logistics but also ensure the Territory presents itself as a world-class destination ready to host high-end clientele.

Bregado Flax Educational Centre – Youth Participation (Grade 10)

3155 **Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the meeting held at the Bregado Flax Educational Centre, 15 April 2025**

Key Takeaways from the Engagement and Consultation with 10th Graders

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1. **The BVI's Unique Appeal Lies in Its Natural Beauty and Culture**
Students recognized beaches, hiking trails, food, music, festivals, peace, and local hospitality as major attractions for tourists, especially in Virgin Gorda.
2. **Tourism is Deeply Interwoven with Community and Family Life**
Many students' family members work in tourism-related jobs such as chefs, housekeepers, boat captains, musicians, and hospitality workers, reinforcing that "tourism is everybody's business."
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3. **Youth Desire More Diverse and Youth-Friendly Tourist Activities**
Suggestions included adding water parks, waterfalls, steel pan events, local cultural experiences, and more water-based attractions to appeal to both tourists and local youth.
4. **Concerns About Affordability and Accessibility**
High taxi fares were noted as a negative aspect of the tourist experience, with students
3170 recommending fairer pricing to make tourism more enjoyable for both visitors and residents.
5. **Limited Interest in Tourism Careers Due to Misconceptions**
Most students expressed little initial interest in tourism careers, believing them to be low-paying or repetitive—until speakers highlighted the diversity and financial potential of such careers.
6. **Call for More Exposure Through Training and Internships**
3175 Students recommended more workshops, internships, field trips to resorts and tourist sites, and hands-on experiences to better understand the industry and its opportunities.
7. **Strong Interest in Creative and Tech-Driven Tourism Roles**
Students showed enthusiasm for careers in photography, graphic design, digital content creation, marketing, app development, and ecotourism—blending personal interests with economic
3180 potential.
8. **Entrepreneurship Should Be Encouraged and Supported**
Some students were already exploring entrepreneurship. They requested support such as mentorship, funding, proposal-writing help, and guidance from the Small Business Bureau to start tourism-related ventures.
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9. **Desire for More Local Attractions and Cultural Events**
Youth expressed interest in reviving or adding attractions such as horse racing, zoos, ATVs, and diving experiences, to make the BVI more vibrant and appealing for tourists and locals alike.
10. **Students Want to Be Engaged Through School-Based Tourism Clubs**
The proposal for tourism clubs received strong support, with students expressing interest in ongoing
3190 involvement in tourism education and activities through their schools.

Introduction and Initial Engagement with Students

The session opens with a speaker addressing students and inviting their ideas on the future of tourism in the British Virgin Islands (BVI). The purpose is to understand their perspectives, concerns, and creative input regarding tourism. Students are asked what makes the BVI attractive to tourists, and responses include the natural environment, culture, food, music, festivals, and the Territory's peace and safety. The facilitator reinforces that the BVI's small size does not diminish its powerful appeal, emphasizing the uniqueness of each island.

Personal Connections to Tourism and Cultural Events

The speaker encourages students to reflect on their personal experience with tourism, asking how they interact with visitors and recognize tourism's presence in their daily lives. The importance of tourism as a collective responsibility is highlighted through the phrase, "Tourism is everybody's business." A show of hands reveals that many students' family members are employed in tourism-related roles such as chefs, housekeepers, taxi drivers, boat captains, and musicians. The discussion continues with cultural events like the Virgin Islands Easter Festival and Lobster Fest, and the importance of embracing and participating in them is emphasized.

Fungi Fest and Tourist Preferences

The speaker introduces "Fungi Fest" as another cultural celebration involving music bands from across the region. The event's importance in promoting local culture as a key tourism asset is emphasized. The conversation then shifts to identifying what tourists like and dislike about Virgin Gorda, with positive aspects including beaches, food, people, peacefulness, environment, and historical sites. There is a brief misunderstanding about the sun being a dislike, which the speaker clarifies is usually a major attraction for visitors.

Suggestions for Improvement in the Tourism Experience

Students are asked to reflect on what could be improved for tourists. Suggestions include adding more attractions and activities, such as local fungi events, steel pan performances, water parks, and waterfalls. The need for diverse water-based activities is also raised. A student comments on the high taxi fares, suggesting that pricing could be made more affordable. The speaker appreciates these contributions and encourages more youth input on improving the visitor experience.

Youth Engagement and Career Aspirations

The discussion turns to the future of tourism and career opportunities. Students are asked to dream big and consider exciting, well-paying jobs in the industry. A few express interest in food-related careers. However, most indicate they are not interested in tourism, citing higher earnings in other fields. The speaker challenges this notion, explaining that tourism offers lucrative and dynamic opportunities. Personal experience is shared to show how tourism careers can evolve—from hotel work to government policy-making—demonstrating the field's diversity.

Ideas for Engaging Youth in Tourism

The speaker asks students how to better involve them in tourism. Students suggest workshops, internships, and field trips to local resorts like Little Dix Bay and Oil Nut Bay to observe tourism in action. Cruise ships are mentioned as another experiential avenue, though current security restrictions limit access. On-the-job

3230   training is proposed as a method for youth to learn while earning, and students confirm that such programmes are not currently part of their school experience. The discussion also touches on community service and its potential to build tourism interest.

Career Opportunities in Tourism

3235   Various tourism-related careers are introduced, ranging from hotel work and tour guiding to food services such as chef or mixologist. Creative fields are also discussed, including arts, music, festival planning, digital marketing, content creation, and technology-driven tourism applications. The speaker underscores the value of environmental and marine-based careers in ecotourism and conservation. The overarching goal is to inspire students by showing the breadth of opportunities available within the sector.

National Identity and Connection to Home

3240   The speaker prompts students to think about what they want the world to know about the BVI. Students suggest marketing the culture, the love and closeness of the community, and the natural beauty of the Territory. When asked how many want to leave after graduation, many raise their hands. The speaker empathizes, sharing a personal journey of wanting to leave and later returning, stressing the irreplaceable value of home.

3245   ## Tourism by the Numbers and Local Attractions

Another speaker interjects with data showing that over 700,000 cruise passengers visited the BVI in the past year. He emphasizes that many of them travel to see the Baths "just down the road," highlighting the immense interest in the natural and cultural assets of the islands. This ties back to the earlier message that the resources and heritage in students' own backyards are significant drivers of the local economy.

3250   ## The Value of Local Tourism Assets and Career Stability

The speaker highlights the economic significance of Virgin Gorda, noting that most visitors to the BVI desire to experience its attractions, particularly those within walking distance of the students' school. The appeal of locations like The Baths, Spring Bay, and Devil's Bay is underscored, and the speaker encourages students to consider careers that support and sustain these tourism experiences. Drawing on personal
3255   experience, the speaker shares that after returning to the BVI from abroad, they found stable, fulfilling employment and have had no regrets, reinforcing the viability and rewards of tourism-based careers at home.

Encouragement to Leverage Creativity and Technology

Students are urged to consider how their hobbies and interests—such as art, marketing, and technology—
3260   can translate into viable tourism-related careers. The speaker emphasizes that marketing is essentially a creative expression of how the BVI is presented to the world. They also challenge students to think about how their frequent use of smartphones could be directed toward developing apps or tools that enhance visitors' experiences, reinforcing the idea that anything they enjoy can become economically valuable and personally rewarding.

3265   ## The Power of Community and Cultural Hospitality

Reinforcing an earlier point about the importance of love and community, the speaker reflects on how long-time visitors often return to the BVI because of the warmth and authenticity of its people. These enduring relationships are framed as a fundamental reason for the Territory's tourism success. The speaker encourages students to value their community's culture and recognize their central role in the BVI's tourism 3270 appeal. Virgin Gorda, in particular, is presented as a special place not only because of its natural beauty but also because of its people and heritage.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities and Photography Business Idea

The speaker shifts to concrete examples of entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly in photography. Highlighting the absence of professional photography services at key tourist sites like The Baths, the 3275 speaker proposes a student-run photography business with multiple stations along popular trails. This idea is presented as a profitable and scalable venture. Other locations like Savannah Bay are suggested for similar business opportunities, illustrating how students can capitalize on the demand for memorable visitor experiences while building sustainable businesses.

Supporting Young Entrepreneurs and Accessing Resources

3280 Discussion turns to young entrepreneurship, with a teacher mentioning students who previously engaged in business initiatives using clay, paint, and seeds but struggled to continue. In response, the speaker advises connecting with the Small Business Bureau at the Department of Trade, which can guide young entrepreneurs and potentially offer grants up to $10,000. The process involves adult support for licensing under parental names and proposal writing, introducing the idea that business support structures exist to 3285 help youth bring their ideas to life.

Inspiring Future Roles in Tourism

Students are asked to envision their future roles in tourism. Possible pathways discussed include working in government, managing resorts like Little Dix Bay, or becoming a CEO. One student expresses interest in starting a boat charter company, prompting a call for innovation and differentiation in a competitive field. 3290 This segment aims to inspire students to aim high and think creatively about their contributions to the BVI's tourism future.

Making Tourism More Attractive to Youth

To encourage greater youth participation in tourism, students suggest increased training opportunities, workshops, and scholarships. They also recommend enhancing local attractions by introducing new ones 3295 such as water parks, zoos, and reviving horse racing. They express interest in experiences similar to those in other Caribbean islands, such as Antigua's horseback riding and ATV tours. These ideas reflect a desire for more dynamic and engaging tourism infrastructure in the BVI.

Proposal for Tourism Clubs

The idea of creating tourism clubs within schools is introduced, with students expressing interest in joining. 3300 These clubs would focus on tourism-related learning and engagement, helping students explore the industry from within their own communities. The speaker humorously cautions the students not to abandon the club once it starts, signalling the importance of sustained commitment.

Closing Remarks and Final Reflections

In the final moments, the speaker delivers an empowering message: students are not just the future, but the present force shaping the BVI's tourism industry. They are thanked for their input and encouraged to continue thinking boldly. The session concludes with a warm thank you from a student, highlighting the value and impact of the interaction.

Bregado Flax Educational Centre – Youth Participation (Grade 12)

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the meeting held at the Bregado Flax Educational Centre, 15 April 2025

Key Takeaways from the Engagement and Consultation with 12th Graders

1. **Underutilized Sites Need Promotion**: Participants expressed that while The Baths are heavily promoted, other natural and historical sites such as the Copper Mine, Savannah Bay, and Gorda Peak are overlooked. There is strong support for diversifying the tourism product by raising awareness of these lesser-known attractions.
2. **Desire for More Local Economic Inclusion**: Students and teachers questioned how small businesses in Virgin Gorda, particularly in The Valley, can benefit more directly from tourism. There is concern that current tourism flows bypass many local enterprises.
3. **Tourism Infrastructure Gaps**: Stakeholders highlighted the lack of adequate facilities like changing rooms, shops, and consistent services at beaches and tourist sites, particularly in Virgin Gorda. They called for investment in infrastructure that supports both residents and visitors.
4. **Cultural and Historical Assets Undervalued**: Feedback included a need for better preservation, presentation, and digital promotion of cultural heritage and historical sites, including the development of a proper museum.
5. **Call for Youth-Oriented Facilities**: Students expressed a desire for more recreational spaces such as teen clubs, arcades, cinemas, and local malls to enhance local quality of life and create shared experiences with tourists.
6. **Support for Creative and Digital Careers**: There was strong interest in careers related to tourism promotion through graphic arts, content creation, and social media marketing. Students acknowledged the role of influencers and digital storytelling in attracting visitors.
7. **Barriers to Youth Participation in Tourism**: While many students' families are involved in the tourism sector, few initially expressed interest in joining the industry themselves. Reasons cited included perceptions around low pay and a lack of visible pathways like internships and mentorships.
8. **Educational and Engagement Opportunities Needed**: Students supported the idea of a Tourism Club that would expose them to tourism careers, field trips, and real-world industry knowledge. Teachers noted that more interactive learning resources and exposure are needed to shift perceptions.
9. **Technological Improvements Suggested**: Participants recommended better internet access, free Wi-Fi, mobile apps, and an improved tourism website to enhance both visitor experiences and local engagement.
10. **Tourism Messaging Should Reflect Local Identity**: Stakeholders emphasized the importance of branding the BVI beyond just its beaches, suggesting slogans like "We are for more than just the beach" and stressing the need for greater international awareness of the Territory's unique culture and identity.

Introduction and Framing the Conversation

The speaker begins by stating that the meeting is part of a wider series of consultations aimed at creating a National Tourism Policy for the Virgin Islands. The Ministry plans to give presentations followed by a dialogue on tourism development. Emphasis is placed on contextualizing the importance of the tourism industry within the broader national economy. The speaker references macroeconomic data from the Ministry of Finance, noting that the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Virgin Islands is about $1.7 billion, with tourism contributing approximately 52% to that figure. This includes direct services like hotels, restaurants, and transportation.

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The Broad Economic Scope of Tourism

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The speaker elaborates that this 52% contribution includes not only traditional tourism services but also construction and renovation activities associated with tourism infrastructure, such as developments on Peter Island and other similar projects. The point is underscored that tourism is not a minor sector—it is one of the main pillars of the economy alongside financial services.

Defining Sustainable Tourism

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The conversation shifts to sustainable tourism, defined from multiple global perspectives. The United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) approach includes long-term growth that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally responsible. The UN Environment Programme emphasizes respect for cultural and spatial elements while minimizing environmental footprints. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) promotes responsible tourism that conserves biodiversity and supports cultural heritage. The speaker stresses the need for responsible, not exploitative, tourism development.

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Linking Tourism, Service, and Sustainability

Tourism sustainability is also linked to service quality. "Service" is distinguished from "servitude" and is framed as the way people are treated when they visit. The speaker highlights that guest satisfaction—whether through government services, private businesses, or individuals—is crucial to economic success and long-term sustainability. Poor service can damage a visitor's experience, while good service promotes repeat visitation and increased spending. The speaker asserts that all actors—government, businesses, and individuals—share responsibility in delivering quality service.

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The Purpose of Policy and Economic Participation

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The policy being developed is a governmental tool to determine investment and support in the tourism sector. The speaker acknowledges the widespread involvement of residents in tourism-related activities, from transportation and accommodation to marine services and mechanics. They emphasize that the full experience of a tourist—from the moment they decide to visit to their return home—needs to be considered, including the availability of information and seamless entry processes.

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Question from Participant: Tourism's Impact on Local Businesses

A participant raises a concern that tourists seem to follow a fixed pattern—disembarking, taking taxis to bars, then returning to boats—without significantly benefiting local businesses. The participant questions

how small businesses, particularly in the Valley, profit from tourism when visitors do not seem to spend or explore widely.

Response: Overconcentration on The Baths and Underutilized Assets

The speaker responds by acknowledging that The Baths are overly promoted and receive the bulk of tourist attention, with visitor numbers ranging from 600 to over 1,300 on busy days. They note that Virgin Gorda has nine national parks, the highest number in the territory, but most remain under-promoted and underutilized. The audience appears surprised by this information, underscoring a need for greater awareness and educational efforts.

Cultural and Natural Heritage, and Underutilized Sites

Several of the national parks on Virgin Gorda are listed, including Spring Bay, Little Fort, Prickly Pear, and West Dog. The speaker notes that many residents are unaware of these sites, despite their proximity and historical significance. Sites like the Copper Mine, with nearly 19 acres of land and cultural value, are described as vastly underutilized. The government plans to work with stakeholders to broaden visitor experiences beyond The Baths.

Integrating Heritage and Enhancing Experiences

The speaker agrees that the current experience offered to visitors must be improved to enhance the sustainability and quality of guest experiences, the policy will consider elements like eco-friendly accommodations, responsible transport, and a wider range of activities. These additions aim to create more memorable and impactful visits that reflect the territory's natural and cultural richness.

Policy Development and Community Engagement

The speaker emphasizes that the policy is being developed through community consultation and input. The meeting is being recorded as part of this participatory approach. Six meetings have already taken place across the territory, including in North Sound, the Valley, and Tortola, with plans to visit Jost Van Dyke. The goal is to ensure the policy reflects the voices and experiences of those directly affected by tourism, so that subsequent laws and regulations are relevant and people-centred.

Integrating Community Voices and Regional Lessons

The speaker emphasizes that the policy being developed is intended to reflect the voices of the community, ensuring that the strategy aligns with environmental, cultural, and economic priorities. The Virgin Islands is working within the broader regional framework of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). Previous community meetings, including one held at St. Mary's, contributed input to the regional tourism policy, which now informs the ongoing national policy development. These consultations, along with insights from a major Tourism Summit held earlier in the year with 160 participants from government, business, and civil society, are forming the basis of the new National Tourism Policy.

Structure and Foundations of the Policy

The policy is conceptualized using a metaphor of a house: its foundation is sustainable development principles, drawing on the National Sustainable Development Plan. However, the speaker notes that few attendees appear familiar with this plan, highlighting a communication gap the ministry must address. The

tourism policy will also rely on evidence-based decision-making, input from public-private partnerships, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that targets and impacts—such as increases in tourism's contribution to GDP—are measurable and trackable.

Pillars and Focus Areas of the Policy

3425 The policy will focus on ensuring tourism growth is inclusive and participatory, creating income-generating opportunities for locals across all areas of the sector. It aims to support the marine and blue economy, incorporate climate resilience, and manage tourism products in a way that safeguards long-term success. The policy also emphasizes environmental protection, accessibility, transportation, and efficient governance systems. These focus areas—likened to the windows of a house—will be elaborated into eight
3430 thematic sections, each guiding investment and development actions.

Youth Engagement and the Value of Tourism

A more interactive segment is opened, seeking to engage the youth in defining why tourism matters to them and to the future of the Virgin Islands. Tourism's role in supporting jobs, businesses, and the broader economy was highlighted. Youth are encouraged to express what they believe makes the BVI attractive to
3435 tourists. Responses include beaches, culture (particularly fungi music), food (especially fish and fungi), and the welcoming local atmosphere. Acknowledging the territory's safety, she also emphasizes that each island offers a unique experience, reinforcing the value of cultural and geographic diversity in tourism development.

Personal Connections to Tourism and Cultural Exposure

3440 The speaker explores the students' direct and indirect connections to tourism through family members involved in sectors like marine transport, hospitality, and service. The speaker references events like the Virgin Gorda Easter Festival, Emancipation Festival, and Fungi Fest as both cultural experiences and tourism products. Students are asked whether they interact with tourists in everyday life and are encouraged to maintain courteous and welcoming behaviour, which contributes to positive visitor experiences and
3445 repeat tourism.

Student Reflections on Tourist Likes and Dislikes

In a candid exchange, students identify some of the negative aspects of the BVI experience for tourists, including garbage along roads, poor infrastructure, and resource shortages such as water. They also recognize the territory's strengths from a tourist's perspective—beaches, food, and especially the people.
3450 The presence of multi-generational repeat visitors highlights the territory's enduring appeal.

Career Aspirations and Opportunities in Tourism

When asked about future careers in tourism, only a few students express interest initially. However, the speaker seeks to challenge assumptions by highlighting lucrative and fulfilling career paths in culinary arts, boat captaining, and housekeeping. She gives real-world examples, including chefs earning up to $3,000
3455 per week on charter boats. The conversation underscores that tourism is a viable and profitable career choice, not just a fallback option. Students are encouraged to think of tourism not just in traditional terms, but as a dynamic industry with room for creativity and entrepreneurship.

Future Vision: Connectivity, Clean Spaces, and Technology

Finally, the speaker invites students to imagine the future of tourism. Questions are asked whether they want more shared spaces between locals and tourists, cleaner and safer public areas, and improved technology. Students suggest ideas such as better apps, improved internet connectivity, and free Wi-Fi. One even proposes an Uber Eats-style delivery app, showing a willingness to engage with innovation in tourism services. The segment ends with a lively and participatory tone, encouraging further engagement from youth in shaping the future of tourism in the Virgin Islands.

Rethinking Accessibility and Transportation in Tourism

A student raises the idea of integrating Uber-style services into the Virgin Islands to enhance accessibility for smaller groups, noting that most taxis prefer transporting larger groups. The conversation reflects growing interest among youth in technology-driven alternatives to traditional tourism services. The speaker acknowledges the suggestion and transitions into a deeper discussion on career paths within the tourism sector.

Expanding Tourism Career Opportunities

The discussion broadens to showcase the wide array of jobs within the tourism industry. Beyond traditional roles such as hotel managers, chefs, and taxi drivers, students are introduced to creative and digital careers like content creation, tourism marketing, and influencer work. Careers in ecotourism, conservation, and marine guiding are also presented as viable and rewarding paths. When asked about government support, the speaker highlights the Department of Trade's Small Business Bureau, which provides guidance, access to funding, and assistance in preparing business plans for new entrepreneurs.

Youth Vision for BVI Tourism Branding

In response to the question "What do you want the world to know about the BVI?", students suggest ideas such as simply "that we exist," referencing the common lack of recognition abroad. Another student highlights the frequent misidentification of Virgin Islanders, sparking a discussion about identity and visibility. A student proposes a slogan: "We are for more than just the beach," pointing to a desire for a more diverse representation of BVI's offerings. Ideas for new attractions emerge, including a better museum and improved presentation of historical sites.

Infrastructure and Entertainment Needs in Virgin Gorda

Students call for more infrastructure and leisure options in Virgin Gorda, suggesting the development of a shopping mall, teen club, arcade, and cinema. They argue these additions would enhance the local experience for both residents and tourists. There is also a request for improved recreational facilities, better promotion of historical sites on social media, and expanded tourism infrastructure in less-visited areas like Savannah Beach.

Making Tourism More Appealing to Youth

The facilitator asks why only a few students expressed interest in joining the tourism industry. Students cite the need for better pay and opportunities for internships as reasons for their hesitation. The conversation shifts to career planning, with students asked whether they know what they want to do after graduation. One student expresses interest in IT, prompting a reminder that digital skills are in high demand within tourism. Another student wants to study forensic science, leading to a thoughtful explanation of how such careers—though not directly in tourism—play a role in supporting visitor safety and emergency responses.

Career Connections and Institutional Capacity

The conversation around forensic science is used to illustrate the broader idea of "institutional capacity"—the government's ability to support all aspects of the tourism experience, including unforeseen challenges like medical emergencies or deaths. The speaker stresses that even support services behind the scenes are essential to a functioning tourism sector. Students are encouraged to consider diverse career paths that, while not conventionally tourism-focused, are integral to the system that supports the industry.

Introducing the Idea of a Tourism Club

The concept of a tourism club is introduced, aimed at increasing youth engagement in the sector. Such a club would offer educational experiences like field trips to national parks and exposure to tourism careers. Several students express interest in joining, and the idea is positioned as a way to deepen student understanding of and connection to tourism.

Closing Remarks and Call to Action

The speaker concludes her presentation with an empowering call to action. She encourages students to see themselves not just as the future of the tourism industry, but as active contributors in the present. She thanks them for their participation and reminds them to be bold and innovative in shaping a tourism industry that reflects their needs and aspirations.

Student and Teacher Feedback: Gaps in Promotion and Infrastructure

As the session transitions to a Q&A, a teacher raises a critical question about the government's efforts to promote underutilized areas in Virgin Gorda, like Savannah Beach. She notes the lack of facilities such as changing rooms, bars, or kiosks, making it less attractive to tourists despite its natural appeal. The teacher also comments on the outdated and unengaging government tourism website, urging for a more dynamic and regularly updated digital presence. She expresses concern that Virgin Gorda is not receiving the same tourism development attention as Tortola. The facilitator uses this to underscore the importance of understanding the full tourism "product" and broadening the experience beyond the most well-known sites like The Baths. The conversation highlights the need for strategic investment and inclusive promotion of all tourism assets across the Territory.

Highlighting Creative Opportunities in Tourism Promotion

The conversation shifts to creative expression, particularly graphic arts and visual storytelling, as underutilized tools in promoting tourism. The speaker encourages students with artistic talents to explore how visual design can influence perceptions and drive interest in lesser-known sites. Using The Baths as an example, he explains that its global popularity stemmed from consistent marketing that highlighted its unique natural features. He urges students to consider how similar techniques can be applied to promote overlooked attractions like the Copper Mine.

Personal Passion and Tourism Integration

The speaker shares his own academic background, illustrating how passion for the environment shaped his professional journey, even if indirectly. He uses this to encourage students to pursue what they love and find innovative ways to connect it with tourism. Conservation, preservation, and promotion of natural assets are framed as meaningful and fulfilling avenues for personal and professional growth.

Rediscovering and Reimagining Local Attractions

3540 Using the Copper Mine as a case study, the speaker discusses its underutilized potential. He describes the panoramic view from Gorda Peak, a location where, on a clear day, one can see the entire Virgin Islands chain from Anegada to St. Croix—a unique experience not available even at Sage Mountain. This vantage point, however, is rarely promoted or marketed. Students are challenged to think of how they could create campaigns—especially using digital media and design—to showcase such extraordinary places.

Existing but Overlooked Tourism Assets

3545 The speaker continues to highlight lesser-known but valuable assets like the lookout trail and the Dog Islands, which are frequently used by boaters yet remain unfamiliar to many locals. He emphasizes that tourism isn't just a distant, abstract industry—it is a dynamic space where personal interests, talents, and creative ideas can translate into income and enterprise. Whether someone is interested in marine science, art, or even forensic science, there is a role for them in the tourism ecosystem, especially with nearly a million visitors expected by 2026–2027.

Final Message: Ownership and Opportunity

3550 The conversation ends with a powerful call to action: students are reminded that tourism is not about fitting into predefined roles, but about crafting personal opportunities from what they already love and do well. With imagination, they can capitalize on the increasing number of visitors to the Virgin Islands by creating services, experiences, and products that reflect their unique talents and vision.

Closing Remarks and Gratitude

3555 The session concludes with formal thanks from the school and the Ministry of Education to the presenters for engaging students in a meaningful and participatory way. The students show their appreciation with a round of applause, and the Ministry expresses gratitude for the recognition of the presentation.

Jost Van Dyke Community Consultation

Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held on Thursday 17th April 2025

Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation

1. **Urgent   Need   for   Infrastructure   Upgrades**
   Residents stressed the critical condition of roads—particularly the unpaved, unsafe hillside road in Jost Van Dyke—and called for immediate investment using available loan funds. The current state poses a threat to both residents and tourists, with past accidents cited as evidence of its danger.

2. **Port   Operations   Must   Improve   to   Enhance   Visitor   Experience**
   The congestion and inefficiency at the main customs and immigration clearance facility were flagged as a major deterrent to tourism. Stakeholders proposed reopening the Albert H. Chinnery Administration Building, increasing staff, and improving after-hours access to better accommodate arriving vessels.

3. **Healthcare   Resources   are   Critically   Lacking**
   The island has only one overworked nurse and no emergency transport options. This poses serious risks to both residents and tourists and is seen as a fundamental gap in public safety and service delivery.

4. **ATM   and   Internet   Reliability   Need   Attention**
   The community reported frequent ATM cash shortages and internet issues, frustrating tourists and businesses alike. Stakeholders urged the Ministry to resolve these operational disruptions to support local commerce.

5. **Call   for   Regulated   Boat   Moorings   at   White   Bay**
   Stakeholders identified serious safety risks posed by boats anchoring too close to shore. Proposals included expanding moorings, creating designated swimming zones, and using tender boats to reduce congestion and prevent accidents.

6. **Tourism   Businesses   Should   Receive   More   Mooring   Licenses**
   Current limits on the number of moorings per business were deemed too restrictive. Locals argued that expanding access to moorings would boost tourism traffic, protect marine ecosystems, and promote equitable economic opportunities.

7. **Self-Management   by   Businesses   Is   Effective   but   Not   Sustainable**
   In the absence of public amenities like lifeguards, cleaners, or beach wardens, local business owners have maintained White Bay. However, they warned that as tourism grows, formal Government support will be necessary to sustain operations.

8. **Visitor   Arrival   Experience   Should   Be   Enhanced   Territory-Wide**
   Community members praised entertainment and welcoming initiatives at other ports, like Virgin Gorda, and advocated for similar efforts in Jost Van Dyke to create a consistent and inviting first impression for tourists.

9. **Balancing   Business   Access   and   Public   Safety   at   Beaches**
   Suggestions included assigning zones within beaches for boat access and swimming to reduce conflict and danger, while maintaining fair access for all tourism businesses without favouring specific establishments.

10. **Community   Wants   Direct   Dialogue   with   Ministers**
    There was a strong request for a dedicated public meeting with the Minister for Communications and Works to provide clarity on infrastructure plans and timelines. Stakeholders welcomed continued dialogue and follow-up on their concerns.

Minutes

3605   **Opening Remarks and Importance of Tourism Policy**

The speaker begins by noting the ongoing consultation period for the tourism policy, which will conclude on May 19th. Emphasis is placed on public participation, with an acknowledgment of evolving global conditions—particularly climate change—and the need for responsive governance through policy. Sustainable tourism is underscored as a core focus, with specific reference to managing historical sites,
3610   cultural heritage, environmental assets, and tourism infrastructure through a coherent policy framework. The speaker cautions against the dangers of unregulated development and reiterates that tourism, alongside financial services, is one of the Virgin Islands' two major economic pillars. Responsible stewardship of the sector is framed as essential to preserving the territory's quality of life and economic vitality.

Call for Shared Responsibility and Public Engagement

3615   The speaker stresses that the Government alone cannot carry the burden of protecting and enhancing the tourism sector. Instead, responsibility must be shared with stakeholders and the general public. Citing a prayer delivered earlier by Ms. Flax, the speaker reinforces that "tourism is everybody's business." The Virgin Islands' natural beauty is described as a gift that must be preserved for future generations, and the audience is encouraged to ensure that current efforts yield long-term benefits. Previous consultation
3620   meetings are described as fruitful, producing valuable suggestions and insights. The speaker invites continued public engagement and reassures participants that all contributions will be considered in shaping the final policy. The speaker transitions into defining what a policy is—namely, a Governmental document that articulates intentions, approaches, and strategies to support growth, public welfare, and environmental protection. The purpose of the tourism policy is positioned as a tool to support businesses, facilitate
3625   individual progress, and ensure sustainable growth of the tourism industry.

Tourism's Economic Contribution and Stakeholder Relevance

The speaker further explains the role of policy by linking it to everyday lives. Using a relatable example, the speaker references students whose parents work in tourism-related jobs, reinforcing the personal impact of the sector. The economic context is detailed: the Virgin Islands generates approximately $1.7 billion in
3630   annual economic activity, with tourism accounting for 52% of that total. This figure includes not only direct tourism services such as hotels and restaurants, but also related sectors like construction and service jobs. The explanation frames tourism as the dominant economic force in the territory.

Environmental and Cultural Stewardship in Sustainable Tourism

The natural environment is highlighted as a critical asset drawing visitors to the Virgin Islands. The speaker
3635   advocates for a tourism policy that strikes a balance between economic opportunity and environmental protection. Cultural identity and heritage are also mentioned as central elements to be preserved. The idea of sustainability is defined not just in ecological terms, but also in maintaining the cultural and community values that distinguish the territory. A forward-looking perspective is promoted, emphasizing the need for decisions that ensure the longevity of tourism benefits for future generations.

3640   **Ensuring Quality Visitor Experience and Government Accountability**

The speaker emphasizes the importance of delivering high-quality service throughout a tourist's journey— from arrival to departure. This includes both private sector hospitality and public sector efficiency. The tourism policy is expected to embed service standards that ensure positive experiences across all

touchpoints. The Government is tasked not only with setting these expectations but also with embodying them in its operations. The idea is reinforced that quality service is not only about business owners and workers, but also about government systems functioning effectively to support the visitor experience.

Promoting Hospitality Across Destinations

Finally, the speaker mentions several iconic sites as examples of places where visitors should expect high-quality experiences. The goal is for the Virgin Islands to offer a consistently smooth, enjoyable, and memorable experience to all tourists, regardless of where they go in the territory. The speaker stresses that this approach must be integrated into the national tourism policy to ensure consistency and excellence.

Stakeholder Inclusion in Tourism Policy Development

The speaker emphasizes that ongoing consultations aim to involve not only industry professionals—such as hotel owners, restauranteurs, and tourism workers—but also members of the public, including youth. There is a deliberate effort to avoid top-down policymaking by ensuring the law reflects the lived realities and experiences of those directly impacted. Reference is made to past stakeholder engagements, including interactions with 10th and 12th graders, and meetings held last year and earlier this year, culminating in a national Tourism Summit on Peter Island. This summit brought together representatives from across the Territory to discuss and help define what Government action should support tourism development.

Policy Structure Explained Using the "House" Analogy

To help the audience understand how policy is structured, the speaker uses a house as a metaphor. The foundation or floor represents foundational guiding documents like the *National Sustainable Development Plan*, which outlines how the Virgin Islands envisions its future. The floor also symbolizes the importance of Government-private sector collaboration and the need to measure economic growth over time. These elements provide the structural base for a strong, actionable policy that aligns with national aspirations and measurable progress.

Policy Focus Areas – The "Windows" of the House

The "windows" in the policy house represent the specific themes and goals the policy will cover. These include generating sufficient income to support local livelihoods, protecting the marine environment for both ecological and economic functions, ensuring disaster resilience, and enhancing the quality of visitor experiences. The policy also aims to protect the culture and heritage of the Virgin Islands, improve transportation and access (e.g., ferry and charter systems), and ensure that Government management is effective and accountable in its role of supporting the tourism industry.

Acknowledgement and Encouragement of Student Engagement

Ms. Flax joins the conversation to commend the students of Jost Van Dyke Primary School and their teacher for participating in the policy discussion. She expresses appreciation for their engagement in matters that directly affect their community. Emphasizing that today's youth are tomorrow's custodians of the tourism sector, she acknowledges their role in shaping the future of the Virgin Islands, as tourism influences numerous jobs and livelihoods within the community.

The Link Between Education and Tourism's Economic Role

Drawing on her background in education, Ms. Flax reflects on her early years teaching at Enis Adams Primary School. She uses this as a springboard to explain that tourism is not just a concept—it is a real economic engine that allows people to afford basic human needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. She simplifies the economy by framing it as the exchange of goods and services that generates income, emphasizing that every society requires a reliable way to earn in order to survive and thrive.

Population Growth, Inflation, and Revenue Needs

Ms. Flax transitions into a discussion on economic pressures facing the Territory. Since the 1940s, the population has increased fivefold—from under 7,000 to more than 35,000—thereby increasing the demand for public services and national income. She also explains the concept of inflation, noting that the cost of living rises annually, which further underscores the need for the BVI to generate more revenue. While financial services currently provide 60% of Government revenue, she notes that the sector is under significant international strain, necessitating greater reliance on tourism for future income.

Tourism's Contribution to the Local Economy

Ms. Flax elaborates on how tourism injects money into the economy: visitors use airlines, ferries, taxis, restaurants, water sports services, sailboats, and purchase local produce and seafood. She illustrates the interconnectedness of the tourism value chain, where each segment of the sector supports jobs and livelihoods across the Territory. The greater the number of visitors, the more money circulates through the local economy.

Visitor Arrival Statistics and Post-Hurricane Recovery

In addressing the growth of the tourism sector, Ms. Flax shares key visitor statistics. In the previous year, the Territory welcomed over 1.095 million visitors—just shy of its record of 1.1 million visitors set in 2016. She explains that the 2017 hurricanes disrupted this momentum, damaging infrastructure across the Territory, including in Jost Van Dyke. However, steady recovery has been underway since, with ambitions to not only return to pre-hurricane levels but to surpass them in the coming years.

Hospitality and National Image

Ms. Flax concludes this segment by underscoring the importance of visitor experience. As visitor numbers increase, the Territory's reputation hinges on positive hospitality. A single negative experience can deter return visits, while positive experiences—rooted in the natural beauty of the islands and the warmth of the people—encourage visitors to return. To sustain and grow the tourism industry, the BVI must remain welcoming, clean, and service-oriented at all times.

Tourism, Environmental Stewardship, and Infrastructure Improvement

The speaker reiterates a powerful connection between national pride and environmental responsibility. Those who litter or neglect their surroundings are described as not truly loving the BVI. A clean and pleasant environment not only attracts visitors but also improves residents' quality of life. The principle is simple: what is good for locals will also appeal to tourists. This dual focus—on visitor satisfaction and local well-being—is central to tourism growth. Improving air and sea transport, as well as visitor services, enhances the tourism product and increases satisfaction. All of these efforts are to be grounded in a clear

policy, defined as Government's structured approach to ensuring order and progress in tourism
3720   development.

The Role of Tourism Policy as a Strategic Roadmap

The speaker explains to the students that the purpose of forming a tourism policy is to guide consistent and effective action. Policies help regulate behaviour and decision-making, and in this context, the tourism policy will act as a roadmap for improving and expanding the sector. The policy's aim is to ensure the
3725   continued growth of tourism by institutionalizing good practices and aligning them with national development goals.

Community Concerns About the Port and COI Recommendation

A teacher raised a critical concern about a Commission of Inquiry (COI) recommendation to revoke the designation of the Jost Van Dyke port as an international port of entry. The speaker explains that the COI
3730   investigated the Territory's Governance and made several recommendations, including one to shut down the port. He stresses that this is merely a recommendation and will not be accepted, as it would severely harm not just Jost Van Dyke, but the Virgin Islands as a whole. The speaker defends the economic importance of the port, particularly its role in facilitating international travel and trade, especially with the U.S. Virgin Islands. He confirms that the recommendation will be firmly rejected.

3735   ### Colonial Status and the Need for Self-Determination

The speaker delves into a deeper reflection on the Territory's colonial status, explaining to the students that the Virgin Islands are still governed by the United Kingdom and, in a sense, "owned" as a colony. He criticizes the colonial structure as outdated and not aligned with global norms of self-governance. The speaker urges young people to educate themselves and grow into future leaders who will challenge and
3740   ultimately change this status. This, he implies, is essential to prevent harmful external decisions, such as the recommendation to close the port.

Plans for Port Improvement and Enforcement Integration

A student asks whether, if the port is not going to be closed, there is a plan to improve it. The speaker acknowledges the need for better enforcement and staffing at the port. He mentions a plan to integrate
3745   immigration and customs functions, so officers are cross-trained and can perform both roles. Additionally, more investment is required in human resources and physical infrastructure to meet the necessary standards.

Land Ownership and the Dock Redevelopment Issue

A community member points out the unresolved issue of land ownership where port expansion is needed. The speaker admits that he previously believed the Government owned the land but has recently learned it
3750   may belong to a private family based in Tortola. The implication is that resolving this matter is a prerequisite for any major infrastructure development. The speaker acknowledges the complexity and necessity of resolving the land rights issue to proceed with long-term improvements to the dock area.

Security, Arrival Experience, and Tourism Culture

Another community member raises questions about the need for security at ports and praises the visitor
3755   experience at Virgin Gorda, where music and entertainment at the ferry dock made guests feel welcome.

The speaker agrees that the arrival experience is crucial, noting that it sets the tone for a visitor's entire stay. Decorations, cleanliness, and music all contribute to creating a positive first impression. He acknowledges that while the Tourist Board typically manages these aspects, more resources may be needed to implement them consistently across all ports. He commits to discussing this with the Board and exploring solutions.

Utilizing Customs Infrastructure and Staffing Needs

Suggestions are made about maximizing the use of existing customs buildings and designating specific facilities for private boats and cruise ship clearance. The speaker agrees these are valid points and indicates willingness to take them up with Customs and Immigration. However, he acknowledges that staffing remains a barrier and commits to advocating for additional officers to be deployed to Jost Van Dyke.

Ownership of the Abandoned Dock and Safety Concerns

Concerns are raised about an abandoned dock near the Albert H. Chinnery Administration Building, described as a safety hazard and heavily used despite uncertain ownership. The speaker expresses surprise at the lack of clarity regarding the dock's ownership and suggests a search should be conducted to determine if it is Crown land. Depending on the result, responsibility could be assigned to the appropriate Government agency or transferred to the Port Authority.

Local Fishermen's Access and Infrastructure Support

Another suggestion is made regarding the redevelopment of a small local dock for use by fishermen, potentially freeing up space at the main dock and improving organization. The speaker acknowledges the concern and considers that a broader concept for designated landing sites for fish could be developed. This would support local livelihoods while easing congestion at key visitor entry points.

Traffic Flow and Safety Improvements on the Island

A final recommendation is made to make the island's main road a one-way system to improve traffic flow and safety. The suggestion has widespread community support, with consensus that this change, once the back road is properly repaired, would reduce congestion and prevent speeding. It would also offer tourists a scenic drive through local neighbourhoods, enhancing their cultural experience of the island. The speaker affirms the importance of fixing the back road as a prerequisite for implementing this traffic change.

Road Redevelopment and Community Accessibility

The conversation begins with the importance of revitalizing the back streets in Jost Van Dyke to allow for new economic opportunities. The community envisions shops and small businesses opening along these corridors, emphasizing the need for thorough infrastructure planning to ensure vibrant, accessible spaces that benefit residents and tourists alike.

Environmental Clean-ups and Dinghy Management

A member of the community clean-up team shares insights from a recent clean-up of Great Harbour, which revealed an excessive number of abandoned dinghies. While the clean-up made the beach visually appealing and potentially more suitable for picnicking or tourist recreation, the presence of unregulated dinghies remained an eyesore. The speaker suggests creating a designated area for dinghy storage. In response, the

Premier acknowledges the value of such efforts and references ongoing Government initiatives like the Beach Use Policy and beach management plans. These plans, piloted at Long Bay, include designating specific zones for picnicking, boat access, swimming, and other uses, and could be replicated in Jost Van Dyke.

Clarification on Beach Policy Authority

A representative from the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change clarifies that this Ministry holds responsibility for the Beach Use Policy and that future beach management plans will include other key areas like Great Harbour and White Bay. The plan is available online, and the speaker offers to share the link with community members. As the discussion transitions from youth participants to adults, officials thank the students for their attendance and express hopes that they will grow into future leaders and business owners in the Territory.

Attention then shifts to the severe congestion at Jost Van Dyke's customs and immigration facilities, where visitors often wait up to two hours just to clear for a day trip. Suggestions include repurposing the nearby Albert H. Chinnery Administration Building to provide additional space and improve efficiency. Officials commit to raising the matter in internal discussions, recognizing both the economic and reputational risks of long wait times for visitors.

Online Clearance Process and Institutional Integration

Participants note inefficiencies in the online clearance system, where visitors are still required to come ashore despite supposedly completing entry processes online. Government officials acknowledge past technical challenges—specifically with the connection between customs and immigration systems—but affirm that improvements are underway. They note that online clearance should eventually reduce manual processing burdens and enhance visitor convenience.

Further discussion highlights that charter vessels, ferries, and large private boats currently overload the single clearance site at the main dock in Great Harbour, causing delays and deterring potential visitors. Stakeholders stress that in the past, yacht and boat clearances were handled at the police station, separate from ferry operations, which allowed for smoother processing. The current concentration of all clearance activities in one location is described as unmanageable.

Restricted Port Hours and Missed Economic Opportunities

Another major concern is that the port gate is locked at 6:30 pm, meaning late-arriving boats cannot land their passengers, even when they are eager to spend money. This "lockout" results in a direct loss of tourism revenue and contributes to a perception that the island is closed to visitors after hours. Community members argue that a practical solution—such as stationing a security guard to manage the facility in the evenings— could resolve this issue. Officials express willingness to raise the matter with the BVI Ports Authority, but caution that such a solution would depend on the Authority's resources and operational guidelines.

Deteriorating Roads and Urgent Safety Concerns

The dialogue takes a dramatic turn as residents vent their frustration with the state of hillside roads in Jost Van Dyke. The community laments being the only island in the BVI without a reliable, paved hillside road. The current dirt roads are described as unsafe, especially during rainy seasons when they become impassable. Community members cite incidents where tourists and even a former Tourist Board Director

lost their lives or experienced severe difficulties due to the road's condition. They urge Government officials to prioritize paving and stabilizing this crucial route.

Calls for Action and Legislative Support

3835   In response, a Government official assures the community that funding for roadworks is available under the existing $100 million loan program and confirms that Jost Van Dyke is included in the planned upgrades. The community expresses appreciation for Minister Kye Rymer's efforts but emphasizes the urgency of the matter. A call is made for a junior minister to support the portfolio and help accelerate action, including direct engagement with residents to explain project timelines and plans. One speaker even shows
3840   a photo to illustrate the dangerous condition of the road, which is described as narrow, unpaved, and liable to collapse at any moment.

Urgency of Pre-emptive Action on Infrastructure

A resident warns that Government interest typically spikes only after a tragedy occurs. This sentiment underlines the need for urgent action on longstanding issues, particularly with the dangerous conditions of
3845   roads and facilities in Jost Van Dyke. The community insists that problems which have persisted for decades must be addressed proactively, not reactively.

Ease of Doing Business and Service Access

Attention shifts from infrastructure to the ease of conducting business on the island. A participant asks about factors that could improve tourism operations, raising specific concerns about the unreliability of the
3850   ATM at the administrative building in White Bay. Although the ATM is functional, it regularly runs out of cash and struggles with internet connectivity—both serious inconveniences for tourists who rely on card transactions.

Healthcare Shortages and Emergency Services

Residents express grave concern over the inadequate healthcare resources available on the island. With only
3855   one nurse working around the clock and no dedicated transport boat for medical emergencies, the burden on local health workers is unsustainable. The lack of medical infrastructure undermines the island's tourism readiness and presents a safety risk for residents and visitors alike.

Safety Hazards at White Bay

The discussion turns to a highly sensitive but critical issue: the growing danger at White Bay due to boats
3860   anchoring too close to shore. The volume of visitors, combined with shallow waters and large propellers, creates an unsafe swimming environment. Past attempts to install mooring lines and sand screws were unsuccessful, as the equipment was either ignored or destroyed. Suggestions include installing regulated mooring systems and designating swimmer-only areas. Several community members note that without intervention, a serious accident is inevitable and would tarnish the island's reputation.

3865   **Cultural Dynamics and Visitor Behaviour**

Some residents argue that current practices such as Puerto Rican boaters anchoring near shore and playing loud music—are part of the established tourism culture. They describe this behaviour as expected and harmless, noting that most swimmers are from the same boats. Others counter that relying on informal

3870 social norms instead of formal regulations is risky, especially when the physical space is limited and crowded. A suggestion is made to install moorings on either side of the bay, with tender boats shuttling visitors ashore to reduce congestion and potential danger.

Need for Equitable Business Solutions and Mooring Expansion

To avoid perceived favouritism among beach businesses, participants recommend establishing a shared system where all businesses agree on designated swim and mooring zones. This would allow visitors to
3875 anchor at a distance and walk or take tenders to any establishment, rather than docking directly ashore. Another speaker calls for the Government to expand the current mooring limit beyond ten per business, noting that more moorings would not only improve visitor access but also protect coral reefs by preventing boats from dropping anchors.

Self-Management and Lack of Public Facilities

3880 The conversation concludes with reflections on the self-sufficiency of local businesses in managing the beach environment. Residents note that despite the absence of Government personnel such as cleaners, lifeguards, or beach wardens, the business owners maintain the cleanliness and order of the area. However, they caution that while things are currently running well, the lack of formal oversight and public infrastructure poses risks if visitor numbers continue to grow.

3885 The meeting wraps up with officials expressing gratitude for the insights and feedback. They commit to discussing the issues raised particularly those related to safety, infrastructure, and tourism logistics with relevant Ministries and agencies. The possibility of organizing a follow-up public meeting with the Minister responsible is proposed, reinforcing the importance of community engagement in shaping future improvements.

3890 **Closing Remarks and Final Acknowledgements**

The meeting concludes with heartfelt words of gratitude and well-wishes from the organizers. The officials thank all participants for their active contributions, insights, and commitment to improving tourism and infrastructure on Jost Van Dyke. Emphasis is placed once more on the importance of safety, collaboration, and proactive problem-solving to address the community's pressing concerns. The session ends on a
3895 positive and hopeful note, with blessings extended for a restful and safe Easter holiday. Participants are encouraged to remain engaged as the Ministry and other Government entities consider next steps in response to the day's discussions.

West End Community Consultation

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held on June 2025

Key Takeaways from the Stakeholder Meeting

1. **Call for a Pre-Approval Mechanism**
   Local developers requested the establishment of a policy framework that allows for preliminary or conditional government support before incurring major expenses on Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and technical studies, to reduce financial risk and uncertainty.

2. **Revival of Concept Review Processes**
   Stakeholders emphasized the importance of reviving early-stage concept review meetings involving multiple government departments. This would allow for the early identification of project requirements and expectations, providing clarity before formal planning submissions.

3. **Need for Development Agreements for Local Investors**
   Participants advocated for greater use of development agreements, not just for foreign investors but also for local developers. These agreements would formalize commitments from both government and developer and facilitate smoother navigation of permits and approvals.

4. **Frustration with Lack of Government Communication**
   There was significant concern over the absence of timely responses from government offices. Developers highlighted instances of submitting full project documentation, including EIAs, without receiving any acknowledgment or feedback.

5. **Concerns About Equity Between Local and Foreign Investors**
   Stakeholders noted a perceived bias in favour of foreign developers, calling for more equitable treatment of local entrepreneurs who often feel ignored or unsupported despite having viable and well-funded projects.

6. **Proposal for a Focal Point or Liaison Officer**
   It was suggested that the government establish a single point of contact or liaison officer within the planning and tourism ministries to help guide developers through inter-agency processes and prevent miscommunication or delays.

7. **Streamlining of Licensing and Permit Processes**
   Participants called for a comprehensive review and streamlining of the licensing and approval process, especially for complex developments requiring input from multiple ministries, to reduce duplication and accelerate timelines.

8. **Importance of Transparency and Clear Requirements**
   Developers emphasized the need for greater transparency around requirements for large-scale projects, including detailed guidelines on environmental, social, and economic impact assessments.

9. **Support for Holistic and Diverse Tourism Development**
   Feedback encouraged government to broaden its view of tourism beyond cruise ships and hotels to include high-end, tranquil, and culturally immersive experiences.

10. **Need for Fiscal and Non-Fiscal Incentives**
    Developers requested that government explore tax reliefs on imported materials, streamlined work permits for skilled labour, and other incentives that could make large-scale tourism projects more feasible and attractive.

Minutes

Rationale for a National Tourism Policy

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The Premier articulates the growing importance of tourism in the economic landscape of the Virgin Islands. He explains that while financial services have traditionally supported the economy, tourism is expected to take on a greater role in generating employment, government revenue, and business opportunities. The need for a clear and sustainable tourism policy is emphasized—one that protects environmental assets, preserves cultural identity, and aligns with the unique characteristics of each district. The Premier highlights the distinctiveness of the western end of Tortola, mentioning its marinas, ferry services, cultural experiences like "Cultural Thursdays," the shell museum, and a vibrant restaurant and villa sector. He calls for

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community input to identify both opportunities and challenges, particularly regarding infrastructure, to ensure that tourism growth is sustainable and reflective of local needs.

District-Level Priorities and Expectations

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Minister Pat Smith echoes the Premier's sentiments, noting that tourism was once the primary economic engine of the Virgin Islands before being overshadowed by financial services in the 1980s. He stresses that tourism must now reclaim its central role. Tourism is framed as a source of economic empowerment and job creation. The Minister shares his vision for the First District, branding it as "the best place to visit, the best place to live," and emphasizing the need to enhance the visitor experience while ensuring economic benefits for residents. He advocates for a policy framework that incorporates input from local communities and provides structured communication channels between grassroots tourism entrepreneurs and the central

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government. This structure, he argues, is essential for enabling local initiatives and securing necessary policy or financial support.

Purpose and Economic Context of the Policy

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Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith-Abbott introduces the core objectives of the policy. He refers to data from the Ministry of Finance's macroeconomic review, which projects a GDP of approximately $1.75 billion in 2024, with tourism accounting for an estimated 52% of national economic activity according to the World Travel and Tourism Council. This figure includes direct and indirect contributions such as goods and services and tourism-specific construction. He underscores the intention to develop a sustainable tourism policy that balances environmental protection, economic development, and cultural preservation.

Defining Sustainable Tourism

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The Permanent Secretary outlines the conceptual framework for defining sustainable tourism, which emphasizes minimizing environmental impact, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting responsible tourism. He introduces the importance of service quality as a fourth pillar of sustainability, asserting that both the natural environment and the quality of service—delivered by both public and private actors—are essential to tourism success. Guest satisfaction, he notes, is directly linked to economic growth, and

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improving service quality is therefore a strategic priority.

Guest Experience and Tourism Ecosystem

The discussion expands to focus on enhancing the guest experience holistically—from the decision to travel to the Virgin Islands through to departure. The policy aims to ensure a seamless journey and immersive, culturally aligned experiences. Sustainability measures in hospitality—such as eco-friendly

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accommodations and ethical tourism activities—are viewed as crucial for elevating guest satisfaction. The

Permanent Secretary calls for a systemic approach that involves all stakeholders across the tourism ecosystem to guarantee consistent and high-quality service delivery.

Stakeholder Engagement and Regional Alignment

3985 The policy development process is described as inclusive and stakeholder-driven, aiming to reflect diverse perspectives from business communities and local actors. The goal is to create an enabling regulatory and incentive framework aligned with broader development objectives. Reference is made to the OECS Common Tourism Policy, developed in part through consultations held in the Virgin Islands in January of the previous year, which serves as a foundational document. Additionally, insights from the recent Tourism Summit in January of the current year are also being incorporated into the policy framework.

3990 **Policy Framework and Foundational Principles**

The policy is being informed by the OECD's model tourism policy framework and is grounded in the National Sustainable Development Plan. The framework includes measurable targets, encourages public-private partnerships, and emphasizes integration, monitoring, and evaluation. The presentation introduces thematic "windows" within the policy, such as inclusive growth, blue economy, climate resilience, niche
3995 market development, biodiversity, transport access, and institutional capacity. These themes serve as focal points for building a comprehensive, evidence-based policy aligned with national priorities and global standards.

The summary ends just as the discussion begins on the specific goals within the blue tourism component, which will be addressed in the next part of the transcript.

4000 **Introduction to Blue Economy Considerations**

The Permanent Secretary concludes his technical overview by highlighting several key areas that will be expanded in the tourism policy under the umbrella of blue economy and coastal development. These include beach use planning, environmental impact assessments (EIAs), marine infrastructure such as marinas and jetties, marine protected areas, human capital development, and awareness-building around sustainable
4005 practices. He frames the presentation as a "whirlwind tour" meant to introduce stakeholders to the policy's scope and invites comments from attendees, setting the stage for a brief location-specific overview by Assistant Secretary Flax.

Proposal for Community Developer Engagement

Before the session continues with the presentation, a community member and aspiring developer, is invited
4010 to speak. He raised a critical concern: the financial hardship faced by local developers who must invest significant resources into EIAs and feasibility studies without any assurance that government will ultimately approve their projects. He proposes the creation of a policy that offers *pre-approval* or at least conditional endorsement by the government before such expenses are incurred. He shares his own experience dating back to 2019, emphasizing that a lack of early support or clear policy guidance undermines local
4015 entrepreneurship.

Developer's Financial Burden and Need for Policy Clarity

The prospective developer elaborates on the personal cost of development-related studies, including over $100,000 spent on EIAs and seabed studies, with $60,000 paid to a local firm. He underscores the emotional and financial toll of advancing a project without any response or commitment from government entities.

4020   He argues that it is unfair to proceed under these circumstances and reiterates the need for a policy response that would provide some form of upfront engagement and assurance before developers shoulder such burdens.

Response on Planning Practices and Conditional Approvals

4025   The response begins by acknowledging that in cases involving private land, developers can typically begin their planning process following a preliminary presentation to government. Sometimes, they receive letters offering tacit approval of a development concept. However, the approach differs significantly for projects involving public lands, which must go through a formal request for proposal (RFP) process in line with principles of transparency and fairness. This RFP process itself serves as a form of vetting and quasi-approval, allowing a developer to proceed with more certainty.

4030   **Clarifying the Role of EIA and Conceptual Reviews**

Officials, including veteran civil servants, weigh in to clarify the process further. The discussion distinguishes between the conceptual approval of a project and formal planning approval, which legally requires an EIA. It is emphasized that while concept presentations are useful, the legal threshold for an EIA cannot be waived once a project moves into the planning stage. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that there 4035   was once a common practice in government of reviewing project concepts early, allowing proponents to receive broad feedback from multiple agencies and departments. This process gave rise to a "tacit understanding" that helped developers proceed more confidently, even before the formal planning and EIA stages.

Pre-Planning Consultations to Streamline Approvals

4040   The Permanent Secretary elaborates on the former practice of hosting inter-agency consultations with developers during the concept phase. These consultations would help define the project's scope, environmental and social implications, and determine whether a full or limited EIA was needed. The intent was to reduce uncertainty for developers and avoid unexpected requirements later in the process. The discussion acknowledges that this valuable coordination has diminished in recent years, and reviving it 4045   could enhance clarity, reduce duplication, and promote efficiency in the planning process.

Social Dimensions and the Complexity of Large Projects

The Permanent Secretary explains that while environmental impacts can usually be quantified, the social dimensions—such as workforce impacts, permit processing, and community displacement—are more complex and often lead to unpredictable delays. He reinforces the need for a coordinated, holistic pre-4050   planning process to ensure developers receive clear guidance from all relevant ministries and departments early on. This would prevent the current scenario where developers feel they are "finding out the planning process as they go," leading to frustration and lost investment.

Development Agreements and Government Commitment

He introduces the concept of *development agreements*, commonly used for foreign investors but also 4055   available to local developers. These are formal, legally binding contracts between the government and a developer that outline mutual commitments—financial, regulatory, and social. These agreements, once approved by Cabinet, help provide predictability and confidence for the developer as they move through complex processes. It is implied that such a tool could be better utilized to support promising local projects.

Developer's Personal Experience of Bureaucratic Barriers

4060   He recounts a disappointing experience with previous administrations. After making two formal presentations to government, including one where he was advised to obtain a non-existent form from the ministry, he felt misled and undermined. Despite completing his EIA and submitting all documentation, he received no acknowledgment or follow-up from government officials. He voices his continued hope that the ministry will respond, but highlights the toll of government inaction on local developers.

4065   **The Missing Link: Government Communication**

Officials acknowledge that what was lacked in his process was a formal expression of support or encouragement from government—specifically, a statement that would allow him to proceed confidently with the planning process. They suggest this is particularly critical given that his proposal involves public lands, which require greater procedural scrutiny. Without such support, developers are left in limbo, unsure

4070   whether to invest further.

Lack of Response and Risk of Losing Investor Confidence

He expresses further frustration over the lack of government communication, particularly in light of the size and scope of his proposed development. He mentions having secured a private investor willing to fund a $776 million project projected to employ thousands of workers during and after construction. However,

4075   due to the absence of government correspondence or official documentation, he struggles to maintain the investor's confidence. In response, the Premier proposes to raise the matter with the Chief Planner to ensure He receives the necessary clarity and direction to proceed.

Closing Remarks and Ongoing Engagement

As the meeting approached its conclusion, the Premier and other officials prepared to depart but encouraged

4080   continued engagement with Ministry staff remaining on-site. The conversation shifted to a broader reflection on tourism development in the western region of the Virgin Islands. One stakeholder spoke optimistically about the improvements being seen but highlighted the immense potential yet to be realized. He described plans for a "one-stop shop" tourism complex, including a cruise port, hotel with over 300 rooms, entertainment and shopping amenities. He emphasized the uniqueness of such a development in the

4085   region and its potential to meet unmet demand that currently drives visitors to competing destinations such as St. Martin and St. Thomas.

Broadening the Definition of Tourism

The speaker expressed concern that the current local view of tourism remains too narrow, often reduced to cruise ship arrivals or traditional hotel stays. He urged the government to adopt a more expansive

4090   understanding that includes tranquil and high-end experiences, which could set the Virgin Islands apart. While acknowledging that investment is not within the Ministry of Tourism's formal remit, officials noted that mechanisms must be established to accommodate and support tourism-related investments and ensure the Ministry can play a facilitating role in such developments.

Concerns About Equity in Government Support

4095   The developer voiced a major concern about perceived disparities in how local and foreign investors are treated. Based on personal experience, he felt that local developers were frequently overlooked or inadequately supported, despite presenting sound, well-financed proposals. He expressed a willingness to

continue engaging with the Ministry, share ideas, and offer input to help shape policy in a way that supports both local and foreign investment in a balanced and transparent manner.

4100 **Pathway to a Development Agreement**

Ministry officials reiterated that the appropriate pathway for formalizing the developer's vision and securing government support would be a *development agreement*. This instrument, provided for under the Planning Act, enables developers—whether local or international—to enter into a legally binding arrangement with government. Through it, both parties make specific commitments, including facilitation

4105 of permits and approvals. The officials advised that the developer, whose plans are already with the planning authorities, request such an agreement, which would ensure more structured communication, coordination, and accountability.

Enabling Environment and the Role of a Focal Point

Building on the suggestion of a development agreement, the discussion broadened to systemic

4110 improvements. The Permanent Secretary emphasized the importance of creating an enabling environment for all developers, pointing out that challenges with the current permitting and approval process have been raised by multiple stakeholders. One proposed solution is to designate a focal point—an official or liaison—responsible for guiding developers through inter-ministerial requirements. This would help eliminate ambiguity, minimize delays, and offer a clearer roadmap for navigating bureaucracy, particularly in cross-

4115 cutting areas like work permits and environmental approvals.

Need for Incentives and Streamlined Procedures

The officials further emphasized that creating a supportive environment includes not just procedural clarity, but also tangible incentives. These could include reduced import duties for construction materials, streamlined work permit processing for specialized labour, and access to fiscal or non-fiscal incentives for

4120 developers. The current lack of a coordinated, transparent system was acknowledged as a key factor contributing to developer frustration. The Ministry committed to mapping out these steps and developing mechanisms to match private-sector efforts, like the proposed "one-stop shop" model, with complementary public-sector facilitation.

Final Acknowledgements and Takeaways

4125 In closing, the Permanent Secretary thanked the speaker for his candid and constructive input, acknowledging that qualitative insights often reveal more than statistical metrics. He noted that the feedback had provided the Ministry and the Premier with a clearer understanding of how policy and procedural reform can better support tourism-related development. The final remarks emphasized that delays and lack of clarity not only discourage individual developers but also represent missed opportunities for national

4130 growth.

Agriculture and Fisheries and the National Tourism Policy

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held on Wednesday 4th June 2025

Key Takeaways from the Agritourism Stakeholder Meeting

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1. **Authenticity Over Mass Supply:** Stakeholders agree the BVI should focus on high-value, place-based food experiences—farm-to-table dinners, farmers' markets, small-group farm and fishery tours—rather than trying to supply cruise-ship volumes.

2. **Regenerative & Chemical-Free Branding:** Participants called for the Territory to position itself as a regional leader in climate-smart, regenerative agriculture, backed by local certification and a

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ban on harmful pesticides (e.g., glyphosate).

3. **Education Starts Early:** Multiple speakers stressed weaving agriculture, fishing and environmental literacy into primary and secondary curricula, plus internships and community-service hours, to build a skilled next generation.

4. **Community Gardens in Every District:** Well-funded, staffed gardens were proposed for each

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community as learning hubs, food-security buffers and visible proof that residents are connected to the land—an attraction in their own right.

5. **Grass-Roots Momentum Needs Bridges:** Farmers and fishers are already innovating (online sales, farm stays, agritourism tours); they need streamlined permits, micro-grants and marketing help to scale their efforts.

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6. **Short-Form Storytelling:** Low-budget, high-impact YouTube and Instagram reels profiling local farms, fishers and food traditions were identified as an easy win for the Tourist Board to boost both visitor interest and youth pride.

7. **Policy Alignment & Certification:** Stakeholders asked Government of the Virgin Islands to clarify what kind of agriculture it wants—organic, regenerative, medicinal plants, etc.—and embed

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that vision in policy, standards, grants and loans.

8. **Luxury "Pick-Name-Eat" Packages:** Combining hands-on harvesting (e.g., choosing a lobster, picking herbs) with five-star chef preparation was promoted as a premium product that connects high-end visitors directly to local producers.

9. **Seasonality & Supply Coordination:** Chefs and farmers need a matchmaking platform and

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education on seasonal menus to ensure consistent farm sourcing while respecting natural crop cycles.

10. **Food Security as National Resilience:** Memories of Hurricane Irma and COVID shortages underscored that expanding local production and storage is not just a tourism perk but a strategic necessity for the Territory.

Minutes

Welcome by Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith-Abbott

Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development thanks attendees in person and online. He explains that this presentation is part of a territory-wide rollout of the National Tourism Policy. Feedback has been gathered in multiple public meetings, and today's session is dedicated to 4170 exploring how agriculture fits into and benefits from the policy. He then invites Dr. the Honourable Karl Dawson to open with remarks and a prayer.

Prayer and Honourable Dawson's Contextual Remarks

Dr. the Honourable Karl Dawson offers a brief invocation, asking for wisdom in stewarding the islands' resources. Turning to the topic, he recalls that when Caribbean tourism first emerged—often funded and 4175 managed by overseas investors—it was expected to bolster agriculture by bringing more mouths to feed. Instead, hotels imported the foods that international managers and visitors were accustomed to, limiting local demand. Today, the internet and changing visitor tastes have flipped expectations: travellers actively seek authentic, locally sourced cuisine. This shift presents strong prospects for agriculture within the tourism economy, but farmers must now scale up production to meet growing demand and realise the sector's full potential.

4180 **Fresh-local Demand and the Rise of Farm Tours**

Honourable Dawson resumes his remarks by stressing that contemporary visitors do not merely want "local" dishes—they ask for freshly harvested, truly farm-to-table cuisine. This craving for authenticity has spun off a second, lucrative activity: guided farm tours that let guests pick produce themselves and deepen their understanding of island agriculture. Such tours, he notes, create a parallel income stream for growers and tighten 4185 links between tourism and farming. Thanking the Permanent Secretary for organising so many stakeholder sessions, he expresses confidence that the resulting policy will serve both sectors well.

Tourism's Weight in the BVI Economy

Diving into the policy presentation, Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith-Abbott begins with macro-economic context. According to the Ministry of Finance's 2024 outlook, the Territory's nominal GDP is estimated at US 4190 $1.7 billion, while real GDP stands near US $1.6 billion. As the Premier enters, Smith adds that the World Travel & Tourism Council calculates tourism's direct contribution including accommodation, construction and related services at roughly fifty-two percent of all economic output, underscoring the sector's centrality.

Building a Sustainability Spine

The policy is anchored in three complementary sustainability frameworks. From the UN World Tourism 4195 Organization comes a broad tri-pillar view of economic, social and environmental impacts. UNEP's community-focused lens stresses respect for local culture and minimal ecological harm, while the IUCN's "responsible tourism" concept foregrounds biodiversity conservation and heritage protection. Mr. Smith-Abbott insists that service quality be woven into sustainability: guest experiences whether positive or negative must feed back into continual improvement, and both private businesses and public agencies have duties to deliver seamless, 4200 enriching journeys from pre-arrival inquiry to departure. Satisfied visitors, he argues, stay longer, spend more and return often, compounding long-term growth.

An Inclusive, Data-Driven Roadmap

Reflecting months of outreach from January's regional meetings through the Tourism Summit and the current sector round-tables—the draft policy is deliberately inclusive. It seeks to align growth with environmental stewardship, cultural preservation and fair economic distribution. Drawing on a regional tourism framework that BVI helped craft in early 2024, the document rests on evidence, public-private collaboration and rigorous monitoring. Mr. Smith-Abbott likens the policy architecture to a house whose eight "windows" admit light on key themes: equitable income growth, the blue economy, climate resilience, product and niche development, biodiversity protection, transport and access, destination management and institutional capacity. Each window will spell out detailed actions; for instance, farm-to-table initiatives fit naturally under product development and inclusive growth, but also under supply-chain strengthening.

Toward an Agritourism Annex

Switching slide decks, Mr. Smith-Abbott introduces the agritourism presentation compiled by Sasha Flack. Its purpose, he says, is to harvest sector-specific insights—starting with tonight's discussion—that will shape a dedicated agritourism component within the wider policy. The session now turns to gathering participants' ideas on how best to integrate farm production, culinary heritage and visitor experiences in ways that benefit growers, strengthen food security and elevate the Virgin Islands' tourism brand.

From supply to Full-fledged Visitor Experiences

Picking up the second slide deck on agritourism, Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith- Abbott explains that this segment of the policy rests on three intertwined ideas: tightening the link between what farmers and fishers produce and what tourists consume; turning production sites themselves into paid attractions such as farm tours and tasting sessions; and weaving food security, cultural heritage and guest engagement into one story. The goal is a strategy that stimulates growth across all sectors, raises quality standards, and dovetails with national priorities for resilience, jobs and inward investment, while ensuring primary producers help shape the rules rather than merely supplying ingredients.

Opening the Floor: Key Questions for Producers

Mr. Smith- Abbott lists the Territory's current Agri-tourism touch-points—Anegada Lobster Fest, Farmers' Week, dock-side chats with fishers, small livestock visits, school outings to fruit stands but stresses that programming is still thin. To fill the gaps, he invites the room to tackle four issues: which experiences best showcase BVI culture and produce; what obstacles farmers and fishers now face; how policy can help small operators join the tourism value-chain; and which infrastructure such as roads, greenhouses, processing hubs deserves priority. Training the next generation, he adds, must be baked in from the start.

Youth on the Land: Community Service and School Gardens

The first responses come from local growers. One participant urges the Ministry to commence farm internships that count toward high-school community-service hours. Many veteran farmers, she notes, are ageing and over-stretched; a steady stream of students or college volunteers could "transform the sector" while sparking a passion for agriculture. School gardens, already a modest success, should be expanded Territory-wide to build farm skills and pride early.

The Premier's Candid Appraisal and Vision for Authenticity

Thanking the presenters, Premier Dr. the Honourable Natalio Wheatley, recalls that the Virgin Islands boasted vibrant fishing and farming long before tourism and finance arrived. Rising incomes then led the Territory to import almost everything, squandering a chance to feed visitors from its own soil and sea. Today's 1.1 million

annual arrivals represent, he says, "a huge market" that local producers must reclaim. For tourism to reach its next level it must feel unmistakably Virgin Islands: guests should encounter home-grown food, dance, dialect, music and history rather than a "manufactured" product found anywhere else. He sketches current Government efforts—opening more agricultural land, a water-access policy, a marketing complex, on-the-job training through the RATED programme, revamped fishery legislation, and a rebuilt fish-processing facility—but concedes progress is slow. He challenges the room to help translate potential into genuine food sovereignty and new entrepreneurs.

Farmers press for a Clear, Regenerative Direction

Another farmer replies that industry insiders have long debated how to scale up production, yet a coherent vision is still missing. The policy must decide what kind of agriculture the Territory wants. Showing a photo of a crowded chicken shed in the slides, she argues, proves the point: "tourists are not going to want to go there." Instead, the Islands should champion small-scale, regenerative, organic practices—methods that heal soil, respect tradition and align with climate goals. Such farms, she insists, are precisely what experience-hungry travellers pay to visit. Using her own 15-year-old son as an example, she pleads for structured programmes, mentorships and agro-ecology training that offer youth a viable, inspiring future on the land and sea.

The discussion continues as attendees weigh practical steps to knit agriculture, fisheries and tourism into an authentic, sustainable and lucrative whole.

Toward standards, certification and climate-smart branding

A young agro-ecologist returns to the microphone and hones in on a single issue: without a clear vision for agriculture, policy support for small farmers and fishers will remain abstract. She argues that the Virgin Islands must decide whether it will champion climate-smart, regenerative methods, and then embed that choice in enforceable product standards. Visitors from North America and Europe instinctively trust labels such as "Certified Organic," yet the Territory offers no recognised certification scheme. That gap, she warns, sows' confusion—local vendors casually stamp "certified organic" on produce when no authority exists to back the claim. A home-grown certification system—or at least a verified "regenerative" seal—could simultaneously protect consumers, reward good practice and give conscientious travellers the confidence to spend. Because upgrades are expensive, she urges Government to couple standards with grants or subsidised loans that help farms meet high-end visitor expectations.

Cultivating a bond with land and sea from early childhood

Another participant broadens the debate, insisting that agriculture cannot be treated merely as a career path chosen at sixteen. Genuine food sovereignty, he says, sprouts from children's first encounters with soil and salt water: four- and five-year-olds need to dig, plant, wade and snorkel until a love of nature becomes a lifestyle. Only then will the next generation embrace farming and fishing as callings rather than fallback jobs. The agroecologist concurs, pointing to businesses such as Hastings' medicinal-plant enterprise, which weave cultural storytelling into their tours, and Marley's Farm, touted as a textbook farm-to-table success. These models anchor young people in both heritage and ecological responsibility.

Vision before product: Making Agriculture Globally Relevant

She cautions, however, that "agritourism experiences" is an empty phrase until the Territory settles on what its farming future looks like. High-profile events like Anegada's Lobster Fest, Beach Gastronomy Week, farm-to-table dinners should be curated around chefs who can source every ingredient locally. Only truly place-based agriculture will distinguish the BVI from destinations that already sell polished agro-experiences. The policy

conversation and the agriculture-sector strategic plan must therefore evolve in tandem; otherwise, one will stall
4285   the other.

Grants that Reward Integrated Farm Visions

A colleague cites a farm as proof that modest grants can unlock wide benefits. Public money funded safer paths
and handrails so cruise-excursion groups could reach the hillside plots; the farm then reinvested tour income into
a ground-level shop that retails its produce and value-added foods to locals and visitors alike. Funding, he
4290   suggests, should prioritise applications that demonstrate multiple linkages—production, education, retail and
tourism—rather than single-purpose projects.

A Local-food Chef Competition and the Seasonality Dilemma

Turning to Culinary Tourism, the speaker reveals talks with the Tourist Board to stage a November chef
competition in which every dish must use 100 percent BVI ingredients. Luxury resorts such as Rosewood Little
4295   Dix Bay are keen to lead. Yet two hurdles persist: growers must supply kitchens consistently, and chefs must
relearn seasonality—accepting that menus change when mangoes finish or storms flatten tomato vines.
Government can play a matchmaking role, but the farm-to-kitchen relationship ultimately rests on mutual
flexibility.

Dormant Legislation and the Missing Development Bank

4300   Participants lament that the Food Security and Sustainability Act—packed with ideas for grants, soft loans and
even an Agricultural Marketing Authority that would operate like a development bank—has languished for years
without enactment. Meanwhile, the Development Bank, first chartered to serve farmers and fishers, has morphed
into a conventional commercial lender. The result is a financing vacuum that leaves producers unable to upgrade
packing sheds, visitor facilities or irrigation systems to international standards.

4305   **Infrastructure and the Cruise ship Conundrum**

A farmer explains that cruise lines have approached her for on-shore farm tours, but the safety specifications—
wider roads, hand-washing stations, wheelchair access—outstrip her budget. She would rather stay small, yet
she sees value in one flagship farm meeting those requirements. Such large-group readiness, she says, would
demand coordinated investment in roads, utilities and visitor facilities—costs no single grower can bear.

4310   **Pushing the frontier: What will set the BVI apart?**

The discussion pivots back to policy. If Government wants agritourism to sell the Virgin Islands abroad, it must
decide what frontier to push. Should the Territory market itself as the Caribbean's regenerative-agriculture
showcase? A medicinal-plant capital? A sea-to-table paradise? Once that identity is fixed, public policy, private
enterprise and overseas marketing can march in lockstep, ensuring that the islands' food, culture and landscapes
4315   present a story travellers cannot find anywhere else.

The dialogue continues, but consensus is forming: authentic, standards-based, climate-smart agriculture—
supported by targeted finance and early-childhood nature education—is the linchpin that will bind tourism,
culture and sustainable development into a single, compelling Virgin Islands brand.

Choosing the story the Virgin Islands will tell

4320   Discussion turns to the big-picture identity the national tourism policy should project. Participants argue that the Territory must choose a clear set of principles—regenerative farming, medicinal-plant traditions, climate-smart methods—and promote them as the BVI's avant-garde contribution to Caribbean tourism. Such branding, they note, dovetails neatly with the affluent demographic already attracted to the islands: nine out of ten villa guests and charter-yacht clients say they shop at farmers' markets back home and expect the same values on vacation.
4325   By contrast, supplying cruise ships with bulk produce is dismissed as unrealistic; the real opportunity lies in turning a Saturday market itself into a top-tier visitor experience.

Incorporating fisheries and "off-season" authenticity

A speaker from the fishing community laments that policy conversations so far have centred on Agriculture, even though fishing draws dedicated visitors every week. He proposes quick wins that would cost little: let
4330   tourists watch fishers mend nets or farmers turn compost during the slow season, with paid guides interpreting the process. Such micro-experiences create jobs without forcing producers to pause essential work and draw non-fishing family members into meaningful contact with local life.

Seamless Luxury: Pick it, Name it, Eat it

Building on that idea, the same contributor sketches a traveller's dream day: hand-pick a lobster at dockside,
4335   choose herbs and vegetables from several farms, then return to a five-star resort where a master chef prepares the personalised feast. To pull this off, he says, the Territory needs a visible certification mark—water-quality tested, genuinely organic, locally verified—displayed at every farm gate. High-spending guests will pay a premium for the guarantee, and growers will earn more for meeting the standard.

Remote Voice joins: Technical Hurdles Limit Input

4340   One participant emphasized that the National Tourism Policy must explicitly include **incentive mechanisms that allow farmers and fishers to reap direct, measurable benefits from the growth of tourism**. He urged Government to:

- incorporate clear language committing to **fiscal incentives** (e.g., duty or tax concessions, performance-linked grants, subsidised credit) for producers who supply or host tourism experiences; and
4345   - embed **capacity-building programmes**—technical training, business mentoring, food-safety certification and market-linkage support—so that farmers and fishers can upscale production, diversify into visitor-facing activities and remain competitive.

He stressed that these incentives should be framed as core policy directives rather than discretionary add-ons, ensuring that primary producers are recognised as full partners in a sustainable, inclusive tourism economy.

4350   **Low-budget, high-impact Marketing through Short Videos**

Back in the room, a farmer praises earlier German TV footage of Virgin Islands agriculture that still brings visitors a decade later. He urges the Tourist Board to commission bite-sized YouTube and Instagram reels—two- or three-minute "story spots" on individual farms, fisheries and cultural traditions. Such content, he argues, is inexpensive yet evergreen, generating free global publicity and inspiring local youth by documenting real
4355   island livelihoods. Officials agree, calling the idea "practical and achievable," and suggest a collaborative series that pairs social-media storytellers with producers across the Territory.

Documentary Storytelling and the Chemical-free Advantage

A farmer explains that half of every farm tour she gives is devoted to the question, "Why is local food so scarce?"—a narrative perfectly suited to a short documentary that could simultaneously inspire youth and entice visitors. Others seize on the idea, urging the Tourist Board to produce dual-purpose films that weave BVI agricultural history into modern opportunity. Speakers highlight a marketing edge: unlike many neighbouring islands, the Territory never industrialised pesticide-dependent farming, leaving its soils comparatively clean. Writing that purity into law—through the still-dormant Food Security and Sustainability Act, which empowers Government to ban toxins such as glyphosate—would strengthen the agritourism brand and protect public health.

Health-and-wellness Tourism Demands a Toxin Ban

Participants recount seeing road crews casually spraying herbicides near beaches and drainage lines. They argue that if the BVI wants to pitch farm and food experiences to travellers from the United States and Europe—markets already attuned to chemical hazards—it must enshrine a "no harmful pesticides" policy and educate residents about safe alternatives. Tourism, they insist, is self-care: visitors invest in destinations they trust to nourish body and mind. Showcasing produce uncontaminated by Miami-sourced supply chains would create a subliminal benefit guests can taste but might not consciously articulate.

An Educator's Testimony: Returning to a Culture of Land and Sea

One contributor describes a childhood spent grafting fruit trees, hauling manure and free-diving for fish. Those skills he passed to his own children before urban careers drew many peers indoors. Today's young people, he warns, lack that foundation, and parents who never farmed or fished cannot teach what they do not know. A nationwide public-awareness campaign is therefore essential to rebuild everyday familiarity with planting and fishing, skills that underpin both tourism authenticity and household resilience.

Hurricanes, Pandemics and Hard Lessons in Food Security

He reminds the room that after Hurricane Irma supply ships stopped for weeks; the Virgin Islands endured only because a statutory three-month stockpile of imported food was already on island. COVID-19 posed a similar threat. These shocks proved how thin the Territory's food security is—and how vital local production will be when the next disruption strikes. Yet no comprehensive strategy has emerged. He presses Government to translate lessons from Irma and the pandemic into concrete policies that prioritise domestic agriculture, fisheries and storage capacity alongside tourism promotion.

Reconciling the Nine-to-five Economy with Nature-Based Livelihoods

The discussion broadens to systemic forces that pull citizens away from land and sea. Modern schooling funnels graduates into nine-to-five office jobs—essential for financial services but ill-suited to agriculture's dawn-to-dusk rhythms or fishing's midnight tides. Speakers call for parallel training tracks: one that sustains the bureaucratic economy, and another that nurtures personnel who "know it and feel it," ready to guide tourists through cultural, agricultural and marine activities. Without such dual pathways, policy aspirations will falter for lack of skilled hands.

The Missing Middle: Skilled Youth and Secondary-school Links

A farmer says her most reliable worker is a fifteen-year-old who volunteers on Saturdays because she cannot find adults versed in intensive, regenerative methods. When she tried to enrol him in a permaculture workshop—jointly organised by the Horticultural Society and the high school's agriculture class—the school withdrew at the last minute. Primary-school Garden programmes are improving, she concedes, but secondary-level engagement remains patchy. She urges policymakers to connect the new tourism-agriculture framework directly

to curricula, internships and certification so that students graduate with both passion and practical competence to lead the sector forward.

Community Gardens as Gateway Experiences

A farmer-educator turns the conversation toward neighbourhood-scale agriculture. Secondary- and tertiary-level students, she argues, should meet food production first in well-run community gardens—one for Road Town, East End, West End and every village. Paid coordinators could teach residents to grow backyard vegetables, easing pressure on commercial farmers and letting visitors see that "these communities are really connected to their land." The gardens would demonstrate that cultivation is not merely toil but yields physical, mental and financial rewards, embedding authenticity across the entire tourist itinerary.

Grass-roots Momentum and the Call for Bridges

Another participant reassures Government officials that the movement they want already exists: farmers, fishers and food artisans are innovating "on their own," from online produce deliveries to dawn fish-cleaning demonstrations. What they need now are bridges—marketing support, streamlined permits, small grants—that cement their efforts into a national narrative. Collaboration, he insists, is urgent not only for tourism but for "food sovereignty," a lesson made stark during recent crises.

Remembering Irma and COVID: Why Resilience Matters

Recalling the queues for groceries after Hurricane Irma and again during the COVID-19 lockdowns, speakers note that the Territory coped only because a statutory three-month stockpile of imported food was already on island. If ships fail again, a stronger local supply will be vital. Community gardens, school programmes and support for small producers are therefore framed as national-security measures, not just lifestyle choices.

Accommodations Consultation

Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held on 27th May 2025

Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation on Accommodations

1. **Modernize and Streamline the Hotel Aid and Investment Framework**
Stakeholders emphasized that the current Hotel Aid Ordinance is outdated, bureaucratic, and difficult to navigate, deterring investment in accommodations. A call was made for a modernized, transparent, and fit-for-purpose incentives regime that supports both local and foreign investors in the tourism sector.

2. **Address Infrastructure Deficiencies That Undermine the Sector**
Reliable infrastructure—including electricity, water, healthcare, transportation, and road networks—is lacking, especially on Virgin Gorda. These deficits undermine the guest experience and limit expansion opportunities. Stakeholders urged inter-ministerial coordination to ensure tourism planning is not done in isolation from infrastructure development.

3. **Promote Workforce Development and Local Participation**
Concerns were raised about the underrepresentation of BVIslanders in hospitality roles, with foreign workers dominating many properties. Stakeholders advocated for structured training, career pathways, and secondment opportunities abroad to equip locals with the skills needed and increase their presence in the sector.

4. **Support Tourism and Hospitality Education Across All Levels**
From secondary school tourism classes to college-level hospitality and marine certifications, stakeholders stressed the need for curriculum review, practical exposure, and revival of previously successful programmes like the culinary arts and marine captain certifications to build a strong local talent pipeline.

5. **Improve Tourism Marketing and Encourage Public–Private Collaboration**
Many called for greater coordination in destination marketing. This includes reinstating collaborative trade show participation and ensuring that marketing budgets grow in line with rising competition, especially in the luxury sector. A proposal was made to re-establish industry associations to pool resources and promote niche products collectively.

6. **Develop Cruise-to-Overnight Conversion Strategies**
The cruise industry was seen as both a threat and an opportunity. Stakeholders proposed initiatives such as taxi tours of local accommodations, return-visit incentives (e.g., collectible coins), and structured conversion tracking. The goal is to turn day visitors into overnight guests and leverage cruise arrivals more effectively.

7. **Establish a Licensing and Quality Assurance Regime for Short-Term Rentals**
Stakeholders expressed concern about the unregulated growth of platforms like Airbnb. Suggestions included attaching licensing to quality standards, improving accountability, and ensuring fairness by requiring tax compliance and quality inspections for all accommodation providers.

8. **Reintroduce Environmental and Safety Standards for Beaches and Public Spaces**
There was a strong call to reinstate lifeguard programmes and improve beach safety given the increase in visitor numbers. Sustainable tourism practices—including recycling, composting, and reef protection—were also emphasized as central to the guest experience and the Territory's brand.

9. **Prioritize Inclusive Planning Based on Updated Demographic Data**
Participants stressed that tourism planning must be population-driven, with reliable census data guiding decisions. Without accurate demographic information, training targets, infrastructure needs, and service levels cannot be adequately planned or resourced.

10. **Foster Community Engagement and Cultural Integration**
Stakeholders called for greater efforts to instil national pride and a sense of ownership over tourism among residents. Examples included using shared cultural experiences to integrate newcomers, revitalizing unique

4465   local attractions, and embedding cultural education within tourism programming to differentiate the Virgin Islands experience.

Minutes

Opening Remarks and Welcome

4470 The formal meeting opens with a welcome by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development. He introduces the purpose of the focus group, which centres on accommodations, a key thematic area within the broader consultative process for developing the Virgin Islands National Tourism Policy. He acknowledges the presence of the Junior Minister for Tourism, the Ministry staff, and announces that two presentations will be delivered—one by himself and another by the Assistant Secretary.

4475 The Deputy Secretary briefly addresses the group, emphasizing the importance of accommodations within the tourism sector and encouraging participants to contribute freely. The Junior Minister follows with more extensive remarks, reflecting on the extensive stakeholder consultations held across the islands. She notes the rich exchange of ideas in previous sessions and highlights the value of small focus groups like this one, which promote open dialogue. She stresses that accommodations are central to tourism development,
4480 particularly with planned infrastructure expansions such as the airport upgrade. Attendees are encouraged to ask questions without hesitation, and their contributions are described as crucial to the policy's success. She recognizes key figures in the audience, including the Chair of the Tourist Board and Mr. Miles, who holds multiple roles in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Framing the Policy Context

4485 The Permanent Secretary begins his presentation, setting the stage for the consultation by outlining the macroeconomic context for tourism in the Virgin Islands. Referring to data from the Ministry of Finance's macroeconomic review and the World Travel and Tourism Council's Economic Impact Report, he notes that the tourism sector—spanning goods, services, construction, and related activities—contributed approximately 52% to the national economic output in 2023. This underlines tourism as a critical pillar of
4490 the Virgin Islands' economy. The data provides a compelling rationale for the development of a robust national tourism policy.

Sustainability as a Policy Foundation

The policy is being developed with sustainability as a core principle, guided by three major frameworks: the World Tourism Organization, which promotes balanced economic, social, and environmental outcomes;
4495 the United Nations Environment Programme, which emphasizes cultural preservation and minimizing environmental impact; and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which promotes responsible tourism that supports biodiversity and local economies.

A fourth, localized dimension of sustainability is introduced—service quality. The Permanent Secretary links high-quality visitor experiences with economic sustainability, highlighting that satisfied guests are
4500 more likely to return and contribute to the long-term success of the industry. He underscores the importance of assessing guest experiences and addressing service gaps, positioning both public and private sectors as shared stakeholders in maintaining quality and ensuring satisfaction.

The presentation stresses the need to create an "enabling environment" for seamless, high-quality visitor experiences from arrival to departure, including authentic cultural interactions, efficient border experiences,
4505 and well-managed crisis resolution processes. The overarching goal is to ensure that all actors within the tourism ecosystem contribute to sustainable growth and visitor satisfaction.

Stakeholder Engagement and Regional Alignment

4510 The final segment of this portion of the transcript shifts focus to the policy's development process. It is described as a highly participatory and stakeholder-led initiative, beginning with the January 2024 Tourism Summit and including a series of national consultations and focus groups—such as this one on accommodations. The process builds on earlier stakeholder engagement efforts and aligns with the newly released OECS Common Tourism Policy Framework (April 2024).

4515 Information collected from national and regional consultations, including inputs from various government and private sector actors, has informed both the regional framework and the emerging national policy. This cross-pollination ensures coherence between the Virgin Islands' national approach and wider Caribbean regional priorities. The Permanent Secretary confirms that the Tourism Summit attracted over 200 participants, both virtually and in person, underscoring the breadth of engagement in shaping the tourism policy framework.

Policy Framework Overview and Conceptual Model

4520 The Permanent Secretary continues his presentation by introducing a conceptual framework for the National Tourism Policy, structured as a "house" with eight metaphorical "windows" that represent key focus areas for policy development. The guiding principles for the policy are grounded in sustainable development, evidence-based decision-making, strong public-private partnerships, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. These principles are intended to shape a resilient, innovative, and inclusive tourism sector that
4525 promotes broad-based economic development.

The eight "windows" of the policy include: inclusive economic growth and equitable income distribution; expansion of the blue economy; climate change resilience; development of niche tourism markets and products; biodiversity and resource conservation; improved access and transport systems; enhanced tourism management; and increased institutional capacity. The Permanent Secretary notes that explicit policy
4530 statements will be formulated under each of these windows, drawing from this model as a blueprint—though it may be refined further to suit national priorities.

Sector-Specific Focus: Accommodations

The Assistant Secretary takes the floor to deliver a focused presentation on the accommodations sector. She notes that the aim of the focus group is to gather feedback to directly inform the policy's accommodation-
4535 related provisions. The consultation will explore current challenges, identify opportunities, and assess the types of policy support needed for sustainable growth and improved service quality.

She explains that a National Tourism Policy is important because it provides strategic direction for the sector, promotes sustainability and competitiveness, aligns tourism with national development goals such as job creation and investment, and ensures that stakeholder voices are meaningfully reflected. The current
4540 state of the accommodations sector is described as diverse—with a mixture of hotels, resorts, villas, guesthouses, and short-term rentals—but uneven in quality and standards. The sector continues to grapple with the lingering impacts of natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. New challenges include competition from online booking platforms such as Airbnb, labour shortages, high operating costs, and restricted access to financing.

4545 Participants are encouraged to respond to key questions: What is working well? What are the biggest challenges? What policy changes could have the greatest impact? How can partnerships and programs be designed to support innovation and quality in the sector?

The Assistant Secretary also outlines initial policy ideas, such as: strengthening public-private collaboration; supporting professional development and hospitality certification; incentivizing eco-friendly accommodation models; improving digital marketing access for small operators; developing clear licensing and grading systems; and encouraging local investment in accommodations.

Stakeholder Input: Sector Successes and Challenges

Stakeholder feedback begins with a participant noting improved connectivity to the Territory, specifically the introduction of direct flights from Miami. This enhancement in access is seen as a significant benefit to the tourism sector and should be maintained and further developed.

Another participant highlights the challenge of seasonal labour, noting the acute need for temporary workers during peak tourism periods. The issue is compounded on Virgin Gorda, where limited worker accommodations make it difficult to house staff locally. A solution proposed is the reintroduction of ferry service between Tortola and Gun Creek, which would enable workers to commute instead of relocating. Additionally, the participant calls for greater marketing support, including structured opportunities for tourism providers to pool resources and coordinate with the Tourist Board. The current absence of a robust, sector-wide marketing mechanism is seen as a critical shortfall.

Revisiting Historical Models and Recommending Renewed Collaboration

The Junior Minister responds positively to the suggestions, expressing support for transportation solutions to address workforce mobility, especially between Tortola and Virgin Gorda. She recalls prior practices where villa owners and hoteliers participated in international trade shows alongside the Tourist Board and suggests reviving this model of collaboration. She also references former efforts by a villa owners' association that jointly promoted properties, emphasizing the value of holistic and cooperative marketing strategies.

The Junior Minister reiterates the importance of public-private partnership, advocating for a coordinated promotional approach that leverages the reach and resources of the Tourist Board while allowing individual businesses to market their own offerings. She proposes a model similar to that used by the Caribbean Tourism Organization, where members can travel together to trade shows under a unified banner. This approach would allow cost-sharing and greater exposure for all parties.

Tourist Board Response: Current Practices and Areas for Improvement

A representative from the BVI Tourist Board adds context to the ongoing practices and acknowledges that while the Board currently issues an annual calendar of planned events to industry stakeholders, more can be done to increase inclusivity and ensure broader participation. The representative supports the idea of deepening partnerships with industry actors and commits to reviewing and potentially widening the net of communications and opportunities.

They highlight a recent initiative called "Market Connect," where business development managers from different international regions hosted live sessions to present their activities and collaboration opportunities. These sessions were recorded and could be shared with the broader tourism sector to facilitate ongoing engagement and partnership. The representative agrees that consistent communication of trade show schedules and partnership opportunities can help maximize limited marketing funds and ensure industry-wide benefits. There is a shared commitment to reviving effective programs that have fallen off the radar.

Revisiting the Hotel Aids Legislation and Investment Incentives

A participant expresses concern that previous efforts to develop strategic partnerships and support systems for the accommodations sector have not gained sufficient traction. In particular, there is a call to reassess the relevance and effectiveness of the *Hotel Aids Ordinance* and related legislation, which are currently considered outdated and burdensome. In response, the Permanent Secretary explains that the Ministry of Financial Services, Labour and Trade—now with responsibilities including investment and digital transformation—is reviewing the current incentives regime. The Hotel Aids Ordinance and the Hotels (Licensing and Control) Act are central to this review, and reforms are anticipated to ensure that these tools are modernized, practical, and aligned with the needs of the contemporary tourism sector. While another ministry may lead the legal and regulatory overhaul, the Ministry of Tourism must remain deeply involved due to its close relationship with industry stakeholders.

Infrastructure Deficiencies and Inter-Ministerial Coordination

An online contributor, Sharon, raises several foundational concerns, beginning with the inadequacy of infrastructure across the Territory and particularly on Virgin Gorda. She highlights the lack of reliable electricity, water, road infrastructure, and healthcare services—all of which undermine the accommodations sector and by extension, tourism development. She emphasizes that a national tourism policy cannot be developed in isolation but must involve coordinated input from other government ministries with responsibility for infrastructure and public services. Sharon calls for serious inter-ministerial collaboration to ensure tourism-related investments are underpinned by suitable development planning and essential services.

She also critiques the limited inclusion of Virgin Islanders in the accommodation's workforce, noting the dominance of foreign workers, particularly from Asia and the Philippines. She urges that workforce development be prioritized, including structured training and education for locals. This would reduce the housing burden for imported labour and ensure greater economic benefits for BVIslanders. Furthermore, she calls for mechanisms that allow for staff exchanges or secondments with foreign-owned properties, where BVI staff can work abroad during low seasons and return home with enhanced skills.

Tourism Budget, Accommodation Tax, and Strategic Collaboration

Sharon continues her intervention by addressing the chronic underfunding of the tourism sector. She notes that the BVI Tourist Board has been operating on the same budget since 2013, despite increased competition—especially in the luxury market. She argues that the policy must mandate budgetary growth and explore mechanisms to earmark a percentage of the hotel accommodation tax for tourism-specific purposes, including marketing and product development.

She also insists that collaboration with industry should not be symbolic. The policy must explicitly require meaningful and recurring engagement with the sector before final decisions are taken or the policy is submitted to Cabinet. Smaller businesses especially need training, financial support, and technical assistance. Sharon adds that the government entities responsible for tourism should also receive adequate training and exposure to global standards through travel and professional development so that they are better equipped to support the industry.

Regulating Short-Term Rentals and Ensuring Accountability

Another stakeholder raises concerns about the regulation of Airbnb and similar platforms. Traditional operators continue to pay hotel accommodation taxes, while it remains unclear who regulates the quality and compliance of short-term rentals. The fear is that poor experiences with unregulated properties could damage the destination's reputation. In response, the Permanent Secretary states that licensing and

4630   regulation, especially linking business licenses to quality standards, is an area the Ministry is exploring. This would ensure a baseline of service across all operators and align customer expectations with consistent service delivery. Ongoing inspection and accountability mechanisms are being considered, so that service quality is maintained over time rather than checked sporadically.

Safety, Lifeguards, and Public Health Measures

4635   A participant raises the issue of water safety, noting the long-standing absence of lifeguards at most beaches, despite the Territory's reliance on marine-based tourism. With increasing visitor arrivals, the risk of accidents grows, and the policy should include provisions for lifeguard services as a critical public safety measure. The Permanent Secretary confirms that this issue has been discussed before, recalling that lifeguarding was once part of the Conservation and Fisheries Department's responsibilities and later shifted
4640   to Fire and Rescue Services. He suggests that a dedicated mentorship and training program for lifeguards, especially targeting locals, could be reintroduced to improve coverage and safety at beaches across the Territory.

Education as a Long-Term Transformational Tool

        In closing this segment, the facilitator reiterates the importance of identifying impactful policy changes. A
4645   participant interjects to underscore the importance of education, particularly starting from a young age. They begin to suggest that fostering early awareness and training in tourism and hospitality fields is vital to building a locally-empowered workforce. Their statement transitions into the next speaker's contribution.

Hospitality Education and Career Pathways

        The discussion continues with a heartfelt reflection on the importance of education as a foundational pillar
4650   for the hospitality and tourism sector. A stakeholder emphasizes the need to instil a love for hospitality in young people, grounded in pride for local culture and identity. The speaker suggests that structured training programmes—such as hospitality schools offering specialty certifications in culinary arts and accommodation management—should be developed or enhanced. These would not only professionalize the workforce but also establish long-term career pathways in tourism, which is essential for generational
4655   continuity in the industry.

        The speaker links these education goals with sustainability, noting that hotels should serve as active models for eco-conscious practices. One example given is a recycling initiative where waste is sorted and composted on-site, but challenges remain with final disposal and the availability of supporting infrastructure. Guests are increasingly drawn to destinations that demonstrate environmental stewardship,
4660   and the speaker cites examples such as reef protection and farm-to-table experiences. These not only promote sustainability but also enhance guest satisfaction. The speaker urges that policies include sustainability targets and regulatory support to reinforce these industry-led efforts.

Elevating the Image of Tourism Careers

        Mr. Lettsome joins the conversation virtually and expands on the educational theme. He points out that
4665   local youth often view tourism jobs as low-paying, seasonal, and lacking in long-term prospects. Consequently, generations of BVI students are not envisioning futures in the industry. He supports reinstating structured programmes such as culinary arts at the local college, but emphasizes the need to make tourism careers more appealing and viable.

Lettsome laments the bureaucratic challenges associated with the *Hotel Aid Ordinance*, which is intended
4670   to provide incentives for accommodations development. He recounts personal experiences where, despite
Cabinet approval, businesses were still subjected to excessive delays and administrative burdens. This
dysfunction discourages investment and leaves the BVI lagging behind regional competitors like Antigua,
where new hotels are constantly emerging due to streamlined processes and active government support.
Lettsome warns that the BVI's reputation for natural beauty alone will not sustain its tourism economy
4675   unless institutional barriers are removed and strategic investment is made.

Strengthening Secondary and Tertiary Education Linkages

Another speaker follows up on the discussion around education, referencing presentations made by senior
secondary students who are required to take tourism as part of the curriculum. However, questions remain
about the content, structure, and practical impact of these classes. The speaker encourages more oversight
4680   and collaboration with the Ministry of Education to ensure that students are meaningfully exposed to real-
world tourism operations, especially in tourism-intensive locations like Virgin Gorda.

The speaker also references the culinary and marine certification programs once offered through the college,
noting their relevance and importance. These programs have reportedly waned and need to be revitalized
to ensure that students can acquire qualifications for operating vessels both within and beyond the Territory.
4685   There is a clear call for these educational initiatives to be seen not as supplementary, but as integral to
workforce development and the long-term success of the national tourism policy.

The speaker reinforces the need to modernize and streamline the hotel aid framework, a sentiment echoed
throughout the consultation. Clearer guidelines and criteria, embedded within a broader investment
framework, are deemed essential.

4690   **Planning, Demographics, and Integration**

Sally contributes to the discussion by emphasizing that infrastructure and service development must be
planned with people in mind. She questions whether the Virgin Islands has an accurate understanding of its
population—how many young people are coming through the school system, what their interests are, and
how this affects workforce projections for tourism. She warns that without reliable demographic data,
4695   policy planning is taking place in the dark.

Sally raises the often-sensitive issue of integration. While "tourism is everybody's business" is a common
mantra, the reality is that many community members do not feel connected to the industry. She references
an example from Japan where integration efforts between immigrants and locals were made through
collaborative food preparation, suggesting that shared cultural spaces can help develop the kind of national
4700   pride and ownership that tourism requires. The message is that if people do not feel invested in their place,
they will not feel invested in promoting it.

Market Shifts and Cruise Ship Impact

A participant reflects on the structural changes in the accommodations landscape over the past few decades.
Noting the decline of traditional properties like Long Bay and Prospect, they attribute much of the shift to
4705   the rise of cruise tourism. Unlike overnight visitors, cruise passengers tend to spend less locally, and their
presence is highly concentrated during certain hours of the day. While the marine industry helps fill
accommodation gaps during weekends, there is a notable decline in weekday occupancy. The speaker
suggests that the cruise industry, which has disrupted the traditional tourism model, should be held more

4710 accountable—possibly through its contribution to education, training, or infrastructure—as part of a balanced tourism strategy.

Cruise Tourism and Conversion Strategies

The discussion continues with a participant suggesting a proactive engagement with cruise tourists. They recommend organizing a taxi-based tour of local accommodations for cruise passengers to showcase what they are missing by not staying overnight. This would allow properties to collaborate and entice future
4715 bookings. The speaker laments the decline of quirky, authentic attractions that once catered to overnight visitors and advocates for shifting the power dynamic with cruise lines—from being dictated to, to negotiating more equitable arrangements.

The Junior Minister responds affirmatively to all the comments raised thus far. She acknowledges that infrastructure is vital and confirms that government loan financing has been secured to begin improvements.
4720 She emphasizes the importance of engaging youth through creative programming. She reminisces about earlier initiatives at the Tourist Board, such as summer orientation programmes for students that included tours and classroom instruction. These efforts led some students to pursue careers in tourism, and she advocates for their revival to build interest and pride in the sector.

She also notes the usefulness of bringing back training programmes like KISS and re-engaging former
4725 facilitators such as Thierry Le Brun, based on feedback received at the recent Tourism Summit. Addressing the cruise tourism debate, she states that the Ministry is actively exploring cruise-to-overnight conversion strategies. The Assistant Secretary has been tasked with developing such programmes, building on existing models in other destinations.

Trends in Cruise Tourism and Planned Infrastructure Enhancements

4730 The Junior Minister expands on cruise sector reforms, explaining that environmental concerns from host destinations have prompted cruise lines to adopt greener practices. She references her recent attendance at Sea trade Cruise Global (SeaTrade) and notes that cruise operators are increasingly open to working with local governments to enhance guest experiences. However, the Virgin Islands must do more to track conversion rates and understand which passengers return as overnight visitors.

4735 She mentions a best-practice example where passengers receive a collectible coin when disembarking, which they return during an overnight stay to demonstrate conversion. She supports adopting such ideas and emphasizes that infrastructure improvements are key to creating a welcoming and memorable environment. Projects underway include public-private efforts to beautify Road Town, create green spaces, widen sidewalks, and ensure wheelchair accessibility. A meeting has already been scheduled to advance
4740 these enhancements, which include building a boardwalk from Pier Park to Queen Elizabeth II Park. These efforts aim to make Road Town more appealing to both cruise and overnight visitors.

Tourism Investment, Budgeting, and Competitive Strategy

The Junior Minister reiterates that while progress takes time, the government is committed to delivering on tourism development. She stresses that tourism, like financial services, is a key economic pillar and must
4745 be protected and advanced with competitive strategies. Global political and economic shifts necessitate greater investment in tourism to remain relevant. She calls for increased government spending in the sector, asserting that investing more now is essential to yield meaningful long-term returns.

Census Completion and its Importance to Tourism Planning

In response to earlier concerns about the lack of population data, the Junior Minister provides an update on the census. The Central Statistics Department, which falls under her Ministry, has faced difficulties collecting responses from the public. She explains that census enumerators often face resistance or verbal abuse, leading to incomplete datasets. Nevertheless, the Ministry remains committed to finalizing the census, which is crucial for determining community needs, infrastructure requirements, and budget allocations that will support tourism development.

Closing Reflections from the Director of Tourism

The Director of Tourism joins the discussion to affirm the importance of inclusive consultations. He underscores that all feedback shared—whether from property owners or renters—is valuable and can influence the final tourism policy. He expresses optimism that the current process, though overdue, will lead to a policy that equips the Territory to advance tourism in meaningful and transformative ways.

Final Remarks and Next Steps

The Junior Minister delivers the closing remarks, expressing gratitude for the stakeholders' active participation. She acknowledges the outdated nature of the last national tourism policy and affirms the urgency of having a new one that reflects the current realities and ambitions of the Territory. Tourism and financial services remain the Territory's two main economic pillars, and a clear policy framework is essential for sustainable development. She shares that this was the final public consultation, though additional stakeholder engagements will continue behind the scenes to ensure the policy is inclusive and reflective of all voices.

Closing Reflections on the Consultation Process

The Junior Minister offers concluding reflections on the series of national tourism policy consultation sessions. She underscores the holistic intent of the process, emphasizing that the policy will not focus selectively on certain aspects while neglecting others. The consultations aimed to ensure inclusivity, with outreach spanning across the Territory—from Anegada to Jost Van Dyke. Each session, whether large and well-attended or small and intimate, contributed meaningfully to the collective insights being gathered. She expresses deep appreciation to all participants and reiterates that the goal is to have the new national tourism policy finalized by the end of June. Though ambitious, she believes the team is well-positioned to meet this timeline, supported by the OECS Common Tourism Policy framework as a structural guide. Stakeholders can expect to be consulted again before the final policy is presented.

Next Steps and Policy Development Process

The Permanent Secretary provides clarity on the next steps in the policy development process. All proceedings from the consultations—including detailed minutes—will be published and made accessible through the Government's website. He confirms that a steering committee is in place to oversee the final stages of policy drafting. A key consideration raised by stakeholders—access to an initial draft of the policy—has been taken seriously. The Ministry is committed to ensuring transparency and iterative review of the draft, starting with the synthesis of all stakeholder feedback gathered from the consultations, beginning with the January Tourism Summit.

He explains that there will be two main deliverables: (1) the documented proceedings from all stakeholder meetings, and (2) the first official draft of the National Tourism Policy. Both are targeted for completion and release by June. The intention is to ensure broad-based review of the draft before it is formally submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Events, Entertainment and Sports Tourism Consultation

Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held on Monday 28th April 2025

Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation

1. **Infrastructure Limitations Must Be Addressed**
   Stakeholders emphasized the urgent need to upgrade existing sports facilities—including track and field venues, seating capacity, and certified amenities—and to build new, sport-specific infrastructure across all islands, not just Tortola.

2. **Marketing and Advance Planning Are Critically Weak**
   There was consensus that successful sports and event tourism depends on advance planning and early promotion. Stakeholders repeatedly called for events to be marketed regionally at least 6–12 months in advance to attract visitors, engage airlines and hoteliers, and secure corporate sponsorship.

3. **Policy Harmonization Is Needed Across Ministries**
   Participants stressed that the tourism policy must be aligned with existing frameworks such as the National Sports Policy and the Cultural Policy to avoid duplication and ensure cross-sector coherence, particularly with the Ministry of Education and Sports.

4. **A National Events Calendar Is Essential**
   There was a strong call for a centralized, publicly accessible annual events calendar. Such a tool would enable coordination among sports federations, event promoters, and government departments, and support effective budgeting and resource allocation.

5. **Stakeholder Collaboration Must Be Strengthened**
   Multiple speakers called for greater unity among sports federations and associations. Instead of working in silos, stakeholders should support one another's events and consider joint investments in shared infrastructure, such as temporary seating or facility upgrades.

6. **Decentralization and Inclusion of Sister Islands Are Priorities**
   Virgin Gorda stakeholders in particular highlighted the need for equitable development of sports infrastructure across the Virgin Islands. Facilities should be developed in multiple islands to spread tourism benefits and recognize local athletic potential.

7. **Human Resources and Ancillary Services Are Lacking**
   Beyond facilities, the Territory lacks essential support services for international sports events, such as sports physiotherapists, medical staff, and technical event specialists. These gaps must be filled to host credible events at international standards.

8. **Funding Models Need Reform and Predictability**
   Stakeholders noted the need for more transparent, structured access to government funding and advocated for long-term investment strategies. The idea of pooled federation resources and non-profit status to access public support was also explored.

9. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Should Be Legislated**
   Several contributors proposed implementing a formal CSR framework to compel companies—especially international financial firms—to contribute consistently to community development, including sports, culture, and festivals.

10. **Private Sector Engagement and Readiness Exist**
    Marina and hospitality stakeholders expressed readiness to support off-season events, offer room packages, and partner on logistics. However, they stressed that their involvement requires early notification, clarity of demand, and consistent collaboration.

Minutes

Introduction and Economic Contribution of Tourism

The speaker opens the meeting, addressing both physical and virtual participants. They present an overview of the Virgin Islands' economy, stating that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated at approximately $1.7 billion. Drawing on data from the World Travel and Tourism Council for 2024, it is highlighted that tourism accounts for 52% of this GDP. This figure encompasses not only direct tourism-related goods and services but also associated construction and infrastructural development. This expansive footprint reinforces the critical importance of the tourism sector in the Virgin Islands' economy.

Embedding Sustainability into Tourism Policy

The discussion then transitions to the strategic direction of the new tourism policy, which seeks to embed sustainability as a core principle. Three primary frameworks for defining sustainable tourism are proposed, each addressing the economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions. The goal is to minimize environmental impact, respect local culture, and ensure long-term economic resilience. Additionally, the concept of "responsible tourism" is emphasized, alongside enhancing service quality and its associated economic benefits. The policy aims to go beyond traditional metrics and instead incorporate holistic experiences into the development of the sector.

Guest Experience and Public-Private Balance

A key aspect of the policy is the link between service quality, guest satisfaction, and economic impact. The speaker stresses the importance of evaluating and improving the tourist experience from arrival to departure, recognizing that satisfied visitors contribute more economically. The policy is also built on a shared responsibility model, where both public and private sectors are jointly accountable for maintaining quality standards. This includes ensuring that government actions and investments align with the needs of the tourism industry.

Seamless Visitor Experience and Authenticity

The framework aims to deliver a seamless, enriching visitor experience, beginning with the tourist's decision to visit and continuing through their interactions with the Virgin Islands' culture and environment. Authentic cultural and natural heritage experiences are prioritized, along with eco-friendly accommodations, responsible transport, and ethical tourism activities. These principles are intended to shape an ecosystem in which the entire tourism journey is sustainable and high-quality.

Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Alignment

The speaker notes that stakeholder feedback is integral to the development of the new policy. There is a desire to incorporate diverse perspectives across the sector and ensure regulations and incentives support sustainable tourism. The policy aims to align tourism development with broader environmental, cultural, and economic priorities. It builds on earlier consultations held in January 2024 during the OECS Common Tourism Policy development, in which the Virgin Islands actively participated, including representation at the regional launch in April.

Evidence-Based Development and Institutional Capacity

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The policy development process follows the OECS's model for policy design, ensuring integration within the broader sustainable development framework and national development plan. Emphasis is placed on evidence-based decision-making, robust public-private partnerships, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The framework is likened to a house with various "windows," each representing critical focus areas such as inclusive growth, income distribution, marine and blue economy development, climate resilience, destination management, and institutional strengthening. The Virgin Islands Government and associated consultative bodies are tasked with rebuilding capacity to manage tourism effectively.

Focus on Events and Niche Tourism Markets

Attention shifts to the specific theme of the evening's consultation: product and niche market development, particularly in the context of events and sports tourism. Acknowledging the growing activity in this space, the Ministry seeks to identify how it can facilitate further development and expansion. Assistant Secretary Flax is invited to present on this theme, providing context for a deeper exploration of opportunities and challenges.

Presentation on Sports, Entertainment, and Event Tourism

Assistant Secretary Flax outlines the objectives of the session: to identify challenges, explore opportunities, and suggest policy recommendations in the area of event tourism. This sector contributes significantly to tourism, especially during the off-season, while also fostering cultural promotion and community engagement. The National Tourism Policy will prioritize improved infrastructure, balanced growth, and equitable benefits for local communities. While interest and participation in live events are increasing, the sector faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited event spaces, fragmented coordination, and complex permitting processes.

Opening the Discussion and Stakeholder Contributions

Participants were invited to contribute their views. Several discussion prompts are presented to guide input, including current successes, barriers to growth, and the type of support needed. Key opportunities identified include hosting signature and regional events, investing in sports infrastructure, and empowering local artists. The floor is opened for participant feedback, starting with a participant who highlights several critical issues: inadequate hotel amenities, high accommodation costs, visa delays, and limited support from Government agencies. He also stresses the need for a coordinated events calendar to prevent scheduling conflicts and calls for increased government investment and policy support to bolster event tourism.

Infrastructure Gaps and Missed Opportunities in Sports Tourism

A participant continues the discussion by emphasizing the pressing need for upgrades to local sporting infrastructure, particularly the territory's main track and field facilities, which are vital for supporting sports tourism. They argue that the government should take a lead role in developing and maintaining such infrastructure, especially since most of these facilities fall under public sector control. The speaker recalls successful past initiatives, like college basketball tournaments hosted in the Territory, which were well-positioned geographically and logistically between the U.S., Bahamas, and St. Thomas. Despite the potential, such events have since been discontinued. Beyond sports, the speaker highlights opportunities in yachting and multi-discipline events such as Ironman competitions, advocating for greater government and private sector financial support to tap into these niches.

The Critical Need for Advance Planning and Coordination

A new speaker stresses the importance of forward planning in event tourism. They express frustration over the absence of a consolidated annual events calendar, despite multiple requests made to Government and tourism agencies. Without a unified calendar, budgeting and logistical coordination—both at the governmental and private sector levels—become extremely difficult. They advocate for preparing event schedules at least a year in advance to allow for meaningful support, such as airline partnerships, accommodation packaging, and other logistics. Delayed notifications result in missed opportunities, as hotels and airlines often cannot adjust plans on short notice. The speaker proposes creating a unified, collaborative process among event organizers to establish a planning calendar well ahead of time.

Mutual Engagement and Accountability in Tourism Partnerships

Another contributor challenges the assertion that the private sector is not proactive enough, turning attention to a perceived lack of reciprocal interest from Government and tourism authorities. They recount past efforts to publicize and invite engagement for an event that received minimal response or presence from the relevant tourism bodies. Despite significant government investment in event infrastructure, promotional support from agencies like the Tourist Board was absent, with little to no online visibility of the events. The speaker underscores the need for mutual engagement, stressing that effective partnerships require both sides to show commitment and initiative. The analogy of a one-sided relationship is used to illustrate the perceived imbalance in efforts.

Quality of Experience and Broader Tourism Readiness

A further contribution reinforces the importance of considering the total experience of visiting athletes and attendees. The speaker recalls a previous international volleyball seminar that failed to return to the Virgin Islands due to high hotel costs and inadequate infrastructure. They explain that athletes' perception of a destination extends beyond the event itself to the broader experience—affordable lodging, quality amenities, reliable utilities, and general accessibility. These factors collectively shape whether visitors choose to return. The speaker calls for more attention to these indirect yet critical components of the tourism experience, stating that financial planning alone is insufficient if the supporting environment is lacking.

Online Contribution – Planning, Marketing, and Private Sector Involvement

An online participant adds her voice to the chorus calling for advance planning and improved marketing. She identifies poor lead time as a chronic issue, particularly in the organization of major national events such as the Emancipation Festival. Without long-term planning—ideally a year in advance—potential visitors cannot make travel arrangements, and airlines and hotels cannot adjust supply. She emphasizes the need for stronger regional marketing, especially given competition from better-promoted Caribbean festivals. Bradshaw also advocates for more substantial corporate sponsorship and private sector involvement, highlighting the mutual benefits derived from successful tourism events. Finally, she stresses the need for top-tier sports facilities that meet international standards, referencing her own involvement in football and the stringent requirements of FIFA.

Inclusion of Sister Islands in Sports Tourism Development

Another online participant, raises concerns about the uneven development of sports tourism infrastructure across the Territory. Speaking from Virgin Gorda, they question whether the conversation about sports tourism genuinely includes all islands or remains Tortola-centric. They point out that Virgin Gorda produces talented athletes, but the absence of adequate facilities forces them to travel to Tortola for training

4955 and competition. He called for more equitable investment in sports infrastructure across the islands, arguing that each island should have the opportunity to develop its own sports tourism offerings. The current concentration of resources on Tortola limits the broader potential of the Virgin Islands as a sports tourism destination.

Systemic Gaps in Sports Tourism Readiness

4960 The discussion resumes with a strong emphasis on the gaps in the Virgin Islands' readiness to support sports tourism at a professional level. The speaker notes the absence of key supporting services such as sports physiotherapists, medical professionals with sports-specific expertise, and appropriate hospitals. These, they argue, are crucial components if the Territory is to be taken seriously as a sports tourism destination. Another speaker agrees with the need for a whole-of-territory approach, reinforcing that "Virgin Islands" refers to the entire archipelago, not just Tortola. They note that while Virgin Gorda may lack some facilities,
4965 it already contributes value to the sports ecosystem, and further investments must be made holistically across the islands. Additionally, the broader logistics of hosting international events—including specialized equipment, security, and hotel standards—are emphasized as essential prerequisites. The development of a comprehensive policy, supported by appropriate budgeting and sectoral collaboration, is positioned as the next critical step.

4970 **Integrating Sports Policy and Improving Governance**

An individual spoke from a structural and policy perspective. She raises concerns about policy fragmentation, noting the recent introduction of a National Sports Policy and questioning how it will be harmonized with the emerging National Tourism Policy. Her concern centres on ensuring cohesive governance and avoiding contradictory or overlapping mandates. She also calls for clarity on how sports
4975 will be integrated into the BVI Tourist Board's marketing strategy. Finally, she addresses the matter of funding, stating that while facilities are important, governance and accountability of how funds are used are just as vital. According to her, international collaboration with Olympic and sports federations can yield additional resources, but only if the local systems reflect sound governance and financial integrity.

Inter-Ministerial Coordination and Policy Harmony

4980 In response to the previous comment, the facilitator affirms that the Ministry of Education remains the lead for sports infrastructure and development, while the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development will not duplicate roles but instead coordinate effectively to ensure policy harmony. They explain that the tourism policy will integrate and cross-reference relevant provisions from the existing sports and cultural policies rather than attempt to supersede them. This integrative approach ensures that
4985 the Tourism Ministry supports, rather than replicates, efforts already underway by other ministries. The policy will therefore focus on identifying aspects of tourism (such as leveraging sporting events for destination promotion) while deferring operational aspects to the appropriate ministries. The need to address practical barriers, like accommodation standards and equipment availability, is acknowledged and discussions with the hospitality sector are anticipated to ensure the quality and consistency of visitor
4990 experience.

Importance of Timing in Marketing and Tourism Campaigns

Mr. McCoy, the Director of Tourism for the British Virgin Islands, addressed marketing-specific concerns, noting that sufficient lead time is essential for successful tourism campaigns tied to sporting events. He shares a current example where an event proposed for 2026 is already under discussion, giving the Board
4995 ample time to build partnerships with hoteliers and airlines. He clarifies that while the Board frequently

promotes events via social media and contributes financially toward organizers' marketing efforts, more extensive campaigns require substantial time and collaboration. Another speaker builds on this, emphasizing the need for forward planning around major athletes, like Kyron McMaster, whose Olympic-level participation should be leveraged in multi-year campaigns to showcase the Virgin Islands as a breeding ground for elite talent. They advocate for incorporating such athletes into long-term destination branding strategies that span various sports, including sailing and basketball.

Using Athletes as Ambassadors and the Need for Structural Inclusion

The dialogue shifted to the use of athletes as international ambassadors for the Virgin Islands. Acknowledging past attempts to engage Kyron McMaster in marketing activities during the Olympic Games, Mr. McCoy admits that execution was hindered by coordination and scheduling issues. He affirms that with better collaboration between the Tourist Board, athletes, and their agents, such promotional initiatives could be highly impactful. The conversation then touches on the structural absence of sports representation within the BVI Tourist Board. One contributor expresses frustration that while various sectors have representation, sports does not, despite its significant role in national branding and youth development. They propose tying scholarship funding to promotional responsibilities, encouraging student-athletes studying abroad to actively market the Virgin Islands. The speaker further calls for competent appointments within sports-related posts, noting the broader challenge of disorganized event planning, paralleling issues with both festival coordination and sports. Ultimately, they argue for strategic human resource placement and forward-thinking policy implementation to drive meaningful growth.

Marketing Sports Tourism and Policy Alignment

The discussion turns to the issue of marketing and capacity building within the sports tourism sector. A participant emphasizes the importance of bringing along younger individuals to observe and learn so that they can become future leaders and practitioners in the field. The conversation pivots to reflect on how sports can be marketed in numerous ways, but progress has been hindered by misaligned leadership and misplaced personnel. A question is raised about whether the BVI Tourist Board will need to develop a wholly new marketing strategy specifically for sports and events, to which the response is affirmative. This indicates that sports tourism is still a relatively new domain within the broader tourism strategy, and developing a robust framework is now a key priority.

Defining Event Scope and Addressing Structural Limitations

Participants raise concerns about the absence of a clear tourism strategy to guide the direction of event tourism. In particular, questions are asked about the type of visitor the Territory wants to attract and whether this will shape the kinds of events and sports to prioritize. The speaker notes the need to treat event tourism as a business enterprise that must generate revenue for both the government and private sector. However, they express scepticism about whether the Virgin Islands has the capacity to profitably deliver large-scale events given its geographic constraints and limited accommodation infrastructure. In response, it is acknowledged that the Virgin Islands must operate within its limitations but can still pursue modest yet impactful event tourism. Ongoing planning efforts include proposals for a multi-use space near the Festival Grounds, potential development of an amphitheatre, expansion of the boardwalk, and increasing the availability of rooms and hotel infrastructure. These developments, along with the proposed airport expansion, could strengthen the Territory's event-hosting capabilities in the future.

Entertainment Sector Needs and Regional Collaboration

The conversation shifts to the entertainment sector, where concerns echo those of the sports community. Participants highlight the need for Government support, especially with logistics such as immigration, taxes, and permits for international performers. The importance of a reliable, well-publicized calendar is revisited—without it, both local and regional marketing efforts suffer. The hope is expressed that the BVI can shift away from seasonal tourism to a more continuous model, supported by regional collaboration. Officials reveal that conversations are underway with neighbouring territories to develop reciprocal tourism flows that could bolster event attendance and tourism numbers throughout the year. The creation of a guiding policy is seen as essential to provide continuity and prevent ad hoc decision-making.

Ministry Representation and Facility Development Strategy

A new speaker, Steve, raises a pointed concern about the absence of representatives from the Ministry of Education at such an important meeting, given their lead role in youth and sports development. He questions how decisions regarding sporting facilities are currently driven: is it based on budget cycles, the volume of complaints, or strategic planning? The lack of a transparent and structured development approach creates uncertainty for sports federations and organizations. The response from a representative suggests that while a formal sports policy exists, there is still a need for unified action among the various sports bodies, including the Athletics Federation and the Recreation Trust, to collectively determine next steps.

Moving Beyond Basic Infrastructure to Full Facility Development

Steve continues by urging stakeholders to think beyond mere access to sports fields or courts and instead focus on the complete development of sports infrastructure. Using athletics as an example, he explains that while a track exists, seating remains inadequate, with the current capacity of around 1,200 unable to accommodate even the athletes, let alone spectators and coaches, for events like the CARIFTA Games. He emphasizes that serious discussions about hosting regional or international events must include plans for scalable seating, certified facilities, and compliance with international standards. These considerations are not only necessary for effective event hosting but also tie into the broader tourism product, requiring synergy between marketing, government endorsement, and sector-wide engagement. Steve concludes by asserting that sports events should not be promoted in silos—if they receive national investment, they should be advertised on all official platforms, not just by the federations or organizing bodies.

The Role of the Recreation Trust and the Path Forward

Eustace Freeman, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Recreation Trust, enters the discussion and expresses appreciation for the open dialogue. He highlights the importance of discussion as the first step toward progress, particularly in the area of sports tourism policy development. While the transcript cuts off just as he begins to speak in more detail, his introductory remarks signal institutional support for policy dialogue and an intention to contribute actively to the Territory's strategic direction on sports and recreation.

Long-Term Facility Planning and the Role of Consistency

Eustace Freeman, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Recreation Trust, shares a major development: in 2023, the Trust, in collaboration with sporting stakeholders, completed a comprehensive 15-year plan for facility development across the Territory. This plan reflects input from various sporting organizations and outlines their long-term goals and infrastructure needs. The document is currently moving through the governmental approval process. Freeman emphasizes that sports tourism cannot be meaningfully developed without aligning infrastructure with sectoral needs. He recalls the launch of a Sports Convention between 2021 and 2022, organized in collaboration with the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports, which

5080 produced a unified sports calendar. However, he laments the lack of consistency, noting that the momentum waned in 2023 and 2024. To succeed in building a sustainable sports tourism model, Freeman stresses the necessity of long-term planning, consistency, and unified commitment from both government and stakeholders.

Opportunities in Maritime Events and the Role of Private Sector

5085 A representative from the Moorings/MarineMax spoke next, spotlighting the underutilized potential of maritime events in the Virgin Islands. They point to existing world-class facilities and the international visibility of some events through widely circulated videos. The speaker expresses appreciation for recent events, such as a basketball tournament that brought teams and economic activity to their marina. With 54 rooms now available, the marina is eager to collaborate further, especially during the off-season, to promote sport fishing and similar events. This demonstrates the readiness of private sector partners to actively 5090 contribute to the sports and events tourism space.

Urging Federation Collaboration and Self-Reliance

Ms. George, representing the Women in Sports Commission and Bregado Flax Educational Centre, challenges the fragmented nature of the current sports ecosystem. She urges federations to support each other, citing a recent example: the upcoming football match against Jamaica, a major event, has not been 5095 widely promoted by other sports federations. She stresses that athletic infrastructure such as the A.O. Shirley Recreation Grounds should not be considered the domain of one sport alone. George proposes that rather than waiting for government funding, federations could pool resources to co-invest in infrastructure improvements like seating. This collaborative approach, she argues, would yield faster and more meaningful results.

5100 **Resource Mobilization Through Policy and Organizational Structure**

The conversation turns toward resource mobilization. The facilitator emphasizes that federations and associations are well-positioned to access funding through government programmes or other non-profit channels. However, other sectors of the entertainment and event space may need to organize themselves as non-profits to qualify for similar support. For events already structured as businesses, resources could be 5105 routed directly to them or through suitable intermediary entities. The proposed national tourism policy is expected to serve as a roadmap for government to allocate funding more effectively and equitably across these different formats.

Establishing Contribution Thresholds and Event Scaling

A participant raises a practical question: what should be the minimum financial contribution for an event 5110 to be viable or worthy of support? The facilitator responds that the scale of events varies, with small events requiring only a few thousand dollars and larger events necessitating much more. They cite the upcoming BVI vs. Jamaica football match as an example of a high-reach event worth significant investment. Moreover, they stress the value of strategically timed events—particularly during low tourism months such as August through October—as they can draw regional visitors and help maintain steady tourism activity 5115 year-round.

Strengthening Corporate Social Responsibility

The discussion then shifts to the role of corporate sponsorship. One participant points out that unlike in other Caribbean jurisdictions, BVI lacks a formal policy or legal requirement compelling businesses to

5120 contribute to community and cultural events. They observe that in countries like the Cayman Islands, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is legislated, requiring companies to support community development. In the BVI, however, sponsorship remains discretionary, with many companies choosing to support only select events. Participants advocate for the development of formal CSR legislation to ensure businesses give back consistently, thereby strengthening funding pipelines for cultural, sporting, and entertainment initiatives.

5125 **Next Steps and Commitment to Publishing Outcomes**

As the meeting winds down, the facilitator thanks participants for their time and engagement. They commit to transparency by announcing that proceedings from all the consultations will be compiled and made publicly available. Additionally, stakeholders will be kept informed of progress in the development of the National Tourism Policy. The facilitator praises the level of commitment shown by participants, noting that 5130 the continued involvement of all stakeholders is essential for the long-term success of sports tourism in the Virgin Islands. The meeting formally concludes with recognition of the collective determination to grow the sector beyond individual sports and toward a more integrated, policy-led future.

Final Reflections on Consistency and Maintenance

As the consultation drew to a close, one of the final speakers emphasized the importance of consistency— 5135 not only in planning and implementation but also in the maintenance of existing infrastructure. They acknowledged that while work has been ongoing in the development of sports and events tourism, the road ahead still requires sustained, collaborative effort. The speaker urged all stakeholders to take ownership of maintaining public facilities, reinforcing that infrastructure longevity is a shared responsibility, not solely a governmental one.

5140 **Closing Informal Conversations and Next Steps on Policy Alignment**

In the final moments, a few informal exchanges occurred among attendees. One participant reiterated the importance of having a national calendar that includes all major events—sports, cultural, and entertainment—so that stakeholders can plan more effectively and collaborate across sectors. Another comment referenced the pending approval of the National Sports Policy, with a commitment to follow up 5145 directly with the Ministry of Education and Sports for clarification. The discussion closed with expressions of appreciation and agreement to remain in contact, underscoring the strong desire for coordinated, multi-sectoral collaboration as the Virgin Islands develops a more comprehensive and integrated tourism framework.

Education, Training & Capacity Building Meeting for the National Tourism Policy

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held on Friday 6th June 2025

Key Takeaways from the Education and Capacity Building Stakeholder Meeting

1. **Mandatory, Standardised Customer-Service Training** – All participants endorsed linking recognised customer-service certification to public-sector appraisals and, ultimately, to every tourism-related trade licence, work permit, taxi or tour-operator licence.

2. **Public Service Must Lead by Example** – Government agencies should complete the training first and model courteous, efficient service, proving the standards are achievable before extending them to the private sector.

3. **Create a BVI Institute of Tourism at HLSCC** – Stakeholders want a single, central hub to deliver workforce development, house global certifications (e.g., AHLEI, ServSafe) and coordinate "train-the-trainer" programmes across hospitality, marine and blue-economy sectors.

4. **Kindergarten-to-Career Curriculum Pipeline** – Tourism, national history and hospitality skills should be taught continuously from primary school through tertiary levels to inspire local youths and reduce reliance on expatriate labour.

5. **Embed National Pride and Identity in Daily Life** – Schools, offices and public spaces should feature flags, posters of national heroes and regular rituals (pledge, anthem) to cultivate the attitude shift that sustains service excellence.

6. **Preserve and Promote Local Cuisine** – Restaurants should be required—or strongly incentivised—to feature authentic dishes such as fungi and fish or peas soup, ensuring visitors taste a uniquely Virgin Islands experience.

7. **Short-Form Marine & Blue-Economy Courses** – Add-on modules covering reef etiquette, guest safety, local history and seamanship should be developed for captains, crew and marina staff, reflecting the Territory's "underwater beds" of tourism.

8. **Use Licensing as the Enforcement Lever** – Trade licences, work permits and sector certifications will become the practical checkpoints for verifying training completion and adherence to service standards across all businesses.

9. **Phased, Inclusive Roll-out** – A "soft opening" approach (starting with visible patriotic gestures and voluntary uptake) will ease resistance, while a five- to ten-year roadmap allows time for full legal and regulatory implementation.

10. **Transparent, Ongoing Consultation** – Minutes of every meeting will be published, and a first policy draft circulated for public comment, ensuring the final document reflects a genuinely shared national vision rather than a single ministry's agenda.

Minutes

Tourism-Policy Consultation Journey

Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith-Abbott recaps that the Ministry has spent the first half of the
year on an extensive consultation process to shape a new tourism policy. A well-publicised summit
served as the launchpad, followed by a series of increasingly focused public meetings that drew
input from diverse sectors and communities across the territory.

Unlike the earlier open forums, the gathering is deliberately limited to public-sector entities
responsible for education, training, and capacity-building in tourism. The immediate aim is to
preview policy concepts, then hold a focused discussion on how education and training
programmes can sustain service quality throughout the industry.

Economic Weight of Tourism in the Virgin Islands

Drawing on the Ministry of Finance's macro-economic review, the presenter cites a nominal GDP
of roughly US $1.7 billion for 2024 (real GDP ≈ US $1.607 billion). Using World Travel &
Tourism Council metrics, tourism—encompassing direct goods and services as well as
construction—accounts for about 52 percent of gross GDP. Mr. Smith-Abbott stresses that tourism
rivals, and in some respects surpasses, financial services in overall economic impact.

A Stakeholder-led, Regulation-ready Policy Framework

The policy is being crafted as "stakeholder-led," reflecting at least fourteen documented
engagements with businesses, sectoral groups, and local communities. Feedback will inform new
or strengthened regulations, incentives, and institutional frameworks that support sustainable
tourism and lay out a roadmap aligned with environmental, cultural, and economic priorities.

Defining Sustainable Tourism through Three Global Lenses

Re-opening the full slide deck, the presenter highlights how the draft policy borrows from leading
definitions of sustainable tourism:

1. **UN World Tourism Organization**—balancing economic, social, and environmental
   impacts for the benefit of all stakeholders;
2. **UN Environment Programme**—respecting local culture, shrinking environmental
   footprints, and ensuring long-term viability

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Service Quality, Guest Experience, and Holistic Sustainability

5220 The chair emphasises that guest experience is the decisive factor in destination success. Both positive and negative feedback must shape policy. Improvement cannot rest solely on the private sector; public-sector services—from immigration desks to transport—must meet the same high standards. Satisfied visitors spend more, return more often, and thereby drive sustainable growth. The policy therefore promotes authentic, immersive, culturally grounded experiences and a seamless journey "from intent to departure," integrating accommodation, transport, excursions, and support services.

Drawing on the OECS Common Tourism Policy

5225 The presenter reminds participants that many of them helped shape the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States' Common Tourism Policy during regional meetings last year. That policy has now been formally endorsed by OECS ministers, and the Virgin Islands team is recycling much of the data and stakeholder feedback it provided then to inform the local tourism-policy draft.

The "house" model: guiding principles and eight strategic windows

5230 Using the OECS model as a template, the draft policy is pictured as a house resting on foundational principles—sustainable development, evidence-based decision-making, robust public-private collaboration, and built-in monitoring and evaluation to track early outcomes. The façade contains eight "windows," or priority themes: (1) inclusive income growth and fair distribution, (2) blue-economy contributions, (3) climate-change resilience, (4) product and niche-market development, 5235 (5) biodiversity and resource conservation, (6) transport and access, (7) tourist-destination management, and (8) institutional capacity. Today's invitees are told they sit squarely in that final window because their training programmes underpin every other objective.

Deepening the Framework

Additional slides show how each window will incorporate elements such as community tourism 5240 and support for micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises. Strengthening national tourism agencies is singled out as vital. Switching to a shorter presentation prepared by Assistant Secretary Flax (currently at CTO Caribbean Week), the chair reiterates that tourism sustains jobs and businesses and that the forthcoming policy should shape opportunities for future generations.

What makes the BVI special and what students think about tourism careers

5245 The Ministry hopes to convene the recently appointed Tourism Ambassadors to hear their fresh perspectives. Meanwhile, a school-outreach session on Virgin Gorda revealed both enthusiasm and ambivalence: about half of the tenth- to twelfth-graders immediately connected tourism to their families' livelihoods, yet many hesitated to picture themselves working in the sector. Their comments centred on how technology and authentic local culture influence visitor perceptions, 5250 suggesting a communications gap that education could fill.

Embedding Customer-Service Standards through Regulation and Lifelong learning

Turning to institutional capacity, the chair notes that public servants must complete six "essential learning hours" per year. Other destinations—Cayman's PRIDE programme is cited—make customer-service and cultural-knowledge modules compulsory for both public officers and tourism businesses. The Virgin Islands once had a voluntary Tourism Industry Service Standards (TIS) programme run by the Tourist Board; the policy team now proposes binding standards instead. Possible levers include trade-licence renewals, work-permit approvals, and public-service training requirements. Delivery could be shared with existing institutions such as H. Lavity Stoutt Community College, rather than resting solely on the ministry.

New Customer-Service Certification with Regional Validation

Dr. Connie George, the Chief Educational Officer, announces that a contract with the Caribbean Examinations Council is nearly finalised to validate a comprehensive customer-service curriculum for the entire public service. The rollout will start with a "train-the-trainer" cohort and then expand to all staff. Unlike one-day workshops, the course will run six to eight months and culminate in a certificate recognised across the Caribbean, embedding customer-service excellence as a "way of life" rather than a one-off exercise.

Dr. George explains that the forthcoming customer-service curriculum, validated by the Caribbean Examinations Council, will be offered in progressive levels and culminate in a regionally recognised certificate. Although the aim is to reach the entire public service, the immediate target is to ensure that, over time, every Government office demonstrates uniform service standards. Parallel content tailored to law-enforcement personnel is being finalised, and meetings are under way to agree start-dates.

Linking Training, Performance Appraisals and Experiential Learning

Questions arise about how the six mandatory "essential learning hours" and the new appraisal forms—now featuring a customer-service metric—will dovetail with the training roll-out. The presenter insists that learning must be structured and experiential: reading a book or watching a video is inadequate. Change will come only when trained staff return to their units and model best practice, but participants press for clarity on who will enforce those standards and what consequences will follow if they are ignored.

Curriculum gaps and the early education challenge

An educator argues that the root problem lies earlier: many youths receive only cursory exposure to tourism concepts, leaving them unaware of career possibilities. Anecdotal evidence from summer camps shows that students often confuse "hospitality" with "hospital work," underscoring weaknesses in the school curriculum. She contends that tourism's evolving nature demands continuous, engaging instruction that sparks curiosity from a young age.

Human-capital Development as the Policy's Cornerstone

Building on her critique, the speaker frames human-capital development as the heart of any serious tourism policy. Policies succeed only if a well-trained workforce—front-line staff, chefs,

housekeepers, tour guides—implements them with professionalism and consistency. Given tourism's resilience through hurricanes and the pandemic, she urges educators to realign training with genuine industry needs so that the sector's economic promise is fully realised.

Barriers, stigma and a call for a BVI Institute of Tourism

The discussion turns to systemic barriers: a heavy reliance on expatriate labour, a lingering stigma that tourism work is "unintelligent," and sporadic training initiatives that lack follow-up and accountability. The newly created Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development can set standards, but the speaker proposes a dedicated Institute of Tourism—ideally housed at H. Lavity Stoutt Community College—to anchor workforce development, mirroring successful models in Jamaica and the Bahamas. She laments the tendency to overlook local capacity and stresses that institutionalising formal, measurable training will unlock the industry's full potential.

Towards a single "Institute of Tourism" and one common song sheet

Picking up where she left off, the HLSCC lecturer stresses that the Territory already owns globally recognised credentials—American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute modules, SERV Safe food-safety classes, and more—but people simply do not know they exist. Fragmentation, she argues, wastes resources: public servants preach one brand of service, schoolchildren hear another, and frontline staff practice a third. A centralised training arm, embedded in the national tourism policy, would align everyone "from one book," assuring that every agency, school and business is held to identical service standards and can be measured against a single yard-stick.

National Pride and the Kindergarten-to-Career Pipeline

What will truly differentiate the BVI from Jamaica, the Bahamas or the Philippines is not beaches but a well-trained, service-oriented workforce and an attitude shift that tourism is "everybody's business." She recounts visiting a Jamaican kindergarten festooned with national colours—an early, patriotic immersion that BVI children lack. The long-term vision, therefore, must be a curriculum that tracks seamlessly from kindergarten through tertiary studies, nurturing future tourism professionals who view the sector as a prestigious, viable career.

Why training must be centralised, structured and inclusive

The speaker sketches a triangular partnership—Education, Industry and Ministry—that funnels all hospitality training through a single clearing-house. Re-training immigration officers or taxi drivers in isolation will never work if follow-up is absent and materials ignore varied learning styles. Centralising programmes would guarantee consistent national standards, set clear professional benchmarks, bolster local pride and, ultimately, lift visitor satisfaction. HLSCC already owns the facilities and international syllabi—gold-seal chef, guest-service professional, front-office manager—so the task is to weave them into the forthcoming policy.

Service Excellence in Paradise—Practical Next Steps

To "deliver excellence in paradise," the Territory must treat every job—from pumping petrol to plating food—as part of the tourism value chain. The policy should require incoming hospitality workers to complete at least a basic history course and earn a recognised certificate so that "all of us are on the same page." She illustrates the sector's untapped human capital with a story of coaching a young man "off the corner" into culinary training, arguing that the right outreach can transform lives.

The Blue-Economy Dimension and HLSCC's Marine Capacities

An HLSCC representative broadens the lens: with "more tourism beds underwater than on land," the marine sector and coastal resilience must feature prominently in the policy's educational strand. The college's Marine Centre already hosts primary-school field visits that teach why plastics harm reefs; it can also deliver professional training to protect and monetise the blue economy for generations to come.

Toward Specialised Marine and Safety Courses

Although one marine lecturer is momentarily absent, colleagues outline concrete ideas: designing short courses on the blue economy for charter crews and marina staff; partnering with the Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority; and embedding rigorous safety modules so aspiring captains grasp the real responsibilities of seamanship. They echo the earlier call for local-history content, arguing that authentic knowledge of the BVI should sit alongside technical skills in any marine-tourism curriculum.

Short-course Ideas and the Missing Ingredient—Attitude

A marine-tourism instructor proposes bolt-on, "short-form" modules for charter crews—local history, reef etiquette, guest-safety briefings—so that would-be captains learn far more than boat handling. Yet she insists that even the best curricula will fail unless they tackle the deeper problem she encounters daily: young Virgin Islanders lack pride in the Territory and often regard tourism jobs as second-class. Training can convey facts, she argues, but only a cultural shift—comparable to Jamaica's daily rituals of flag-saluting and anthem-singing—will reset attitudes.

Culture, Accommodation and the Erosion of Local Distinctiveness

Participants lament that the BVI has stretched "accommodation" so far that its own identity has blurred. Leaders urge citizens to embrace everyone else's customs, yet seldom spotlight home-grown ones. The absence of traditional foods in mainstream restaurants (even venerable dishes such as mayonnaise sauce with bone-in fish) becomes a metaphor for wider cultural dilution. Unless the country re-centres its own story, they warn, talk of service standards will ring hollow.

5360   **Converging on a Solution: a Tourism Institute Anchored at HLSCC**

The Permanent Secretary distils the strongest thread: create a dedicated Institute of Tourism at H. Lavity Stoutt Community College. Such a hub could house workforce-development programmes, standardise service curricula, and incorporate marine and blue-economy training—responding to earlier calls for both land-based and underwater stewardship. The idea meets broad approval,

5365   positioning the college as the logical engine for a Territory-wide culture-and-service revolution.

Hands-on marine training and the case for compulsory learning

The Permanent Secretary reminds the room that HLSCC once ran robust STCW and hospitality programmes in which students dismantled engines, serviced refrigeration units and practised seamanship alongside guest care. Those offerings have "ebbed and flowed," but the new policy

5370   will hard-wire them back in by declaring that everyone who serves the tourism industry—directly or indirectly—must complete some form of accredited learning. The mechanism, he suggests, is to link training to trade licences, work permits, taxi and tour-operator approvals and any other regulatory triggers the ministry can influence.

From One-off Workshops to Annual continuing Professional Development

5375   For public officers, the fix is straightforward: six "essential learning hours" and a revamped performance-management system already exist. The policy will simply specify that those hours must include customer-service and tourism content every single year, ending the pattern of once-and-done workshops that fade from memory. The same principle—obligatory, annual continuing professional development—should extend to the private sector via licence conditions.

5380   **Reviving the Tourism Industry Service Standards (TIS) programme**

Attention turns to TIS, a two-volume, BVI-owned curriculum that once underpinned service training territory-wide. Participants insist the material is sound; the failure lay in poor delivery by untrained facilitators. The Permanent Secretary confirms he has digitised the binders and that the Cayman Islands' PRIDE scheme is essentially the same model.

5385   **Digitisation, Ownership and the Need for Mandatory Layers**

Because TIS belongs to the Virgin Islands, its content can be modernised and disseminated quickly. A marine-science lecturer adds that success in the yachting sector stems from mandatory safety certificates; the same logic should govern customer service, blue-economy awareness and environmental stewardship. If marina staff, schoolchildren and public servants all face firm

5390   requirements, the programme will gain traction and remain sustainable.

Embedding accountability in every evaluation and licence

Echoing that view, another speaker says each new module must be written into performance appraisals, school curricula and business regulations so that people know exactly "what the end

result should look like." Mandated training hours, measurable service standards and periodic re-certification will break down resistance over time.

Certification, licensing and the "hard choice"

The Permanent Secretary proposes a straightforward fix: make certification and periodic training prerequisites for every tourism-related licence—trade, taxi, tour-operator, even work-permit approvals. If companies want to benefit from Government marketing and the Tourist Board's brand, they must prove they can deliver service at the agreed benchmark.

Using licences as levers and keeping the policy above politics

Participants agree that "standards are standards," but one warns that too often national systems—education, health, infrastructure—are treated as partisan projects that shift with each administration. The Permanent Secretary concedes that resistance is inevitable, yet argues the business case is unassailable: without world-class service, the BVI will lose its competitive edge regardless of its natural beauty. Embedding standards in licensing is therefore a non-negotiable, long-term safeguard, not a political football.

How wide should the net be and how tough the process?

A marine educator asks what "every business" really means: must hardware stores such as Clarence Thomas Limited also comply, since locals and visitors shop there? The Permanent Secretary replies that food-handler rules once met similar resistance yet are now routine; a phased roll-out for service standards can follow the same path. Still, she presses for practical details—training intensity, resources, timelines—so the reforms do not collapse under their own weight. He agrees those questions must be answered but insists the principle is clear: consumers, whether tourists or residents, deserve respectful service everywhere they spend money.

Cayman's example and the airport litmus test

She cites a study visit to the Cayman Islands where national pride saturates every school wall, from glossy posters of national heroes to pristine flags. Returning home, she noticed the torn BVI emblem at the airport and the curt reception many residents endure at immigration. If the Virgin Islands want to embody hospitality, she argues, they must begin with visible symbols and welcoming behaviour at ports of entry, then extend those attitudes into classrooms and homes. A phased, education-led approach that starts with simple acts—displaying the flag, explaining the anthem's lyrics—can plant the pride that sustained service excellence ultimately requires.

Local cuisine as the missing link in cultural pride

The conversation drifts passionately into food, which the group treats as a barometer of national identity. Several speakers note that, in most restaurants, traditional dishes such as fungi and fish, peas soup, or bone-in fried snapper have vanished from dinner menus. One participant recalls a Caribbean country where every eatery, even foreign-branded ones, is legally required to list local food; another says she tasted authentic "stewed goat with peas and rice" in Turks and Caicos yet

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5430 cannot find equivalent BVI staples at home. They argue that if local dishes disappear, visitors are left with the same generic meals they can buy in Miami, and the Territory loses a principal expression of its uniqueness.

Mandating Standards so Authenticity survives

5435 Food becomes a proxy for wider service standards. The group agrees that, in the absence of enforceable benchmarks, restaurant owners will cook whatever sells fastest. One lecturer likens the situation to McDonald's: the chain offers predictability worldwide, and tourists expect the same reliability from a destination's signature dishes. If Government requires every menu to feature BVI classics—and links that rule to business licences—cultural authenticity and visitor satisfaction can rise together.

5440 ### Next-step anxieties: phasing, drafting and deadlines

Attention shifted to process. A participant asks for concrete milestones: when will public inputs be distilled, how will the policy be introduced to the wider community, and what phased actions will follow? The Permanent Secretary replies that he is about to "go into seclusion" to meet a self-imposed deadline: circulate a first draft by the end of June. All consultation minutes will be
5445 anonymised and published so no one can claim their voice was ignored. National identity, he adds, has emerged as a through-line from the initial summit to this meeting and will anchor a dedicated policy section.

A long-horizon rollout and the spectre of political change

Because the document aims to be transformative, the Secretary envisions a five- to ten-year
5450 horizon with staged implementation and continuous dialogue. The policy will sketch an "enabling environment" of new regulations—tying training and service standards to trade licences, work permits and sector certifications—but also acknowledge the cost and complexity of enforcement. Asked whether an election could derail the work, he insists that embedding standards in legislation and licensing, rather than in partisan programmes, will safeguard the roadmap whoever forms the
5455 next government.

Public service will lead by example

The Permanent Secretary notes that, because performance appraisals already require customer-service metrics, rolling out mandatory training inside Government should be straightforward: streamline the content, link it to certification, and model the very standards that will later be
5460 imposed on the private sector. If civil servants can show continuous learning, accountability, and courteous service, they will lend credibility to any wider mandate.

A living, contested policy that belongs to the whole country

He promises the consultation will not end here. Draft policy statements will circulate for critique, and the ensuing debate—sure to be vigorous—will decide "what we want as a country." Several

5465   participants echo that sentiment: the policy must capture a shared national vision rather than a Ministry's wish list.

A "soft-opening" of patriotism while the law catches up

5470   A creative educator proposes immediate, low-cost gestures that require no legislation: extend Virgin Islands Day into schools, teach the pledge and anthem with renewed emphasis, and flood everyday spaces with visual symbols—pins, flags, posters—so that residents can "see it and then live it." These incremental acts of patriotism, she argues, will build momentum and public buy-in while the formal policy winds its way through drafting and approval. The Permanent Secretary agrees that national-identity elements will be woven into the policy.

Consultation with the Public Service (VI Public Sector Learning Institute SESSION #1)
Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held at 11ᵗʰ June 2025

Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation with the Public Service:

1. **Youth Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Engagement**
   Stakeholders emphasized the importance of actively involving young people in tourism—not just as workers but as entrepreneurs and innovators. Examples included youth-led ideas like virtual reality experiences and immersive digital content.
2. **Diversification of Tourism Products**
   Participants advocated for the expansion of tourism offerings beyond traditional beach tourism, calling for increased support for sports tourism (e.g., water sports competitions), culinary experiences, hiking, ziplining, and cultural heritage events.
3. **Support for Cultural and Heritage Tourism**
   There was strong support for developing and promoting cultural and historical assets, including family-owned heritage homes, museums, artisan crafts, and performing arts. Stakeholders called for grants and incentives to help restore and market these experiences, even on private lands.
4. **Improved Cruise Passenger Engagement**
   Stakeholders urged the creation of platforms or programs that would connect cruise ship agents with local cultural tourism operators to promote authentic BVI experiences, aiming to convert day visitors into overnight guests.
5. **Accessibility and Inclusive Tourism**
   Feedback highlighted the need to enhance infrastructure for disabled tourists—such as wheelchair ramps, auditory crosswalk signals, and inclusive design features—to ensure all visitors and residents can access tourism spaces equitably.
6. **Digital Transformation and E-Government Services**
   Participants identified the need for digitized visitor services, such as apps, real-time data, and e-permitting. They supported a more integrated and seamless service experience across government agencies for both visitors and business stakeholders.
7. **Legal and Regulatory Reform for Ease of Doing Business**
   Several contributors called for reviewing and reforming the legal and administrative processes related to tourism—especially in the marine and cultural sectors—to reduce red tape and enhance service standards across the public sector.
8. **Environmental Sustainability and Circular Economy**
   Stakeholders raised issues about waste management, including derelict vehicles and sargassum seaweed. Suggestions included exploring recycling, resource recovery, and public-private partnerships to repurpose waste for environmental and tourism-related benefits.
9. **Leveraging Education and Local Institutions**
   The meeting acknowledged the value of institutions like the Virgin Islands Studies Institute and H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in providing cultural education and training for tourism professionals, including taxi operators.
10. **Performance Management and Customer Service Standards**
    Stakeholders supported embedding tourism-related service quality metrics into the public service performance management system. They also advocated for mandatory training in hospitality and customer service as part of essential learning hours for public officers.

Minutes

Introduction and Overview of the National Tourism Policy Process

5520   The session opened with greetings to public officers and an introduction to a comprehensive presentation on the Emergent National Tourism Policy. The Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development outlined the process and purpose of the session. The Ministry has conducted a series of consultations since January, starting with a tourism summit, to gather stakeholder input on the future direction of tourism in the Virgin Islands. Two presentations were scheduled: one to contextualize

5525   the policy and the second, by Assistant Secretary Sasha Flax, to explain its implications for the public service. Emphasis was placed on interactivity, inviting participation through chat or audio. The presentation highlighted that tourism is a major economic pillar, contributing an estimated 52% to the Virgin Islands' GDP in 2023, as per the World Travel and Tourism Council. This figure includes both direct spending and broader economic linkages such as infrastructure and supply chain investments.

5530   **Framing Tourism Through Sustainability**

The policy is framed through the lens of sustainable development, balancing economic benefit with social and environmental responsibility. The speaker referenced three key frameworks for understanding sustainable tourism: (1) the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which promotes consideration of economic, social, and environmental outcomes; (2) the United Nations Environment

5535   Programme (UNEP), emphasizing cultural respect, environmental impact, and long-term viability; and (3) the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which focuses on biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage, and responsible tourism.

Emphasizing Service Quality and Guest Experience

A major priority of the policy is linking service quality directly to economic outcomes and sustainability.

5540   It was noted that all interactions with guests shape their overall experience and satisfaction. The guest experience must be seamless—from pre-arrival to departure—with authentic, immersive offerings that highlight the territory's cultural and natural heritage. The speaker stressed that service quality is a joint responsibility of both public and private sectors. Public officers in particular must play an active role in delivering high-quality services. There is a clear connection between satisfied guests, their likelihood of

5545   returning or spending more, and broader economic sustainability. The government aims to promote eco-friendly accommodations, responsible transport, and ethical tourism, ensuring that the tourism ecosystem functions harmoniously to deliver positive outcomes.

Inclusive Engagement and National-Regional Alignment

The Ministry has conducted extensive stakeholder engagement across the Territory, including five major

5550   consultations on Tortola and the Sister Islands, as well as sector-specific meetings. These sessions include representatives from business, communities, NGOs, and government. The policy will define key interventions—regulatory, fiscal, and programmatic—to support sectoral growth and diversification over a 5- to 10-year horizon. Importantly, the policy integrates feedback from the January 2024 OECS regional tourism policy consultations, in which the Virgin Islands played a key role. The national policy will adopt

5555   and adapt the OECS framework, ensuring alignment with regional priorities and continuity with national goals outlined in the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP). Evidence-based decision-making, partnership between public and private sectors, and systematic monitoring and evaluation are key principles driving the process.

Core Policy Framework: The "House with Eight Windows"

5560   The framework for the national tourism policy is metaphorically described as a house with eight "windows," each representing a thematic pillar supporting sustainability, resilience, innovation, and inclusive development. These include:

1. **Inclusivity and Income Distribution:** Emphasis on community tourism and policies that support MSMEs.
5565   2. **Blue Economy:** Builds on the existing Blue Economy Roadmap to integrate ocean-based development sustainably.
3. **Climate Change and Risk Resilience:** Links tourism policy with national climate and disaster management strategies.
4. **Product and Niche Market Development:** Promotes responsible management of natural and 5570   cultural resources as tourism assets.
5. **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Protection:** Advocates for conservation of coral reefs, seagrass beds, and overall natural resource sustainability.
6. **Transport and Logistics:** Addresses accessibility and the efficient movement of visitors to and within the Territory.
5575   7. **Destination Management:** Manages the diversity of visitor expectations from cruise passengers to luxury travellers.
8. **Institutional Capacity:** Focuses on enhancing public sector readiness and service delivery to support tourism sector development internally and externally.

The policy thus proposes an integrated, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to sustainable 5580   tourism development, aiming to position the Virgin Islands as a leading destination built on high-quality service, environmental stewardship, and inclusive economic growth.

Policy Themes: Sector Linkages and Environmental Stewardship

This segment continued the presentation of the national tourism policy framework, emphasizing how the Virgin Islands aims to integrate youth empowerment, entrepreneurship, and value-added services into the 5585   tourism sector. The discussion explored the enhancement of value chains and cross-sector linkages to stimulate equitable income distribution. "Blue tourism" was identified as a priority area, with efforts focused on expanding the charter yacht sector responsibly, restoring coral reefs, enhancing coastal zone management, and better planning the use of beaches. The Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change was acknowledged for its ongoing work in these areas.

5590   The climate resilience section underscored adaptation and mitigation strategies, including alternative energy use, carbon neutrality, and sargassum control. A key focus was building resilience for emergencies and climate-related hazards. Product and niche market development included elevating cultural events, festivals, culinary experiences, and increasing protected areas. Concepts such as World Heritage designation, product grading and certification, and wheelchair accessibility were introduced.

5595   Biodiversity protection measures included reducing waste, fostering a circular economy, banning plastics and styrofoam, and conserving energy and water. The section on transport and access addressed both inbound and intra-island mobility, advocating for efficient and sustainable air, sea, and land transport systems. Destination management requires data-driven approaches, such as tourism satellite accounts, to measure capacity and visitor impacts. Lastly, the segment stressed institutional strengthening, staff 5600   development, labour market research, and maintaining effective partnerships at national, regional, and international levels to support sectoral growth.

Public Sector's Role in Delivering Tourism Policy

Assistant Secretary Sasha Flax took over the presentation to discuss the vital role of public officers in supporting the National Tourism Policy. She explained that the session aimed to familiarize officers with the policy's vision and goals while highlighting their responsibility in ensuring a world-class visitor experience. The policy is meant to provide strategic direction, promote sustainability and competitiveness, and align with national objectives such as job creation, economic resilience, and investment attraction.

Public officers were reminded that they serve as ambassadors of the Virgin Islands and should uphold high customer service standards in all public interactions. Their duties—ranging from processing licenses and managing port operations to facilitating event—directly affect visitor experiences. Officers are encouraged to participate in training, particularly through VIPSLI (Virgin Islands Public Service Learning Institute), to better understand tourism-related service expectations. To encourage participation, three questions were posed for public engagement: what policies would help officers serve visitors better, what gaps exist in the current framework, and how can departments contribute to tourism goals?

Stakeholder Engagement: Measuring Economic Impact and Cruise Tourism Strategy

In the ensuing discussion, a participant inquired about how the ministry measures economic returns from marine-based tourism. The Permanent Secretary responded that the ministry will collaborate with the Ministry of Financial Services and Economic Development and the Central Statistics Office to create indicators that better quantify tourism's economic returns. Traditional metrics like permit numbers and revenue collections are useful but limited. More comprehensive tools like tourism satellite accounts are being considered to evaluate how and where money is spent, including guest satisfaction levels and perceptions of service delivery. These tools will help to provide a full picture of tourism's economic contribution, especially in niche areas like marine tourism.

Another question concerned increasing cruise ship arrivals. It was explained that while the government is working with the BVI Ports Authority to attract more ships, there is a conscious effort to balance this with environmental sustainability and the destination's carrying capacity. The goal is also to convert cruise visitors into overnight guests. Sites like Cane Garden Bay and The Baths are under strain from high visitation, so any increase in arrivals must be carefully managed.

Additional comments from the chat were acknowledged. One suggestion was for mandatory, ongoing customer service training for port entry officers. The ministry responded by describing efforts to embed customer service training within essential public service learning hours. They plan to collaborate with VIPSLI, the Deputy Governor's Office, and other partners to offer formal and informal learning opportunities, including desktop modules and partnerships with the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College. Performance appraisals will include customer service metrics to ensure accountability.

A final concern was raised about the visibility of the BVI in international tourism markets, particularly in locations with large BVI diaspora populations. The ministry clarified that the BVI Tourist Board actively promotes the territory abroad, having recently conducted sales and marketing missions in Europe and New York. There is also recognition that Virgin Islanders abroad serve as unofficial ambassadors and can be further engaged in international promotion efforts. The session concluded just as a question was raised about the BVI's ranking in cruise ship arrivals.

Cruise Arrivals, Youth Engagement, and Diversified Tourism Experiences

The discussion opened with a question about the Virgin Islands' cruise tourism ranking in the Caribbean.
While the exact position was not known at the time, it was confirmed that the Caribbean Tourism
Organization tracks such data and that this information can be incorporated into future reporting. The
session then shifted to youth engagement. Participants were informed that the tourism policy deliberately
includes strategies to empower young people as entrepreneurs and future leaders, not merely workers in the
industry. This includes outreach to educational institutions such as the Bregado Flax Educational Centre
and Elmore Stoutt High School, and integration with programs like the Young Tourism Ambassadors, led
by the BVI Tourist Board. A notable student suggestion involved using virtual reality to market the Virgin
Islands, highlighting youth-led innovation and entrepreneurial potential. The Ministry aims to promote such
forward-thinking contributions.

Renee Pickering suggested diversifying tourism services beyond beach activities, advocating for the
promotion of experiences like ziplining and guided adventures. The Ministry confirmed that more work is
underway, particularly with the Tourist Board, to present sample itineraries to cruise passengers and
overnight guests. The conversation then pivoted to tourist attractions, with broad support for expanding
culinary, sports, and cultural tourism offerings. Events like the recent football match between the Virgin
Islands and Jamaica showcased the potential to blend tourism with entertainment and culture.

Digital Transformation and E-Government Integration

A question was raised about the role of digital transformation in enhancing the visitor experience. In
response, the Ministry acknowledged that digital transformation is vital and that the Ministry of Financial
Services and Digital Transformation is leading the charge. Several government services are already being
digitized, including border and labour management systems, and the online payment of fees. The intention
is to continue this trend across departments to streamline service delivery, particularly for tourism-related
business licensing and permitting.

The conversation emphasized that digitalization must support both external clients (visitors and businesses)
and internal government users. This includes trade licenses, immigration permits, and other services that
facilitate private sector operations. There is also interest in developing visitor apps, real-time data sharing,
and greater inter-agency tech integration. The Ministry sees the private sector, particularly youth and start-
ups, playing a key role in developing digital tools for visitors, while the government focuses on data
harmonization and creating a "culture of data sharing" across ministries. This will improve service quality
and also strengthen the ability to monitor and evaluate tourism's economic impact.

Regulatory Challenges and Legal Frameworks

Legal and administrative hurdles were discussed next, with the Ministry acknowledging that service
delivery, particularly in the marine sector, is often impeded by bureaucratic permitting and reporting
processes. The national tourism policy seeks to identify these challenges and address them through
improved regulatory and legal frameworks. This includes establishing service standards, redress
mechanisms for tourists, and exploring legislation to support compliance. One attendee proposed
conducting visitor surveys at ports of entry, with incentives to improve response rates. This would help
gather data on tourist satisfaction and enhance service delivery.

Other concerns raised included the cultural authenticity of the Tortola Pier Park and the limited offerings
beyond standard retail shops. In response, the Ministry recognized the need for more cultural integration.
A particularly complex issue was raised about the potential for overnight cruise stays, which are currently

5685 limited by the Territory's restrictions on gambling. If overnight cruising is to be pursued as a policy goal, reform of the gambling legislation may be necessary to align with that objective. The Ministry indicated this would require broader consultation and policy coherence.

5690 Accessibility for disabled visitors was also raised. This prompted a discussion on inclusive design, including sidewalk infrastructure, audio-visual signage, wheelchair access to public and private buildings, and dedicated parking for accessible tourism transport. The Ministry agreed that universal design principles should guide both public infrastructure and private facilities and committed to ongoing partnerships with the Ministry of Communications and Works to address these gaps. Finally, the Road Town Development Partnership was referenced as a model of public-private collaboration aimed at revitalizing the capital and embedding accessibility and design improvements into broader urban development goals.

5695 **Sports and Cultural Tourism Development**

The discussion resumed with a focus on sports tourism, prompted by a participant's suggestion to explore water sports competitions, inter-island meets, and wellness tourism for professional athletes. The Ministry acknowledged that while the Virgin Islands may lack the infrastructure for large-scale international sporting events, it has a wealth of natural marine resources that could support such initiatives. Stakeholder
5700 consultations have also included discussion of events like Spartan races. The lack of horse racing was raised as a tourism concern, particularly given the historical inter-island races with the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Ministry acknowledged the issue as ongoing and worthy of further attention.

The conversation then shifted to cultural tourism. Participants highlighted the need to connect cultural tourism businesses with cruise ship agents to promote authentic Virgin Islands experiences. The Ministry
5705 indicated that strategies like "A Taste of the BVI" programs for cruise guests are being considered to foster cultural immersion within short visit windows. The importance of supporting the artisan community, including painters, craftspeople, and performers, was also emphasized. There is an emerging recognition of the economic potential in promoting and monetizing culture—particularly through stronger connections with the cruise industry and improved visibility of diverse creative offerings.

5710 **Affordability, Heritage Restoration, and Incentives for Private Participation**

A question was raised about whether the policy addresses pricing of essential services such as inter-island ferry travel. While pricing has not been a central focus of the current policy, the Ministry acknowledged that affordability impacts accessibility and should be considered in future engagements with the relevant agencies.

5715 Another participant inquired about grants or other financial support for families seeking to restore historical homes for tourism use. The Ministry responded affirmatively, explaining that most heritage buildings in the Virgin Islands are privately owned, which presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The policy will seek to create an enabling environment for private conservation efforts through potential incentives, marketing support, and capacity-building measures. This aligns with the broader objective of equitable
5720 income distribution and expanding the diversity of tourism offerings by encouraging cultural experiences rooted in local history.

Medical Tourism and Built Infrastructure for Culture

Medical tourism has not yet been explicitly included in the tourism policy, but it is expected to be a component of the upcoming national tourism strategy. Related initiatives, such as the partnership with
5725 Ponce Health Sciences University, are already laying a foundation for this niche by attracting students and

faculty to the Territory. Their presence introduces a new demographic that could be engaged in cultural experiences.

Comments also touched on the need to improve public amenities and cultural infrastructure in Road Town. Suggestions included providing better wheelchair access, public art, museums, and interactive cultural spaces. A proposal to explore the conversion of sargassum (accumulating in central areas like the Road Town Ferry Dock) into usable resources such as fertilizer or construction material was raised. The Ministry acknowledged that while the idea is promising, sargassum contains heavy metals like arsenic that complicate its safe reuse, particularly in agriculture. However, regional collaboration continues to explore responsible ways of turning the seasonal resource into economic opportunity.

Heritage Sites, Museums, and Historic Buildings

The Ministry addressed a question about incorporating the old Main Street prison into tourism. It was clarified that the prison is already used for historical tours, which highlight key events and personalities tied to the site. Far from glamorizing crime, the tours aim to present an honest historical narrative. Plans are also in motion to restore other cultural assets such as the Sugar Works Museum and possibly the Folk Museum, which was lost during Hurricane Irma.

Participants raised additional questions regarding the enhancement of government buildings and public spaces for tourism. Sir Olva Georges' Plaza, and the old administration building were cited as examples. The Ministry emphasized the historical value of these sites and shared that the annex of the old administration building has been handed over to the Archives Unit for restoration and use. This is part of a broader effort to rehabilitate important structures, both for archival purposes and for use as museums or cultural education spaces. These efforts involve collaboration with the Deputy Governor's Office to ensure structural integrity and strategic tourism use.

As for the waterfront boardwalk, it remains under discussion within the Road Town Development Partnership. The goal is to extend the boardwalk from Queen Elizabeth Park along the waterfront to the Pier Park, enhancing walkability, public engagement, and overall visitor experience.

Strengthening Cruise-Cultural Business Linkages

A final suggestion proposed the creation of a platform to educate and prepare cultural tourism businesses to engage effectively with cruise ship agents before guests arrive. The Ministry welcomed the idea, confirming that such an initiative aligns with ongoing priorities and can be developed in partnership with the BVI Tourist Board and the Department of Culture. This platform would help build stronger commercial linkages between local businesses and cruise lines, ensuring better coordination, cultural representation, and economic inclusion within the sector.

Policy Support for Private Heritage Preservation

The final phase of the consultation addressed questions on protecting and promoting historic sites located on private land. The Ministry confirmed that under the National Parks Act, there exists a little-used provision for conservation agreements—tripartite arrangements between the government, the National Parks Trust, and private landowners. This mechanism can facilitate the preservation and public engagement of historic sites while ensuring that benefits may also accrue to private individuals or families who own them. The Ministry acknowledged that incentives such as grants for restoration and access promotion are being considered as part of the enabling framework for cultural tourism development. Sites like "the

dungeon," although privately owned and underutilized, were cited as opportunities for greater heritage tourism through strategic partnerships.

Sustainable Resource Use and Recycling Opportunities

5770 Questions then turned to environmental sustainability. Sharon Ellis asked whether funds are returned to the public after the export of derelict vehicles and whether metal waste could be monetized to support environmental efforts. The Ministry clarified that, to its knowledge, the disposal of derelict vehicles typically incurs a public cost rather than generating revenue, though further confirmation from the Ministry of Health and Social Development was suggested. The conversation shifted to broader possibilities for recycling and circular economy initiatives, including ongoing work with non-profit groups like Green VI.

5775 The reuse of materials such as plastics and metals, and the past use of vessels as artificial reefs, were noted as areas of exploration. Opportunities remain for more structured approaches to managing waste streams within the tourism policy framework.

Sheldon Walters also contributed by highlighting the work of the Virgin Islands Studies Institute in delivering short courses in Virgin Islands cultural education, especially aimed at tourism workers like taxi

5780 operators. The Ministry affirmed its commitment to utilizing such local resources—including work by Dr. Angel Smith—and integrating them into both the tourism policy and the forthcoming tourism strategy.

Stakeholder Participation and Policy Formulation Process

The Ministry reiterated its inclusive, consultative approach to developing the National Tourism Policy, emphasizing that minutes are taken and preserved from every stakeholder meeting. These records will be

5785 published and formally inform the policy, ensuring it remains stakeholder-led. Participants were invited to send further comments and suggestions to the Ministry's official email and to complete the evaluation form provided by VIPSLI. Feedback is seen as essential not only for improving the current session but also for shaping the broader policy framework. The Ministry reaffirmed that a similar session would be held later in the day to engage more public officers in this process.

5790 **Final Reflections on Workforce Development and Service Excellence**

A final contribution from Ms. Tanya Charles, representing the Department of Human Resources, emphasized HR's role in supporting tourism through training, policy development, and partnership with institutions like the Tourist Board and the private sector. She highlighted programs to enhance hospitality training, language skills, and seasonal apprenticeship initiatives that align HR practices with sustainable

5795 tourism objectives. The Ministry acknowledged this important role, affirming that public officers must meet service expectations comparable to the private sector. Accountability through performance management, training through VIPSLI, and collaboration with tertiary institutions and training providers were underscored as essential components of public sector readiness in the tourism domain.

The session closed with expressions of appreciation from the Permanent Secretary, Joseph Smith-Abbott,

5800 and Assistant Secretary Sasha Flax. Participants were thanked for their contributions and encouraged once more to complete the evaluation form, reinforcing the VIPSLI's commitment to responsive, participatory policy development that supports continuous learning and service excellence across the public service.

Consultation with the Public Service (VI Public Sector Learning Institute SESSION #2) –

Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held at 11ᵗʰ June 2025

Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation with the Public Service:

1. **Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities Must Be Improved**
   Stakeholders highlighted that travellers with physical challenges face significant barriers, starting at ports and extending to accommodations and attractions. Recommendations included redesigning public infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, parking, building access) and better accessibility in both public and private sector facilities.

2. **Public Officers Play a Central Role in Visitor Experience**
   Participants recognized that all public officers, regardless of their role, contribute to tourism—whether directly through visitor-facing services or indirectly through licensing, permitting, and administrative support. There was consensus that improving internal service delivery would also improve external outcomes.

3. **Customer Service Standards Need Enhancement**
   There was support for improving consistency, courtesy, and knowledge in public service interactions with visitors. Training, including experiential learning and desktop exercises, was welcomed as a way to raise service quality across government.

4. **Greater Workforce Development and Inclusion is Required**
   The Labour Department emphasized the importance of ensuring fair labour practices, workforce training, and youth engagement in tourism. The policy must create enabling environments for greater participation of Virgin Islanders and Belongers in the tourism economy.

5. **Robust Data Collection and Monitoring is Essential**
   Stakeholders called for the use of tourism satellite accounts and better metrics beyond visitor arrivals. Expenditure data, workforce conditions, and satisfaction metrics were cited as critical to understanding and improving tourism's performance.

6. **Cross-Government Partnerships Must Be Strengthened**
   Various ministries and departments acknowledged the need for closer collaboration, especially between tourism, labour, statistics, infrastructure, and environment, to support comprehensive and coordinated tourism policy implementation.

7. **Environmental Sustainability and Resilience Require Active Management**
   Feedback emphasized the importance of managing coastal impacts (e.g., sargassum, reef degradation), enhancing environmental impact assessments, and leveraging marine protected areas for blue tourism, in partnership with environmental agencies.

8. **Cultural Heritage and Regional Integration Should Be Prioritized**
   Stakeholders advocated for greater emphasis on cultural tourism, including events, festivals, culinary experiences, and leveraging opportunities for intra-regional tourism from other Caribbean countries. Potential designation of World Heritage Sites was also discussed.

9. **Institutional Capacity Must be Strengthened**
   Concerns were raised about the need for a more robust institutional framework to support tourism. Strengthening national tourism agencies and interagency coordination was seen as critical for service quality and strategic oversight.

10. **Ongoing Feedback and Inclusive Policy-Making is Valued**
    Participants appreciated the opportunity to contribute and encouraged continued engagement through sessions like this. The commitment to incorporating feedback into the final policy draft was acknowledged as a positive step toward inclusive governance.

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5850 **Opening Remarks and the Economic Importance of Tourism**

Permanent Secretary Joseph Smith-Abbott opened the session by welcoming participants and introducing the learning opportunity organized through VPSLI. He emphasized that the development of the national tourism policy builds upon extensive stakeholder engagement across the Virgin Islands, including meetings on the sister islands and with sector-specific partners. The policy aims to address key challenges while
5855 charting a clear developmental direction for tourism.

Smith-Abbott presented macroeconomic data, noting that for 2024, the Virgin Islands' nominal GDP was projected at $1.75 billion, with real GDP at $1.6 billion. He highlighted the economic weight of the tourism sector, which contributes approximately 52% to the national economy. This figure includes both direct spending—such as accommodation and services—and indirect contributions, such as infrastructure
5860 investment and supply chain activity.

Framing the Policy through the Lens of Sustainability

The national tourism policy is framed with sustainability at its core, aiming to balance environmental, social, and economic considerations. Smith-Abbott referred to the United Nations World Tourism Organization's definition of sustainable tourism, which emphasizes minimizing negative impacts while
5865 maximizing stakeholder benefits.

International Definitions of Sustainable Tourism

He expanded the discussion by including definitions from the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. These emphasize the respect for local culture, biodiversity conservation, minimal environmental footprint, and long-term economic viability. The Virgin
5870 Islands' natural and cultural heritage plays a key role in shaping this sustainability vision.

He noted a specific focus on the link between service quality and sustainability, stating that guest experiences—whether positive or negative—affect both satisfaction and long-term sector performance. The policy seeks to engage public and private stakeholders in enhancing service quality, highlighting their mutual responsibility.

5875 **Linking Guest Experience to Economic Development**

Smith-Abbott stressed the importance of aligning guest satisfaction with long-term economic growth. The Virgin Islands has a tradition of attracting repeat visitors, which underscores the value of consistently high-quality guest experiences. The policy aims to shape the tourist's journey from pre-arrival through to departure, ensuring a seamless and enriching experience throughout.

5880 He highlighted the importance of pre-arrival engagement, such as providing clear and compelling information that enhances anticipation and ease of travel. This strategy positions tourism as an ongoing relationship rather than a one-off transaction.

Sustainability through Hospitality, Stakeholder Engagement, and the OECS Framework

The guest experience, once in the territory, should be immersive and culturally rich, fostering connections
5885 with both the people and the environment. Sustainable tourism also involves eco-friendly practices, ethical tourism, and responsible transport.

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He described the collaborative development of the policy, incorporating feedback from communities, businesses, NGOs, and government. These efforts aim to produce a policy that not only guides sustainable tourism practices but also outlines enabling frameworks—regulatory, fiscal, and operational.

5890   Importantly, he referenced the Virgin Islands' role in contributing to the formulation of the OECS Regional Tourism Policy during five days of consultations in January 2024. These discussions involved high-level OECS representatives and provided critical insight that will be integrated into the national policy. The OECS policy has since been endorsed by the Council of Ministers and published.

The 2025 Tourism Summit and Continued Stakeholder Engagement

5895   The current policy development process was formally launched during the 2025 Tourism Summit held on Peter Island. The summit included broad participation from across the tourism value chain. Smith-Abbott noted that more than 13 stakeholder meetings have since been held, gathering extensive feedback that is shaping the policy. The national policy draws upon the OECS model tourism policy as a guiding template.

Guiding Principles: Sustainability, Evidence-Based Decisions, and Collaboration

5900   Smith-Abbott outlined the guiding principles of the national tourism policy. It is grounded in the National Sustainable Development Plan, will rely on data and evidence from consultations, and emphasizes public-private partnerships. The collaborative and integrative nature of the tourism sector is central to how the policy will be implemented. These principles will underpin not only policy design but also its long-term delivery.

5905   **Policy Pillars: The "Eight Windows" for Sustainable Tourism Development**

To promote sustainability, innovation, resilience, and inclusive economic growth, the policy is structured around eight thematic "windows":

1. **Inclusivity and Income Distribution** – Addressing how benefits are shared, particularly among MSMEs and communities.
5910   2. **Blue Economy** – Building on decades of marine-based tourism experience and aligning with the Blue Economy Roadmap.
3. **Climate Change and Resilience** – Integrating the national climate change policy and disaster management strategy to address environmental risks.
4. **Product and Niche Market Development** – Supporting various segments such as sports tourism
5915   and entertainment.
5. **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Protection** – Emphasizing conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.
6. **Transport and Accessibility** – Managing entry and internal movement, improving distribution of tourists across locations.
5920   7. **Destination Management and Capacity** – Monitoring strain on amenities and improving visitor flow management.
8. **Institutional Capacity** – Strengthening the capabilities of public agencies and institutions that support tourism.

He elaborated particularly on **inclusive growth**, noting the importance of empowering youth, fostering
5925   entrepreneurship, and ensuring that economic activity benefits local communities. He concluded by affirming that the policy would seek to create meaningful sector linkages and maximize value across all tourism-related activities.

Strengthening the Public Service Role in Tourism

Assistant Secretary Sasha Flax commenced her presentation by outlining the purpose of the session: to solicit input from public officers in shaping the national tourism policy. She emphasized the dual aim of familiarizing public officers with the policy's vision and encouraging understanding of their role in delivering a world-class visitor experience. The policy prioritizes sustainability, competitiveness, and alignment with national priorities such as economic resilience, job creation, and investment attraction. A critical pillar of the policy is the integration of stakeholder voices, ensuring that the perspectives of public officers are included in future directions for the tourism industry.

Flax underscored that public officers serve as ambassadors for the Virgin Islands. Their customer-facing roles—whether at ports, licensing agencies, or public events—shape visitor experiences. Consequently, there is a concerted effort to embed high customer service standards across all ministries and departments. These standards include courtesy, knowledge, and efficiency, with internal service delivery also influencing external outcomes. Participation in training initiatives such as those provided through the Virgin Islands Public Service Learning Institute (VIPSLI) is encouraged to reinforce these values.

Framing the Dialogue: Key Questions for Public Officers

To initiate feedback, three guiding questions were posed:

1. What policies or support would help you deliver better service to visitors?
2. Are there any gaps or missed opportunities that the policy should address?
3. How can your department or ministry contribute to achieving tourism goals?

Participants were invited to respond verbally or via the chat function.

Role of Learning and Development in Enhancing Service Delivery

Smith-Abbott returned to emphasize the importance of structured learning as part of public service professional development. He described current engagements with the Public Service Learning Institute, the Deputy Governor's Office Customer Service Unit, and the Public Sector Transformation Programmes Unit. Together, these entities are working to create tailored training pathways that include experiential learning for frontline staff and desktop exercises such as the current session.

He noted ongoing collaborations with H. Lavity Stoutt Community College to broaden the offerings available to public officers. These learning activities support the fulfilment of essential learning hours and also contribute to the performance management framework, which now includes customer service as a measurable result area across all public service grades. Additionally, mechanisms like the RATAs (Real-time Assessment Tools for Accountability and Service) will be used to assess customer service delivery independently. Smith-Abbott stressed that creating additional learning and assessment opportunities is key to reinforcing a culture of service excellence in the public sector.

Comments from Participants: Accessibility and Workforce Development

Mr. S. Walters raised an important issue: many travellers with physical challenges face barriers to accessing and exploring the Territory, starting at entry points such as ports and extending to hotels and attractions. Smith-Abbott acknowledged this gap and agreed that accessibility must be a central consideration in tourism policy and planning. He cited ongoing collaboration between the Ministry, private sector, and the

Recovery and Development Agency to redevelop Road Town, where they aim to pilot universal design elements such as wheelchair-accessible sidewalks. He also stressed the importance of designated parking for persons with disabilities and incorporating accessibility into the design of all public and private facilities, including hotels.

Mr. Davis from the Department of Labour emphasized workforce development, fair labour practices, and support for the tourism sector's economic viability. Smith-Abbott affirmed this contribution, stressing the need for detailed labour market data and continuous training to ensure tourism workers are supported, fairly treated, and properly equipped. He noted that the national policy will explicitly support youth participation, and the inclusion of Virgin Islanders and Belongers in the sector.

Labour and Monitoring: Building a Strong Evidence Base

The discussion continued on the theme of workforce development. Smith-Abbott explained that collaboration with the Labour Department is critical for collecting data on skills gaps, wage levels, and working conditions in tourism. This will support policy mechanisms for ongoing training, fair employment practices, and the evaluation of worker satisfaction. These indicators will help ensure the workforce is empowered and aligned with the goals of sustainable tourism growth.

A question from Mr. Walters asked which local entity is responsible for tracking the health of the tourism industry. Smith-Abbott responded that while the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development is still relatively new, it is working to establish monitoring mechanisms alongside the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the BVI Tourist Board. These partnerships, including collaborations with regional organizations like the Caribbean Tourism Organization and the OECS, provide insight into sector trends. He indicated that Mr. Tyson from the CSO would contribute further, underlining the importance of robust data and monitoring systems.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Workforce Inclusion

The conversation transitioned to how the tourism policy will incorporate key performance indicators (KPIs) to track not only the implementation of initiatives but also their overall success and challenges. Joseph Smith-Abbott reiterated the importance of capturing workforce data as part of understanding the health of the tourism sector. This includes how workers are faring, their satisfaction, and the adequacy of support systems.

Mr. Tyson from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) contributed a key point: tracking tourism requires more than arrival figures. It demands robust tourism expenditure estimates and tourism satellite accounts, which provide detailed data on how visitors spend, interact, and engage with services and destinations. Smith-Abbott supported this view, affirming that partnerships with CSO will be central in shifting beyond traditional metrics to richer data sources that can inform better decision-making and policy refinement.

He highlighted the indirect yet essential roles of various departments such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, whose licensing of vehicles and tour operators directly affects visitor safety and service standards. Public officers were reminded that even non-customer-facing roles support tourism in meaningful ways, contributing to the seamless delivery of services that underpin visitor satisfaction.

Next Steps and Closing Remarks

As the session drew to a close, Smith-Abbott outlined the next steps in the policy development process. The Ministry will compile all feedback gathered over the last five to six months—including from this session—to prepare a first draft of the national tourism policy by the end of the month. Participants were

reminded that feedback remains welcome even after the session, and a dedicated email address (mtcsd@gov.vg) was shared for additional submissions.

Cruise Tourism

Insights, Stakeholder-Recommended Policy Options and Minutes of the sector meeting held on the 15th May 2025

Key Takeaways from the Tourism Policy Stakeholder Consultation on Cruise Tourism

1. **Strengthen Authentic Cultural and Culinary Experiences**
   There was strong support for enhancing visitor experiences through local cuisine and cultural storytelling. Stakeholders urged the promotion of national dishes and immersive experiences like boxed picnic meals with fungi and fish, integrating culinary arts students into the value chain.

2. **Improve Infrastructure and Site Access**
   Calls were made for better maintenance and access to heritage sites, improved sidewalks, landscaping, and public restrooms. These improvements are essential for evenly distributing cruise traffic and improving the visitor experience across lesser-known locations like Brewer's Bay and Anegada.

3. **Address Service Quality Through Education and Training**
   Participants stressed the need to improve customer service, distinguishing between service and servitude, and embedding tourism appreciation into the school curriculum. There were also concerns about the quality and depth of taxi and tour guide training, with suggestions to involve HLSCC in designing formal certification.

4. **Enhance Urban Aesthetics and Regulate Informal Activities**
   Stakeholders raised concerns about the visual clutter and informal vendor sprawl around Tortola Pier Park. Suggestions included clustering food trucks in a regulated area with proper infrastructure to reduce strain on formal businesses and improve the tourism environment.

5. **Resolve Gaps in Trade Licensing and Enforcement**
   Frustration was expressed over the issuance of trade licenses to non-residents without alignment with Belonger status or sustainability considerations. Participants called for greater consistency, transparency, and policy coherence between departments.

6. **Define and Enforce Carrying Capacity Limits**
   Concerns were raised about environmental and infrastructural strain during high-traffic cruise days, particularly on iconic sites like The Baths. Stakeholders proposed implementing clear carrying capacity policies and dispersing visitor traffic to other islands using solutions like seaplanes.

7. **Modernize Planning and Environmental Legislation**
   Participants supported the swift enactment of the Environment Bill and the reform of Town and Country Planning laws to better regulate development, manage runoff, and preserve green space through innovative solutions like rooftop gardens.

8. **Capitalize on Cruise Homeporting and Gaming Opportunities**
   Stakeholders highlighted homeporting as a key growth area and questioned the stalled implementation of gaming legislation. The Premier acknowledged this and stated that work is ongoing to establish the Gaming Commission, enabling longer cruise stays and economic diversification.

9. **Link Tourism to the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP)**
There was a recurring call to embed tourism policy within the broader NSDP goals—particularly education, health, and youth engagement—framing tourism not just as an economic driver but as a vehicle for inclusive national development.

10. **Stakeholders Expect Action, Not Just Consultation**
The Premier acknowledged that the issues raised were well known and that the next step is implementation and accountability. Stakeholders emphasized the need for decisive follow-through and faster bureaucratic responsiveness to long-standing issues.

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Minutes

Introduction and Economic Significance of Tourism

The session opens with a grounding in practical experience, emphasizing that tourism policy should reflect insights gained directly from engagement with visitors on the ground. The presenter transitions into a macroeconomic overview, referencing data from the Ministry of Finance's 2023 review. The total GDP of the Virgin Islands is estimated at $1.6 billion, and tourism contributes approximately 52% to this figure. This underscores tourism's foundational role in the national economy.

Defining Sustainable Tourism

The definition of sustainable tourism is drawn from international organizations such as the UN World Tourism Organization and the IUCN. Sustainable tourism is described as balancing economic, environmental, and social priorities, ensuring all stakeholders benefit—from airport greeters and taxi drivers to tour guides and service providers. Emphasis is placed on the uniqueness of the Virgin Islands' natural environment, with examples like the Anegada iguana and pink flamingos cited as valuable assets in biodiversity that require conservation. The presentation also stresses that guest satisfaction is directly linked to environmental preservation and high-quality service standards.

Quality, Responsibility, and Economic Impact

Quality of service delivery is identified as a key component of sustainability. Stakeholders—public, private, and individual—must align service quality with tourism development. A key consideration is guest satisfaction: ensuring each visitor enjoys a memorable experience that encourages repeat visits. This is particularly relevant in the cruise sector, where day visitors must be enticed to return. From the initial journey to the in-territory experience, seamless and enriching guest experiences are central to policy considerations.

Cultural Heritage and Immersive Experiences

The discussion shifts to the cultural and heritage dimensions of tourism. Authentic, immersive experiences—like visiting the BVI's famous `"Baths"`—are highlighted as distinctive elements that create lasting memories and emotional connections. These types of experiences, combined with eco-conscious accommodations and ethical tourism activities, enhance overall visitor satisfaction. The overarching message is that sustainable tourism must focus on seamless, high-quality guest experiences, requiring active participation from all elements of the tourism ecosystem.

National Linkages and Inclusive Engagement

Sustainability is tied to the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP), linking tourism to goals like education, health, and resource access for Virgin Islanders. Stakeholder engagement is

6095   essential; the recurring theme "tourism is everybody's business" is underscored to reflect how deeply interwoven tourism is within the local economy. Financial services clients, for example, may also be tourists. A tourism policy must therefore create an enabling environment, incorporating regulation, incentives, and frameworks to promote equitable, sustainable development.

6100   **Vision and Policy Alignment with OECS Framework**

The vision for sustainable tourism in the Virgin Islands is to create a roadmap that aligns tourism growth with environmental, cultural, and economic priorities. The speaker emphasizes that the emerging tourism policy is grounded in the OECS regional framework, lending both credibility and harmonization with broader Caribbean objectives. Elements such as inclusive growth, income
6105   distribution, and the blue economy—especially the marine sector, which played a vital role in post-hurricane recovery—are integral to the policy.

Risk, Resilience, and Market Diversification

Additional components of the OECS framework—such as climate change, disaster risk resilience, and niche market development—are discussed. With hurricanes as a recurring threat, resilience
6110   planning is critical. Niche market development, including biodiversity-based tourism and improved access through airport development, is a current Government priority. The role of the BVI Tourist Board in destination management and marketing is also acknowledged, alongside the importance of institutional capacity, especially in a small territory where overcrowding can negatively affect the visitor experience.

6115   **Recap of Policy Framework and Transition to Q&A**

The presentation reiterates the main pillars of the OECS tourism policy model: inclusive growth, blue tourism, climate risk adaptation, and institutional capacity. The presenter then closes the main presentation, noting that the floor will soon open for stakeholder input. The Foreign Secretary introduces the Assistant Secretary, who is expected to provide a brief, cruise-specific context
6120   before moving into the question-and-answer segment.

Heritage Sites and Visitor Experience Concerns

The discussion begins with a community member expressing concern over underutilized historical and cultural sites, such as a fort that remains difficult to access despite housing cannons. The speaker highlights tourists' unmet requests for museums and libraries, emphasizing that existing
6125   tours are repetitive and uninspired. The need to better market the distinct characteristics of different islands in the territory is stressed, particularly given the widespread overuse of the "sun, sand, and sea" branding. Infrastructure limitations—especially inadequate accommodations and resistance from hoteliers—are also raised, with an upcoming international sports tournament illustrating the practical challenges of insufficient lodging amenities like fridges and microwaves.

6130   **Government Response to Infrastructure and Heritage Redevelopment**

A Government representative acknowledges these concerns, referencing the draft Road Town Development Proposal currently in circulation. Community consultations and business sector engagement are planned before any final decisions are made. Emphasis is placed on improving road infrastructure, with a significant portion of a $100 million loan earmarked for both surface and structural upgrades. Heritage preservation is also addressed. Main Street and the Old Administration Building are identified for restoration and adaptive reuse, including potential conversion into a museum or art gallery. The aim is to enhance both the visitor and resident experience. The Tourist Board is involved in ongoing tourism product development, with proposals for the Craft Alive Village space under active discussion.

Upcoming Road Town Improvement Projects

Several upcoming development projects in Road Town are outlined. These include upgrading the walkway between Vanterpool Pharmacy and the Cutlass Building, sidewalk enhancements on DeCastro Street, and improvements to Main Street and the boardwalk. These initiatives form part of a comprehensive effort to enhance the aesthetic and functional aspects of Road Town. The presence of stakeholders from both public and private sectors, including the Tourist Board and the Ministry of Tourism, indicates coordinated effort to execute these initiatives.

Premier's Remarks and Virtual Museum Announcement

The Premier joins the meeting and announces the creation of a virtual museum experience at the Craft Alive Village as part of efforts to diversify offerings in Road Town for cruise and general visitors. This project is being fast-tracked for completion before the peak tourism season begins in November. The Premier emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement and encourages open dialogue.

Clarification on Consultation Process and Next Steps

A participant inquiries about the process following the meeting, questioning whether a working document will be circulated for further stakeholder input. A ministry representative clarifies that this meeting is one of ten such consultations, and detailed minutes will be compiled into a stakeholder report. The final policy will reflect input from this and other meetings, subject to ministerial review. Reference is made to similar meetings held in January of the previous year, in relation to the OECS Common Regional Policy on Sustainable Tourism, which continues to inform the local policy framework. The final policy will integrate both stakeholder contributions and regional perspectives.

Recommendations for Cruise Tourism and Home Porting

A participant calls for a shift in the approach to cruise tourism, arguing that the BVI has not fully leveraged its potential. She advocates for exploring home porting of smaller ships as a low-hanging fruit that would increase passenger arrivals and economic benefits. She cites the recent arrival of the Iona cruise ship, which created significant spin-off benefits for local businesses, as an example of what could be achieved with more strategic cruise tourism planning. She also raises the question

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of the gaming legislation, which was passed but not yet operationalized, asking about its status and the progress of implementing regulations.

Status of Gaming Legislation and Commission

The Premier responds, explaining that the Gaming Act was passed during the mutual evaluation period but was effectively paused. The Gaming Commission has not yet been appointed, and without it, the Act cannot come into force. Although there were nominees for the Commission, they were never officially appointed. The Premier confirms that the legislation is now being revisited in consultation with the Attorney General's Chambers to ensure compliance with international financial regulatory standards. He also suggests the legislation may be further amended based on feedback from gaming stakeholders who found the existing provisions difficult to administer.

Link Between Gaming, Cruise Stays, and Boating Agreements

The Premier affirms that enabling gaming is a key priority, especially as it may allow cruise ships to stay overnight, addressing one of the reasons they currently depart early. He notes that the issue of boating agreements can be negotiated separately, as many gaming activities occur in territorial waters rather than port facilities, which alters the regulatory landscape. He acknowledges the need to engage cruise lines and the Pier Park in those discussions and reiterates the government's commitment to establishing the Gaming Commission, potentially by late this year or early next year. This would support the long-term vision of increasing economic benefits from tourism, including cruise overnighting and gaming-related activity.

Promotion of Cultural and Historical Experiences

A speaker highlighted the scarcity of traditional Virgin Islands dishes, such as fungi, on restaurant menus. While recognizing the Government's limited control over private businesses, they urged the promotion of cultural cuisine as a matter of national pride. The conversation shifted to the visible neglect in public spaces, including litter and derelict vehicles, which presents an embarrassment when showcasing the Territory to visitors. There was a strong call to better utilize existing cultural and historical sites, many of which remain underpromoted. The speaker cited examples like the Maritime Museum, Her Majesty's Prison Museum, the 1780s Lower Estate Sugar Works Museum, and the Copper Mine ruins—all of which hold significant heritage value but receive little traffic compared to high-traffic sites like The Baths.

Calls for Authentic Experiences and Street-Level Improvements

It was reiterated that tourism should be increasingly experience-based, drawing on the Territory's culture and natural beauty. Several speakers expressed concerns about the aesthetic quality of roadways and tourism-facing areas, citing visible dust, garbage, and general neglect. Despite this, some tourists reportedly remark that Tortola appears clean, suggesting a disconnect between local and visitor perceptions. Suggestions included reviving local craft and food vendors, integrating traditional artisans such as those who bake coconut bread, and creating interactive experiences like

6205   pottery in the downtown area. These contributions would enhance the authenticity of visitors'
       experiences while creating new income-generating opportunities for locals.

Government Response on Derelict Vehicles and Infrastructure

       In response to concerns raised, a Government representative acknowledged the ongoing problem
       with derelict vehicles. The challenge lies in identifying a suitable holding site and arranging for
6210   export or recycling. Past efforts were disrupted due to changes in site ownership. Options such as
       scrap metal compacting and export are being explored. The official also referenced proposals for
       policy changes, such as imposing charges on imported vehicles older than 10 years and levying a
       general fee to fund derelict removal. These proposals, while controversial, aim to provide a long-
       term solution to visual pollution and waste build up.

6215   ## Gap Between Tourist and Local Perceptions

       Another contributor noted the recurring surprise expressed by visitors who find the BVI both clean
       and beautiful, despite local concerns about maintenance and development. This gap between local
       dissatisfaction and visitor appreciation suggests the need for nuanced communication and
       acknowledgment of what is working. Nonetheless, it was emphasized that problem areas remain,
6220   and improvements in basic infrastructure like sidewalks are underway.

Urban Beautification and Land Use Challenges

       The speaker shared plans to incorporate sidewalks and landscaping into new road developments
       but acknowledged constraints due to limited land and private property rights. Efforts to beautify
       urban spaces are often limited by resistance to government acquisition of land. Dust build-up was
6225   linked to hillside development and runoff, and it was suggested that Town and Country Planning
       must tighten controls. The speaker cited urban greening efforts in cities like Shenzhen, China, as
       inspiration for making even densely developed areas feel lush through rooftop gardens and green
       walls.

Policy and Legislative Reform as a Way Forward

6230   There was consensus that many of the problems discussed could be resolved through better
       policies, laws, and enforcement mechanisms. Existing Town and Country Planning laws need to
       be modernized and enforced, especially regarding roadside maintenance. The forthcoming
       Environment Bill was mentioned as a critical step in institutionalizing these reforms, although it
       is expected to be met with resistance. Government officials called on civil society to become vocal
6235   advocates to support difficult but necessary policy changes.

Stakeholder Intervention: Environmental Branding

       A representative from the Virgin Islands Yachting Hotel and Tourism Association introduced
       herself and began by framing a set of comments and questions. She emphasized that if the Virgin
       Islands is to be marketed as an environmentally responsible and sustainable destination, then the
6240   conversation must continue in the direction of tree planting and environmental stewardship. Her

intervention marked a transition to more detailed dialogue on sustainability branding and future-oriented actions.

Sustainability, Trade Licensing, and Service Culture

6245 Speakers voiced concerns about inconsistencies in the issuance of trade licenses to individuals who may not meet residency or Belonger criteria. Questions arose about how sustainability is interpreted and enforced across departments, including the Trade Department. The discussion broadened to include service culture, with strong opinions that service education must begin earlier and be integrated into the national curriculum. Speakers called for creative thinking in delivering authentic tourism experiences, including incorporating national dishes into boxed picnic offerings
6250 for cruise passengers.

Taxi Licensing and Tour Guide Training

Concerns were raised about unqualified taxi drivers providing substandard service and lacking knowledge of Virgin Islands history. A participant clarified that monthly customer service training sessions are held, but the content currently lacks emphasis on historical and cultural education.
6255 Tour guide booklets are now being circulated, and more in-depth training is being considered. Suggestions included engaging HLSCC in curriculum development to ensure training accommodates diverse learners and is properly delivered by certified trainers.

Public Facilities and Capacity Limits

Speakers highlighted the inadequacy of public restrooms at key beaches like Cane Garden Bay
6260 and Brewer's Bay. This shortage limits the ability to distribute cruise visitors across locations and strains certain sites. On days when large cruise ships such as the Iona arrive with over 12,000 visitors, the need for additional facilities and alternative beach destinations becomes evident. The idea of having restrooms available at less crowded beaches was put forward as essential to product diversification.

6265 ### Carrying Capacity and Product Diversification

Discussion shifted to defining the carrying capacity of the Virgin Islands for cruise tourism. There were concerns about long-term environmental sustainability and the preservation of iconic sites such as The Baths. Suggestions included expanding product offerings to include the outer islands, such as Anegada, possibly through the use of sea planes to disperse traffic and reduce congestion.
6270 The conversation also touched on regulating food vendors and managing economic activity around the Tortola Pier Park to ensure fairness and reduce strain on formal infrastructure.

Infrastructure Planning and Vendor Management

The final stakeholder contributions focused on the need for better infrastructure planning, specifically in relation to informal food vendors surrounding the Pier Park. Participants expressed
6275 frustration over the lack of coordination and regulation, describing the proliferation of food trucks as unstructured and burdensome to formal businesses operating inside the Pier Park. Suggestions

were made to relocate and cluster vendors in one area to streamline operations and reduce conflicts. Concerns were also raised about environmental implications and the slow pace of bureaucracy in addressing known challenges.

6280 **Closing Remarks by the Ministry and Premier**

The Ministry confirmed that the views shared across all four islands will be incorporated into the draft tourism policy. The Premier delivered closing remarks, expressing strong alignment with the feedback received and appreciation for the stakeholders' continued contributions. He emphasized that the issues raised are already well understood and that implementation and accountability are
6285 now the priority. The Premier encouraged continued collaboration and noted that the BVI has all the tools necessary to elevate its tourism sector from a preferred destination to the best in its class. Attendees were invited to provide feedback through an evaluation form accessible via QR code and to sign in to facilitate future engagement.

CONSOLIDATED STAKEHOLDER-DERIVED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS HELD POST 2025 TOURISM SUMMIT

Introduction to the Stakeholder-Led Recommendations

This section consolidates what stakeholders asked Government to do—policy options distilled from the minutes and "Key Takeaways" across island and sector consultations held after the 2025 Tourism Summit. For clarity and ease of use, the recommendations are grouped under the policy's eight thematic pillars: (1) Inclusive Growth & Income Distribution, (2) Blue Tourism, (3) Climate Change & Risk Resilience, (4) Product & Niche Development, (5) Biodiversity & Resource Conservation, (6) Access & Transport, (7) Destination Management, and (8) Institutional Capacity. These groupings mirror the policy "house" framework adopted for the National Tourism Policy.

The recommendations serve as the bridge between public input and the first public draft of the National Tourism Policy. They sit alongside the published proceedings (minutes) as part of the commitment to transparent, evidence-based policy development aligned to the National Sustainable Development Plan and the OECS framework, and they will be used to test legal, institutional, and budget implications before submission to Cabinet.

1. Inclusive Growth And Income Distribution

1.1. Community Tourism

1.1.1. Ensure fee policies allow equitable access for residents to national parks while maintaining sustainable financing for maintenance and conservation.

1.1.2. Segment the National Tourism Policy by island-specific strategies that reflect Virgin Gorda's identity as a high-end, tranquil destination.

1.1.3. Involve local residents and business owners in decision-making on cruise management, land use, and infrastructure development.

1.1.4. Institutionalise support for cultural festivals such as Fungi Fest and encourage youth participation in music, culinary arts, and traditional dance.

1.1.5. Promote interactive, heritage-based experiences that showcase local culture and history through youth-led or youth-informed activities.

1.1.6. Fund and staff community gardens in each district to serve as educational hubs, food-security buffers, and immersive tourism experiences for visitors.

1.1.7. Empower local communities to co-host and benefit from signature and regional sporting and entertainment events through structured partnerships and localized economic incentives.

1.1.8. Facilitate training and grants to community organizations for planning grassroots festivals and events.

1.1.9. Develop community-based tours that highlight Jost Van Dyke's historical and cultural assets.

1.1.10. Support local-led initiatives to restore and preserve historic sites like the church and customs house.

1.1.11. Facilitate funding or incentives for local artisans and craftspeople to supply tourism-related products.

1.1.12. Promote integrated community excursions that allow cruise passengers to engage with local communities through storytelling, culture, and heritage exposure.

1.1.13. Support village-based tourism product development (e.g., East End/Long Look storytelling, heritage trails in North Sound).

1.2. *MSME & Entrepreneurship*

1.2.1. Support product development and market access for micro, small, and medium tourism enterprises by fostering partnerships with community stakeholders and creative practitioners.

1.2.2. Facilitate cultural entrepreneurs' integration into tourism value chains, especially through coordinated storytelling, culinary events, and performance showcases that centre Virgin Islands identity.

1.2.3. Extend development agreements and formal facilitation protocols to local tourism entrepreneurs to ensure parity with foreign investors.

1.2.4. Provide streamlined access to fiscal incentives and technical assistance for MSMEs engaged in hospitality, real estate, and support services in the West End.

1.2.5. Establish an Agri-Food Innovation Fund to provide micro-grants, technical support, and business incubation services for small farmers and fishers entering agritourism.

1.2.6. Create grant and loan programmes targeting small guesthouses and boutique properties, ensuring equitable access to capital alongside foreign-owned resorts.

1.2.7. Develop incentives for family-owned properties to upgrade, digitise, and expand operations without losing cultural authenticity.

1.2.8. Promote MSME participation in sports and entertainment tourism through vendor licensing, logistical support, and targeted business development programmes.

1.2.9. Establish vendor zones and concessions at all national events, ensuring small businesses can access and benefit from tourism revenue streams.

1.2.10. Establish a procurement policy that gives preferential access to small, local, and community-based tourism service providers (e.g., transport operators, vendors) when government contracts are awarded for events or visitor services.

1.2.11. Establish capacity-building programmes for local entrepreneurs in hospitality, tour guiding, and eco-tourism.

1.2.12. Facilitate MSME access to vending opportunities within cruise precincts through improved stall infrastructure and transparent allocation systems.

1.2.13. Provide business development training and certification for local entrepreneurs to supply goods and services to the cruise sector.

1.3. *Youth Engagement and Empowerment*

1.3.1. Create youth advisory committees or assign youth seats on tourism-related boards to include young voices in policy and planning.

1.3.2. Establish and support tourism clubs within schools to foster youth engagement, encourage peer learning, and promote student-led tourism projects.

1.3.3. Integrate Agri-marine science curricula from primary to tertiary levels, including school gardens, internships, and national service credits.

1.3.4. Design internships and apprenticeships within the accommodations sector to expose youth to property management, hospitality, and entrepreneurship.

1.3.5. Use youth participation in sports and festivals as a gateway to mentorship, marketing training, and national ambassadorship.

1.3.6. Develop a framework that links government-sponsored athletic scholarships to formal responsibilities in destination branding and cultural promotion.

1.3.7. Expand vocational pathways in tourism within secondary schools and the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College to encourage career interest among youth.

1.3.8. Provide structured internships and service-learning opportunities across government departments and tourism businesses for students.

1.3.9.   Engage youth in tourism awareness and training initiatives that promote cultural knowledge and environmental conservation.

1.3.10. Facilitate mentorship programs pairing youth with existing local tourism entrepreneurs

1.3.11. Finalise and implement the Customer Service Certification programme in partnership with the Caribbean Examinations Council.

1.3.12. Roll out mandatory "train-the-trainer" and six- to eight-month customer-service courses across the public service.

1.3.13. Ensure all civil servants complete a minimum of six essential learning hours annually, including tourism and service-related content.

1.3.14. Require annual continuing education in tourism-related fields as part of public and private sector employment standards.

1.3.15. Integrate these requirements into performance appraisals and license renewals for sustained quality assurance.

1.3.16. Reintroduce patriotic instruction (e.g., flags, national heroes, pledge of allegiance) in all schools.

1.3.17. Use public spaces and government buildings to display visual symbols of national identity.

1.3.18. Use annual celebrations to reinforce cultural values and deepen the connection between youth and national heritage.

1.4. *Value Chain Maximisation & Inter-Sectoral Linkages*

1.4.1. Integrate hospitality and tourism service standards across Government's broader customer service frameworks to ensure consistent quality across sectors that interface with the visitor economy.

1.4.2. Build institutional capacity for consistent and high-quality tourism service delivery as a core function of national development and economic diversification.

1.4.3. Support tourism-aligned training for staff across non-tourism ministries (e.g., Immigration, Customs, Postal Services) to reinforce inter-sectoral synergies in service delivery.

1.4.4. Build stronger value chain connections between agriculture, fisheries, and tourism sectors to increase local supply of goods and services to tourism enterprises.

1.4.5. Establish procurement linkages that prioritise local sourcing within the accommodation, cruise, and events sub-sectors.

1.4.6. Establish integrated government teams combining tourism, infrastructure, planning, and trade to coordinate major investment projects with national development priorities.

1.4.7. Build a digital Seasonality and Supply Coordination Platform to align agricultural outputs with chef demand and culinary event planning in the tourism sector.

1.4.8. Foster linkages between the sports, culture, hospitality, education, and marketing sectors to jointly plan, execute and benefit from events and festivals.

1.4.9. Promote local sourcing for entertainment and event services, including lighting, sound, catering, and security.

1.4.10. Promote internal government procurement from local tourism-linked sectors (e.g., agriculture, transport, events) to stimulate backward linkages.

1.4.11. Embed public service awareness training in all ministries to support tourism's value chain (e.g., training licensing officers, customs, and immigration).

1.4.12. Map and strengthen value chain linkages between cruise arrivals and local agricultural, cultural, and manufacturing sectors.

1.4.13. Incentivise contracts between cruise lines and local suppliers for food, music, crafts, and guide services.

2. Blue Tourism

2.1. Blue Tourism Expansion

2.1.1. Ensure that National Parks Trust sites forming part of the marine tourism infrastructure are adequately funded through both public subvention and tourism improvement levies.

2.1.2. Legislate clear authority for the National Parks Trust to enforce visitation limits and site usage to avoid over-saturation of critical blue tourism assets.

2.1.3. Position the Virgin Islands as the "Yachting Capital of the World" through a global branding and marketing campaign that highlights unique marine-based experiences.

2.1.4. Promote the development of inter-island yachting itineraries that include smaller islands, cultural stops, and marine heritage attractions.

2.1.5. Integrate fisheries into the visitor experience through interactive, low-cost activities such as dockside fish cleaning and storytelling demonstrations by local fishers.

2.1.6. Integrate maritime events such as yacht races, regattas, and fishing tournaments into the national tourism promotion calendar.

2.1.7. Collaborate with marina operators like The Moorings and MarineMax to host sport tourism events in the low season.

2.1.8. Regulate and limit the number of moorings to reduce overcrowding and environmental degradation.

2.1.9. Develop a visitor use management plan for high-traffic marine areas.

2.1.10. 2.1.10 Develop blue-economy and reef stewardship curricula for students, professionals, and operators in the marine sector.

2.1.11. 2.1.11. Partner with the Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority to develop joint marine and safety training initiatives.

2.1.12. 2.1.12. Encourage the inclusion of marine-based excursions as standard cruise options (snorkelling, island-hopping, day sails).

2.1.13. 2.1.13. Expand marine infrastructure to support yacht excursions tied to cruise packages.

2.2. Coral Reef Restoration

2.2.1. Integrate marine and terrestrial conservation enforcement within coral reef protection zones, particularly where anchoring or discharge from vessels threatens reef health.

2.2.2. Scale coral reef restoration projects in collaboration with marine NGOs and local dive operators to rehabilitate degraded reef systems central to the tourism product.

2.2.3. Introduce visitor contribution schemes or voluntary environmental fees to finance coral rehabilitation and marine conservation efforts.

2.3. Beach Use Planning & Coastal Zone Management

2.3.1. Implement coastal zone management protocols, particularly in high-traffic sites like Spring Bay, to prevent erosion and beach degradation from unregulated use.

2.3.2. Develop and enforce beach zoning and coastal use plans that address congestion, environmental degradation, and equitable access.

2.3.3. Regulate use of uninhabited islands through permits and controlled visitor numbers to reduce impact on sensitive coastal ecosystems.

2.3.4. Implement policies to manage overcrowding of beaches, including daily limits and scheduling.

2.3.5. Require designated garbage disposal systems and protocols for beach operators.

2.4. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA)

2.4.1. Mandate site-specific EIAs before implementing tourism infrastructure projects at or near park sites, especially for coastal development and mooring expansions.

2.4.2. Require comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for all new marine tourism developments, including marinas, jetties, and mooring fields.

2.4.3. Institutionalize post-development monitoring of environmental indicators tied to initial EIA commitments.

2.4.4. Review the existing Environmental Impact Assessment process to establish clearer guidelines for accommodations located near sensitive marine ecosystems.

2.4.5. Ensure EIA standards for tourism developments include climate resilience and waste management capacity thresholds.

2.5. Marine Protected Areas

2.5.1. Strengthen the authority of the National Parks Trust to enforce protective measures in marine parks, including limits on vessel traffic and visitor numbers.

2.5.2. Expand the network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to safeguard biodiversity and support sustainable recreational use.

2.5.3. Link tour operator licensing and user fees to MPA access, ensuring both conservation and visitor experience management.

2.5.4. Support collaborative enforcement efforts with NPTVI to protect designated marine areas.

2.5.5. Expand marine protected areas with community consultation.

2.6. *Marinas, Jetties & Moorings*

2.6.1. Reform the licence fee structure for private moorings to reflect actual market rates and cost recovery needs for park maintenance.

2.6.2. Gazette all intended fee changes in accordance with legislation to ensure enforceability.

2.6.3. Modernize and expand marina infrastructure to accommodate growing demand, including services for mega yachts and provisioning.

2.6.4. Rehabilitate facilities such as Gun Creek and Cyril B. Romney Pier Park to serve as hubs for marine visitor traffic.

2.6.5. Standardize mooring systems and signage to improve navigational safety and ensure compliance with environmental standards.

2.6.6. Expand and maintain the national mooring system to support marine conservation and protect sensitive sea beds from anchor damage.

2.6.7. Support development of destination marinas through coordinated permitting and infrastructure rollout by government agencies.

2.6.8. Offer technical guidance and streamlined permitting to local developers pursuing marina-related investments in ecologically sensitive areas.

2.6.9. Upgrade marine infrastructure to support large-scale events, including jetty expansions and docking support services.

2.6.10. Encourage private-sector co-investment in marina event hosting capacity.

2.6.11. Upgrade existing jetties and docks to enhance visitor arrival experiences.

2.6.12. Introduce guidelines to ensure equitable access to docking spaces for local operators.

2.6.13. Maintain and upgrade jetties in cruise-relevant zones (e.g., West End, Cane Garden Bay, JVD).

2.6.14. Establish new moorings to ease congestion at existing ports and facilitate tender operations.

2.7. *Blue Tourism Awareness Building & Human Capital*

2.7.1. Provide funding for awareness and educational campaigns that explain the value and cost of marine conservation and proper use of moorings and marine parks.

2.7.2. Launch national awareness campaigns on the value of Blue Tourism and sustainable marine resource use across schools, media, and community groups.

2.7.3. Train frontline tourism workers and boat operators in marine conservation ethics, customer service, and disaster preparedness.

2.7.4. Run visitor education campaigns on appropriate behaviour in marine environments.

3. Climate Change & Risk Resilience

3.1. *Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation*

3.1.1. Prioritise coastal protection measures, including gabion installations, at erosion-prone sites such as Spring Bay and Long Bay.

3.1.2. Adopt a Regenerative Agriculture Roadmap that bans glyphosate and other harmful agrochemicals and promotes eco-friendly practices aligned with environmental and tourism goals.

3.1.3. Mandate green building certifications and retrofitting incentives for hotels to enhance storm resistance and reduce energy consumption.

3.1.4. Require mandatory integration of climate risk assessments into tourism-related development proposals, especially those seeking public sector approvals or incentives.

3.1.5. Reinforce coastal infrastructure to reduce vulnerability to storm surges.

3.1.6. Promote the development of climate-smart tourism facilities.

3.1.7. Assess cruise port vulnerabilities to climate impacts (sea level rise, storm surge) and prioritise adaptation measures.

3.2. Alternate & Blue Energy

3.2.1. Explore the use of renewable energy sources for park facilities, including visitor centres, trail lighting, and surveillance systems.

3.2.2. Promote investment in solar-powered and water-efficient farm infrastructure by including such upgrades in Agri-tourism facility standards.

3.2.3. Provide subsidies or tax relief for properties adopting solar power, greywater systems, and energy-efficient infrastructure.

3.3. Sargassum

3.3.1. Monitor and respond to sargassum accumulation in marine park areas to prevent ecological degradation and negative visitor experiences

3.3.2. Monitor and mitigate the impact of sargassum seaweed on popular beaches and marine zones.

3.4. Crisis & Risk Resilient Action

3.4.1. Ensure national parks have disaster preparedness and resilience plans that align with tourism continuity frameworks.

3.4.2. Integrate emergency responsiveness and visitor safety protocols into public service customer training, particularly for frontline workers in tourism hubs.

3.4.3. Integrate marina development with dry dock facilities and hurricane storage capacity as part of national climate resilience strategy.

3.4.4. Develop site-specific emergency evacuation protocols and hazard signage for high-traffic marine zones (e.g., White Bay).

3.4.5. Ensure that all entertainment and sports events have risk mitigation protocols in place, including disaster readiness, crowd control, and emergency response planning.

3.4.6. Integrate tourism-specific components into national emergency preparedness plans, ensuring frontline officers are trained in visitor management during disasters.

3.4.7. Develop joint crisis response protocols among Port Authority, Customs, Immigration, and the Cruise Pier security to address future disruptions.

3.5. Marine Ecosystem Management

3.5.1. Prioritize the protection of North Sound's mangroves and seagrass beds in all tourism-related development planning.

3.6. Land-use and Ecological Buffers

3.6.1.   Oppose the unnecessary destruction of ecological buffers, including wetlands and mangrove fringes, even where there is pressure to accommodate tourism expansion.

3.7. Sustainable Visitor Management

3.7.1.   Introduce visitor caps and a scheduling system for sites like The Baths to reduce congestion and environmental degradation.

3.7.2.   Promote alternate excursion routes and lesser-known attractions to reduce pressure on ecologically sensitive sites.

3.8. Tourism Service Standards

3.8.1.   Mandate frontline customer service training for all tourism staff, tied to clear accountability frameworks.

3.8.2.   Establish real-time feedback systems and complaint mechanisms to improve service transparency.

3.9. Ethics and Professionalism in Tourism

3.9.1.   Strengthen ethical standards in service delivery by introducing oversight measures that reinforce professional conduct across the industry.

4. Product & Niche Market Development

4.1. Niche Markets-Cultural Heritage

4.1.1.   Invest in the restoration and controlled access to sites like Copper Mine to develop heritage tourism assets in a safe, sustainable manner.

4.1.2.   Introduce walking heritage tours in main towns such as Road Town and Spanish Town that highlight historic architecture, civic institutions, and cultural landmarks.

4.1.3.   Develop localised experiences rooted in Virgin Islands culture, identity, and stories, positioning the destination as one that is "real, rich and rooted."

4.1.4.   Enhance storytelling across multiple media and tourism touchpoints to deepen cultural resonance and encourage longer stays and repeat visitation.

4.1.5.   Expand the tourism product by supporting new cultural and nature-based attractions, such as aquatic centres, cultural marketplaces, and eco-experiences.

4.1.6.   Develop regulatory mechanisms to protect place names and cultural identity through the activation of the Preservation of Names and Places Act.

4.1.7.   Codify and upgrade cultural and heritage tourism assets, including community graveyards and historic locations, with fencing, signage, and interpretive material.

4.1.8.   Create standards and guidelines for the sustainable development and maintenance of heritage sites in partnership with the National Parks Trust and Tourist Board.

4.1.9.   Market Virgin Gorda as an eco-luxury destination to attract high-value visitors aligned with the island's environmental and cultural brand.

4.1.10. Promote high-end, experience-based offerings while protecting the natural aesthetics and tranquillity of the area.

4.1.11. Maintain support for marine events like the MAXI regatta by ensuring infrastructure readiness and community participation.

4.1.12. Promote more immersive local experiences (e.g., storytelling, community museums, artisan exhibits) to elevate Virgin Islands' cultural heritage as a tourism asset.

4.1.13. Create guided historical walking tours in Great Harbour and White Bay.

4.1.14. Promote storytelling sessions or re-enactments related to JVD's seafaring and pirate history.

4.1.15. Require all restaurants and hotels to feature at least one local dish on their menus.

4.1.16. Create a national list of signature BVI dishes to be taught in culinary training and enforced through licensing.

4.2. Niche Markets – Eco and Community-Based Tourism

4.2.1. Establish site-specific visitor capacity thresholds at ecologically sensitive and high-traffic tourism locations (e.g., The Baths, Sage Mountain) to guide investment, management, and product development.

4.2.2. Institutionalize the carrying capacity approach across the tourism sector to balance economic opportunity with environmental preservation.

4.2.3. Expand tourism programming to include eco-trails, national park tours, and immersive nature-based visitor experiences guided by certified local operators.

4.2.4. Incentivise operators who provide authentic, culturally grounded experiences that reflect Virgin Islands heritage.

4.2.5. Link such experiences to guest satisfaction surveys and tourism performance metrics.

4.3. Events & Festivals

4.3.1. 4.3.1 Link events and festivals more explicitly to niche product development through culinary showcases, music and performance tourism, and local fashion/artisan exhibitions.

4.3.2. Schedule signature events to fill seasonal tourism gaps and build destination identity around authentic Virgin Islands culture

4.3.3. Elevate community-based festivals and events through improved technical support, storytelling, and access to regional and diaspora markets.

4.3.4. Create a unified calendar and promotional platform for cultural and music-based tourism events that integrate local talent with broader tourism experiences.

4.3.5. Integrate sustainability themes and local conservation initiatives into event planning and execution, particularly for festivals in beach and park locations.

4.3.6. Identify and acquire land for a dedicated festival village on Virgin Gorda.

4.3.7. Establish funding mechanisms to support early planning and equitable vendor participation, especially for businesses affected by venue changes.

4.3.8. Expand the cultural calendar to include multiple community-driven events that celebrate food heritage, traditional music, and Anegada's historical legacy.

4.3.9. Rebrand Lobster Fest to reflect a broader culinary identity, showcasing local cuisine beyond lobster as the focal point.

4.3.10. Encourage the revitalisation or development of entertainment-based attractions (e.g., steel pan events, horse racing, zoos) to increase the vibrancy of the tourism offering for both visitors and locals.

4.3.11. Improve inter-agency planning and licensing procedures to streamline event approvals and support cultural festivals that involve public service participation.

4.3.12. Create a centralised National Events Calendar for all sports, entertainment, and cultural activities.

4.3.13. Institutionalise long-term planning and funding for events, with regional marketing starting 6–12 months in advance.

4.3.14. Designate strategic anchor events for each tourism quarter, maximising off-season visitation.

4.3.15. Develop a permitting framework that is timely, consistent, and tailored to event size and impact. Support local cultural festivals and link them to regional tourism promotion efforts.

4.3.16. Align cruise arrival schedules with local festivals to encourage overnight stays and increased cultural participation.

4.4. Culinary

4.4.1. 4.4.1 Promote culinary tourism experiences that emphasise traditional cooking methods, farm-to-table dining, and Virgin Islands food heritage.

4.4.2. 4.4.2 Support the development of food trails, culinary festivals, and chef exchange programmes to highlight BVI cuisine

4.4.3. Support culinary experiences that reflect local foodways, including pop-up markets, food festivals, and farm-to-table offerings developed in partnership with local chefs and farmers.

4.4.4. Institutionalise culinary programming that elevates traditional foods as part of the cultural tourism product.

4.4.5. Launch luxury culinary experiences such as "Pick-Name-Eat" packages, connecting tourists directly with farm produce and local chefs for curated farm-to-table events.

4.4.6. Offer culinary partnerships at national events by integrating local chefs, vendors, and food festivals into sports and entertainment tourism programming.

4.4.7. Promote use of local cuisine in public sector events and visitor experiences (e.g., food at official receptions, showcasing local chefs and caterers).

4.4.8. Encourage culinary tourism experiences that promote traditional JVD recipes using local ingredients.

4.4.9. Establish food safety training for roadside vendors and small restaurants.

4.4.10. Promote BVI culinary identity on cruise excursions by creating food tours and ensuring local cuisine availability on docks.

4.5. Regional Market Growth for Sustained Tourism

4.5.1. Benchmark fee structures against regional comparators (e.g., Magen's Bay in USVI) to ensure competitiveness and perceived value by visitors.

4.5.2. Target Caribbean and diaspora-based travellers with tailored products that offer familiarity, convenience, and deeper cultural connection.

4.5.3. Encourage the development of value-based products for regional visitors that reflect affordability, cultural affinity, and short-stay opportunities

4.5.4. Launch a dedicated regional campaign to promote the BVI as a destination for world-class, niche sporting and entertainment events.

4.5.5. Leverage regional travel partnerships to boost attendance at Virgin Islands events.

4.5.6. Support intra-regional marketing efforts led by the BVI Tourist Board to attract public servants and professionals from neighbouring Caribbean jurisdictions for meetings, events, and leisure travel.

4.6. Increasing World Heritage Sites

4.6.1. Undertake feasibility studies for designating additional cultural or natural heritage sites for international protection and visibility.

4.6.2. Undertake assessments for potential UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as the Copper Mine Point and the historic Quaker settlements.

4.6.3. Encourage preservation of eligible historical and natural assets through technical documentation and nomination processes in collaboration with the Department of Culture and National Parks Trust.

4.6.4. Promote sports and cultural events as part of broader bids for regional and global recognition, such as through UNESCO or sporting bodies.

4.6.5. Initiate feasibility studies for World Heritage Site designation for key historical and environmental assets, such as Copper Mine Point, with public sector coordination.

4.7. Product Grading & Classification

4.7.1. Establish a national service standard and product grading framework that reflects different tiers of tourism service delivery, adaptable to both high-end and community-based experiences.

4.7.2. Benchmark grading systems regionally and internationally, but tailor final standards to the Virgin Islands' cultural context and scale of operations.

4.7.3. Introduce site audit mechanisms linked to the grading system to verify standards adherence and drive continual improvement.

4.7.4. Develop a localised product classification system that recognises differentiated offerings in marine tourism, eco-tourism, and cultural heritage, rather than applying uniform standards designed for resorts.

4.7.5. Introduce tiered standards for product excellence based on service level, environmental sustainability, and cultural authenticity.

4.7.6. Establish a national BVI Organic and Regenerative Certification Scheme to support marketing differentiation and product credibility for visitors.

4.7.7. Introduce a BVI-specific hotel grading system to address local context while aligning with regional and international benchmarks.

4.7.8. Require minimum infrastructure and service standards for event venues before they can host Tier 1 national events.

4.7.9. Develop a tiered classification system for event types (national, regional, local) to guide marketing, support, and evaluation.

4.7.10. Develop a simplified grading system for villas and guesthouses on JVD.

4.7.11. Offer incentives for meeting classification standards.

4.7.12. Establish cruise-specific grading criteria for service providers (e.g., tour operators, excursion hosts).

4.8. Product Standards & Certification

4.8.1. Align hospitality and service standards with customer journey expectations, including pre-arrival communication, arrival experience, destination navigation, and departure.

4.8.2. Include cultural sensitivity, local storytelling, and destination ambassadorship as key competencies within national certification and training modules.

4.8.3. Establish a universal base-level standard that all tourism actors must meet, with tiered incentives or recognitions for properties or businesses that go beyond the minimum.

4.8.4. Design a compliance and mystery-shopper programme as part of service certification, integrated into a broader monitoring and evaluation system.

4.8.5. Upgrade national park facilities to meet international standards of accessibility and visitor experience, including signage, trails, and sanitary amenities.

4.8.6. Require that all newly developed tourism products incorporate accessibility considerations and undergo assessment against established standards.

4.8.7. Develop a national certification programme for product authenticity and quality, with branding benefits and inclusion in official promotions tied to certification status.

4.8.8. Fund physical upgrades for select farms to meet cruise excursion safety standards, including widened paths, hand-washing stations, and improved accessibility features.

4.8.9. Develop a national accessibility audit framework for accommodations, supported by financing mechanisms for upgrades.

4.8.10. Mandate accessibility standards for all public event venues and sports facilities.

4.8.11. Require international certification (e.g., IAAF, FIFA) for sports infrastructure intended for international use.

4.8.12. Enforce national accessibility standards for public infrastructure (e.g., ramps, sidewalks, signage) and require accessibility certification for tourism operators receiving government support or promotion.

4.8.13. Support retrofitting of tourism infrastructure to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.

4.8.14. Require periodic re-certification or CPD credits to maintain licensing, ensuring service quality evolves with industry standards.

4.8.15. Mandate accessibility compliance for all cruise terminal facilities and excursions targeting seniors or differently-abled passengers.

4.9. 4.9 Coastal and Marine Recreation

4.9.1. Revisit the blanket jet ski ban with a view to introducing a regulated framework that allows for controlled water sports activity in designated zones.

4.10 Entrepreneurship Development

4.10.1 Provide grants and low-interest loans through a Small Business Bureau to support entrepreneurship in marine services, guided tours, and cultural tourism.

4.11 Innovation and Economic Diversification

4.11.1 Encourage development of new tourism ventures, especially those that introduce experiential, eco-friendly, or culturally distinctive products.

4.12 Labour Force Participation

4.12.1 Build the capacity of Virgin Gordians to participate in premium service delivery across all tourism subsectors.

5. Biodiversity And Ecosystems Protection and Resource Conservation

5.1. Biodiversity & Ecosystem Protection

5.1.1. Reaffirm the statutory mandate of the National Parks Trust as the lead body for ecosystem protection, especially in the face of tourism-driven pressures.

5.1.2. Develop carrying-capacity frameworks to regulate daily visitor numbers at fragile ecological sites.

5.1.3. Enforce vessel capacity limits at sensitive anchorages to avoid overuse and anchor damage to seagrass beds and coral ecosystems.

5.1.4. Ensure that cultural heritage is protected alongside natural heritage, recognising the role of local communities in stewarding both forms of capital.

5.1.5. Implement a Sustainable Visitor Management Policy at sensitive natural sites such as The Baths, including scheduling systems, infrastructure improvements, and capped visitation.

5.1.6. Partner with NGOs and local groups to develop a community-based environmental stewardship framework, including regular maintenance of beaches, reefs, and public areas.

5.1.7. Launch a local jobs programme for environmental upkeep of key tourism spaces such as ports, trails, and coastal access points.

5.1.8. Promote regenerative, organic farming methods as a key component of national environmental branding and sustainable tourism experiences.

5.1.9. Require all ministries engaged in development approvals to incorporate biodiversity impact considerations for projects with tourism implications.

5.1.10. Regulate and monitor diving and snorkelling activity to protect sensitive reefs.

5.1.11. Encourage low-impact nature trails that minimize disruption to native flora and fauna.

5.1.12. Ensure all marine and beach excursions comply with environmental guidelines to minimise reef damage.

5.1.13. Develop a cruise-specific environmental code of conduct for passengers and tour operators.

5.2. Waste Minimization and Management

5.2.1. Enforce pollution and waste discharge regulations, including holding accountable property owners and vessels responsible for runoff and sewage into parks.

5.2.2. Require all yachts and marinas to provide sewage pump-out stations and ensure regular inspections for compliance.

5.2.3. Promote environmentally responsible tourism by incentivising the sale and use of reef-safe sunscreen by all visitor-serving establishments.

5.2.4. Assign dedicated personnel to manage cleanliness, waste removal, and general upkeep at ports of entry and major public tourism locations.

5.2.5. Provide training and incentives for farmers practicing circular agriculture techniques, such as composting and re-use of organic waste.

5.2.6. Institute a phased requirement for hotels to separate and manage solid waste, supported by government-supplied guidelines.

5.2.7. Encourage the use of biodegradable products through supplier incentives and procurement training.

5.2.8. Strengthen public waste collection, signage, and maintenance at tourism-sensitive public infrastructure (e.g., beaches, trails, parks).

5.2.9. Strengthen waste management systems including the placement of bins and regular collection.

5.2.10. Launch anti-littering campaigns targeting visitors and residents.

5.3. *Circular Tourism*

5.3.1. Promote circular tourism principles within product development by encouraging the use of local materials, reusable packaging, and waste minimisation practices in tourism service delivery.

5.3.2. Introduce technical support to assist small operators in adopting low-impact operational models.

5.3.3. 5.3.3. Introduce environmental levies for cruise ships equivalent to those charged to charter yachts to support fair burden sharing.

5.3.4. Establish long-term incentives (e.g., duty exemptions, fast-track certification) for eco-friendly products, green-certified accommodations, and circular economy tourism enterprises.

5.3.5. Introduce cruise-sector requirements for reducing waste generation and increasing use of refillable and reusable containers during excursions.

5.4. *Use of Plastics & Styrofoam*

5.4.1. Ban the use of single-use plastics and Styrofoam in marine tourism operations and encourage alternatives through supplier incentives.

5.4.2. Enact legislation that restricts the importation and use of single-use plastics territory-wide, with a clear enforcement timeline and public education campaign.

5.4.3. Ban specific synthetic pesticides and plastics used in conventional farming and adopt eco-friendly alternatives that align with green branding in tourism.

5.4.4. Enforce green event guidelines for national events, banning single-use plastics and encouraging reusable or biodegradable alternatives

5.4.5. Enforce bans on single-use plastics and styrofoam in marine and beach-related commerce.

5.5. *Improving Resource Use*

5.5.1. Set benchmarks for water and energy use among marine operators and provide toolkits for improving efficiency.

5.5.2. Integrate energy-efficient lighting, waste management, and water-saving measures into all public event infrastructure upgrades.

5.5.3. Convert the TIS volumes into an online, modular learning system with updated content and delivery through HLSCC and national e-learning platforms.

5.6. *Water and Energy Conservation*

5.6.1. Retrofit Park facilities with water-saving fixtures and energy-efficient infrastructure where possible.

5.6.2. Promote solar and desalination technologies in marinas as part of national sustainable infrastructure goals.

5.6.3. Promote eco-efficiency practices (e.g., low-flow toilets, solar energy, greywater reuse) as performance standards for all tourism accommodations and public sites.

5.6.4. Encourage the adoption of conservation-friendly irrigation and power solutions on farms promoted to tourists, marketing these features as part of the experience.

5.6.5. Promote the installation of water-saving fixtures in tourism facilities.

5.6.6. Encourage solar energy use in guesthouses and public infrastructure.

6. Access & Transport Service

6.1. *Cost effective Inter & Intra Regional Air Access*

6.1.1. Advocate for enhanced air-sea integration through partnerships with airlines and inter-island ferry operators to improve connectivity.

6.1.2. Enhance direct transport connections by air and sea to support same-day travel and reduce friction for visitors arriving to North Sound.

6.1.3. Coordinate sporting event schedules with airlift availability to enable regional team and fan travel.

6.1.4. Advocate for targeted charter services during major events.

6.1.5. Advocate with regional partners for improved cruise-air transfer connections from regional airports.

6.2. *Ferry Services; Air/Sea/Ground Transport*

6.2.1. Incorporate ferry and port experience into national service standard frameworks, focusing on signage, flow, accessibility, and frontline staff engagement.

6.2.2. Develop clear performance indicators for inter-island connectivity as a tourism product feature, including punctuality, ease of booking, and communication.

6.2.3. Improve transport planning coordination between the BVI Ports Authority and the National Parks Trust to avoid unsustainable peaks in visitor arrivals at natural sites.

6.2.4. Require certification in service standards for taxi drivers, ferry personnel, and airport staff as a precondition for operational licensing.

6.2.5. Integrate customer service training into transportation licensing and permit renewal processes.

6.2.6. Upgrade ferry terminals at West End and Jost Van Dyke, including immigration, customs processing, and covered waiting areas.

6.2.7. Strengthen and enforce vehicle safety standards for all public passenger vehicles, including safari buses, to protect visitor and resident safety.

6.2.8. Expand lifeguard services and emergency response capacity at high-use beaches and ecotourism sites.

6.2.9. Guarantee reliable, daily transportation to and from Anegada via both air and ferry, with minimum service standards and coordinated scheduling across islands.

6.2.10. Strengthen inter-island transport connections with Virgin Gorda and other sister islands to enable same-day access and improved visitor flow.

6.2.11. Improve immigration and customs protocols to deliver efficient and welcoming experiences aligned with international standards.

6.2.12. Deploy trained supervisors and "mystery guests" to assess and monitor service quality at immigration, customs, and ferry terminals.

6.2.13. Incorporate port service oversight into the National Quality Assurance Framework for Tourism.

6.2.14. Establish easy-to-use public feedback systems at key ports and tourism offices to resolve service complaints in real-time.

6.2.15. Ensure synchronisation of public infrastructure (e.g., ferry terminals, roads, utilities) with private investment project schedules.

6.2.16. Prepare infrastructure development timelines that take into account existing tourism development approval windows and site activation needs.

6.2.17. Provide accommodations with advance notice of service interruptions or schedule changes affecting guest mobility.

6.2.18. Designate parking and curb access at ports of entry and key sites for persons with disabilities and elderly travellers.

6.2.19. Enhance oversight of vehicle licensing and transport regulation to support safety, accessibility, and visitor-friendly service delivery.

6.2.20. Ensure that ferry services are aligned with peak tourist arrival and departure times.

6.2.21. Introduce sea taxi regulations to improve safety and transparency.

6.2.22. Improve signage and dock infrastructure at key visitor entry points.

6.2.23. Integrate ferry schedules with cruise arrival and departure times for easier inter-island movement.

6.2.24. Introduce shuttle services between Road Town Pier and other island attractions.

6.3. Energy Efficient Transport

6.3.1. Support pilot programmes for solar-assisted ferry services and electric marina transport vehicles.

6.3.2. Pilot low-emission ground transport options for festivals and national events, including shuttles and electric mobility.

7. Tourist Destination Management

7.1. Research & Statistics (Tourism Satellite Accounts)

7.1.1. Develop a real-time visitor counting system for land and mooring access to parks, enabling data-informed management decisions.

7.1.2. Develop exit surveys and real-time feedback tools to track visitor satisfaction and public service performance across key entry and service point.

7.1.3. Allocate budget and personnel for dedicated monitoring and evaluation of customer service standards across public institutions.

7.1.4. Incorporate performance indicators for tourism service delivery into departmental reporting templates.

7.1.5. Implement spatial visitor flow mapping and anchorages monitoring systems to guide evidence-based marine tourism planning

7.1.6. Undertake national scientific studies to determine tourism carrying capacity across different islands and individual attraction sites.

7.1.7. Use visitor density and ecosystem health data to inform tourism growth limits and infrastructure investments.

7.1.8. Disaggregate tourism revenue data by island and accommodation type to support equitable planning, revenue attribution, and reinvestment decisions.

7.1.9. Develop a centralized ferry terminal and shuttle coordination hub for North Sound to improve passenger mobility and reduce bottlenecks.

7.1.10. Introduce a paid parking system and controlled traffic flow measures near Gun Creek to address congestion.

7.1.11. Track tourism investment facilitation performance indicators (e.g., permit turnaround time, inter-agency coordination frequency) to improve service delivery.

7.1.12. Track the economic impact of agritourism activities including contribution to food security, income diversification, and community resilience.

7.1.13. Establish a guest exit survey system in partnership with accommodations to track visitor satisfaction and expenditure patterns.

7.1.14. Track the economic impact of sports and entertainment events through satellite accounts and visitor surveys.

7.1.15. Include data collection from federations and entertainment organizers as part of national M&E.

7.1.16. Establish a data-sharing protocol between ministries and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to facilitate the development of tourism satellite accounts.

7.1.17. Improve tracking of public service delivery metrics (e.g., licensing time, permits granted) that impact visitor experiences.

7.1.18. Collect visitor data specific to JVD to inform decision-making.

7.1.19. Strengthen cruise visitor data collection and feedback mechanisms to guide policy, marketing, and infrastructure investments.

7.2. Use of Technology

7.2.1. Leverage technology to deliver service standards guidance digitally through online training, toolkits, and video simulations for onboarding new tourism workers.

7.2.2. Digitise complaint and feedback mechanisms for tourists, linking them directly to the grading and service performance system for tourism providers.

7.2.3. Create a dynamic online portal for service standards that hosts resources, case studies, checklists, and feedback dashboards for operators and government regulators alike.

7.2.4. Upgrade entrance-fee systems and ticketing platforms to support dynamic pricing models and better track visitation trends.

7.2.5. Leverage AI-based tools to support predictive modelling, visitor profiling, document validation, and content curation, ensuring quality control through structured data pipelines.

7.2.6. Use GIS and marine tracking technology to monitor boating patterns and enforce access limits to protected zones.

7.2.7. Deploy digital tools for crop traceability, consumer education, and virtual farm engagement through QR codes and online storytelling platforms.

7.2.8. Create a central digital portal for accommodation licensing, inspections, and complaint resolution.

7.2.9. Support smaller properties in adopting digital booking platforms and review management tools.

7.2.10. Develop a digital portal for all events and festivals, integrated with booking and marketing platforms.

7.2.11. Enable online permit applications and event registration systems for stakeholders.

7.2.12. Create a single public interface or mobile portal for tourists to access information on government services, emergency contacts, and cultural attractions.

7.2.13. Encourage QR-code-based self-guided tours at government-managed heritage sites and parks.

7.2.14. Implement digital tools (apps, QR codes, feedback kiosks) at cruise docks to enhance information access and post-visit reviews.

7.3. *Labour Market*

7.3.1. Review staff remuneration within the Trust to ensure parity with public-sector salary scales and avoid capacity drain.

7.3.2. Track workforce dynamics in tourism (permits issued, positions advertised, wage levels, job classification by International Labour Organisation's (ILO) codes, linking employment and training policies to tourism workforce needs.

7.3.3. Utilize labour management system data to align workforce development, recruitment, and job matching to sector demands, particularly through trade and work permit processes.

7.3.4. Measure income equity and occupational mobility within the tourism sector to ensure inclusive growth and appropriate labour policies.

7.3.5. Introduce marine sector skills assessments to identify gaps in boat repair, provisioning, and customer service.

7.3.6. Support upskilling of frontline workers and site managers in environmental stewardship, safety standards, and customer care specific to ecotourism operations.

7.3.7. Map skills required by strategic tourism investments and align vocational and technical education programming accordingly.

7.3.8. Support dual vocational training tracks for young people—balancing bureaucratic career paths with nature-based livelihoods in farming and fisheries.

7.3.9. Analyse wage and benefit trends in the accommodations sector to ensure competitiveness and workforce retention.

7.3.10. Conduct skills-gap assessments for sports tourism support services (e.g., event security, sports medicine, media technicians).

7.3.11. Introduce short courses and certifications to fill labour market gaps.

7.3.12. Use the Labour Management System to identify and address skills shortages in tourism-related roles.

7.3.13. Ensure that decent work conditions, including compliance with labour law and fair wages, are enforced within tourism-facing government roles (e.g., port agents, cleaning and grounds staff).

7.3.14. Facilitate job matching and recruitment fairs for cruise-related employment opportunities in the tourism service chain.

7.4. People & HR Development

7.4.1. Establish a tourism-focused certification process for public-facing roles across both the private and public sectors, including taxi operators, customs, immigration, and visitor-facing administrative roles.

7.4.2. Embed service quality competencies into all hospitality-related curricula in schools and vocational institutions, with continuous professional development offerings.

7.4.3. Incentivise participation in training through linkages to licensing, recognition programmes, or access to government-led promotional platforms.

7.4.4. Fund training and career advancement programmes for National Parks staff to strengthen service delivery and site stewardship.

7.4.5. Integrate tourism-specific customer service training into the onboarding curriculum for Immigration and Customs Officers.

7.4.6. Develop a targeted programme of workshops in collaboration with the Public Service Training Institute to familiarise public officers with tourism policy priorities.

7.4.7. Digitize and deliver training through a Learning Management System (LMS) that supports customer service, cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and safety standards in tourism.

7.4.8. Embed certification into work permit processes, training verification, and business licensing systems to ensure service providers meet basic tourism standards.

7.4.9. Build human resource capacity in the area of experience curation, product interpretation, and multi-lingual guiding skills.

7.4.10. Support development of public-private training programmes for new and emerging experience designers and product developers.

7.4.11. Reintroduce vocational training programmes focused on marine trades, hospitality, and customer service linked to Blue Tourism.

7.4.12. Institutionalize environmental education in the national school curriculum from early childhood to secondary level.

7.4.13. Host regional training and HR conferences in Virgin Gorda to elevate tourism sector professionalism and knowledge exchange.

7.4.14. Launch public awareness campaigns to reposition tourism as a viable and prestigious career path across professional domains.

7.4.15. Incorporate agritourism training into national public service-learning programmes and continuous development curricula.

7.4.16. Partner with regional institutions to offer hospitality certification programmes locally, especially in advanced customer service.

7.4.17. Train event volunteers and stewards in hospitality, crowd management, and safety protocols.

7.4.18. Establish sports and event tourism modules within the national tourism training framework.

7.4.19. Mandate annual customer service training modules for all public officers who interface with the public, with particular focus on visitor experience.

7.4.20. Include tourism as a performance result area in the public sector performance management system.

7.4.21. Create a dedicated, centralised Institute of Tourism to offer accredited training programmes for all hospitality, marine, and tourism service professionals.

7.4.22. Include both land-based and marine-based tourism disciplines with regionally and internationally validated certifications.

7.4.23. Integrate American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute (AHLEI) modules, SERV Safe, and STCW certifications.

7.5. *Public-Private-Partnerships/ Destination Management Councils*

7.5.1. Create a cross-sectoral National Standards Advisory Group including Government, private sector, and consumer advocates to regularly review, revise, and promote tourism-related service standards.

7.5.2. Institutionalise service quality feedback loops by incorporating public-facing reporting mechanisms (e.g., dashboards or annual scorecards) and stakeholder feedback forums.

7.5.3. Clarify public-private responsibilities in park operations, especially where private operators are using public assets without paying appropriate fees.

7.5.4. Establish a permanent inter-agency coordination mechanism and shared access to strategic data between the BVI Ports Authority, Customs, Immigration, and the BVI Tourist Board to address bottlenecks in tourist facilitation.

7.5.5. Formalise operating agreements with ferry operators and charter vessel companies for advanced submission of manifests and adherence to a common code of conduct.

7.5.6. Encourage cross-sector collaboration by adopting the Cayman Islands PRIDE model as a baseline for inter-agency public service training.

7.5.7. Establish joint monitoring frameworks involving public agencies and private sector tourism stakeholders to harmonise expectations on service delivery.

7.5.8. Foster training partnerships between private sector firms and local institutions to ensure workforce alignment with market demand

7.5.9. Establish local destination management councils with responsibility for identifying unique product opportunities, managing community involvement, and overseeing interpretation quality.

7.5.10. Create public-private incubation platforms to pilot new tourism product ideas and crowdsource innovation in niche markets.

7.5.11. Formalize Destination Management Councils with marine representation to coordinate planning, investment, and service standards across islands.

7.5.12. Create or designate an entity responsible for the upkeep of tourism infrastructure (e.g., restrooms, signage, trails), distinct from regulatory or promotional bodies.

7.5.13. Facilitate partnerships with private sector, NGOs, and community groups for ongoing site management and volunteer programming.

7.5.14. Establish a microenterprise support facility dedicated to Anegada's small businesses, including grants, loans, and technical assistance through the Department of Trade or a Tourism Microenterprise Fund.

7.5.15. Ensure that business licensing and vendor access reflect fair treatment and enforcement across all operators to rebuild community trust and reduce perceived inequity.

7.5.16. Formalise a West End Destination Management Council comprising developers, community members, and public agencies to manage local tourism development holistically.

7.5.17. Establish collaborative branding initiatives between regenerative farmers and tourism boards to position the Virgin Islands as a sustainable culinary destination.

7.5.18. Formalise regular forums between government and accommodation providers to coordinate on policy changes, investment promotion, and crisis preparedness.

7.5.19. Formalise a Sports and Events Tourism Advisory Council including sports federations, hospitality partners, and government.

7.5.20. Incentivize private sector co-investment in infrastructure, marketing, and logistics.

7.5.21. Establish a local tourism committee in JVD comprising public and private sector actors.

7.5.22. Involve residents in tourism planning and decision-making processes.

7.5.23. Formalise a Destination Management Council with cruise industry representation for collaborative planning and problem-solving.

7.6. Public Awareness & Sensitisation

7.6.1. Launch public communications campaigns explaining park fee structures and conservation costs, including video explainers and signage improvements.

7.6.2. Launch a public information campaign on new tourism facilitation measures at ports of entry, ensuring visitor expectations are managed and frontline officers are supported.

7.6.3. Promote awareness among Customs and Immigration personnel of the economic significance of tourism and the need for consistent and professional service delivery.

7.6.4. Use storytelling and testimonials to sensitise public officers about the real-world effects of poor service and celebrate excellence.

7.6.5. Communicate sector performance and revenue contribution transparently to the public using dashboards and regular reporting cycles, reinforcing tourism's developmental role.

7.6.6. Launch national campaigns to raise awareness among residents of the value of diversified product offerings and encourage their participation in cultural tourism delivery.

7.6.7. Design visitor orientation materials on marine conduct, safety, and environmental rules, especially for charter yacht clients.

7.6.8. Design a national public education campaign that communicates the economic and identity-based value of tourism to citizens.

7.6.9. Showcase the positive impact of tourism on communities, culture, livelihoods, and infrastructure, particularly in rural and maritime communities.

7.6.10. Enhance public and stakeholder confidence by ensuring that Environmental and Tourism Levy revenues are transparently disbursed for product development, site maintenance, and climate adaptation in accordance with legislation.

7.6.11. Implement national campaigns to reconnect residents and youth with traditional farming and fishing practices and elevate their role in tourism.

7.6.12. Run national campaigns to promote pride in hosting, cultural presentation, and event etiquette.

7.6.13. Encourage community buy-in for sporting and cultural tourism through awareness-building initiatives.

7.6.14. Conduct public sensitisation campaigns on the benefits and responsibilities of being a cruise destination.

7.7. Legislative Infrastructure

7.7.1. Amend the 2001 Park Fees Regulation to authorise new sites and fee levels.

7.7.2. Finalise the gazetting of the mooring licence fee increase.

7.7.3. Reaffirm in legislation the Board's authority over carrying capacities and conservation standards.

7.7.4. Draft supporting regulations to ensure that tourism-related vessel movement (e.g., water taxis, charters) comply with updated registration and reporting frameworks.

7.7.5. Develop legal frameworks that allow data-sharing protocols across ministries, define responsibilities for system management, and embed licensing/training compliance.

7.7.6. Link regulatory frameworks (e.g., licensing) with data systems that verify certification, training, and compliance with service and product standards.

7.7.7. Harmonize immigration, customs, and work permit policies with the tourism growth agenda through a simplified "One-Stop Shop" model.

7.7.8. Review the legal and policy frameworks governing creative and cultural sectors to ensure alignment with tourism sector needs, investment incentives, and protection of local IP.

7.7.9. Strengthen copyright, royalties, and IP protections for cultural producers contributing to tourism experiences.

7.7.10. Fast-track land title processing to empower Anegada residents to access financing, invest in tourism infrastructure, and leverage generational property for economic benefit.

7.7.11. Codify investor service standards, timeframes, and escalation protocols in investment facilitation legislation or regulation.

7.7.12. Enact a Food Security and Sustainability Act that codifies support for agritourism, including grants, marketing authorities, and public health safeguards.

7.7.13. Amend the Hotels Aid Act and relevant policies to reflect new sustainability, accessibility, and service quality requirements.

7.7.14. Require periodic recertification of accommodation licenses linked to compliance with quality and environmental standards.

7.7.15. Introduce a legislative framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions to national events and community initiatives.

7.7.16. Review and harmonise policies between the National Tourism Policy, National Sports Policy, and Cultural Policy to ensure seamless integration.

7.7.17. Review and amend existing laws to facilitate smooth processing of passengers, regulate excursions, and ensure environmental and cultural protection.

8. Institutional Capacity

8.1. Strengthening National Tourism Agencies

8.1.1. Assign responsibility for standards development and enforcement to a dedicated Service Quality Unit within the BVI Tourist Board or a relevant regulatory authority.

8.1.2. Build capacity within the BVI Tourist Board to audit, train, and support businesses in achieving compliance with the national standards framework.

8.1.3. Establish dedicated funding and technical support streams to assist MSMEs and new tourism entrants in meeting service standard expectations.

8.1.4. Institutionalise a mechanism for routine subvention review for the Trust and ensure the Environmental Levy is treated as supplementary funding.

8.1.5. Allocate a designated liaison officer within Immigration and Customs to serve as a tourism coordinator, reporting directly to the Ministry responsible for tourism.

8.1.6. Build institutional capacity within the BVI Ports Authority for managing cruise and charter yacht traffic more efficiently through dedicated tourism units.

8.1.7. Equip the BVI Tourist Board to focus primarily on destination marketing while allowing the Ministry to lead on tourism training, policy, and product development.

8.1.8. Ensure the Ministry of Tourism retains oversight of system integration and monitoring, even when data ownership lies in other agencies.

8.1.9. Establish dedicated internal units or officers focused on innovation, product planning, and market diversification within national tourism institutions.

8.1.10. Create a standing mechanism for structured dialogue between marine operators, government regulators, and policy makers before legislation is enacted.

8.1.11. Expand the technical capacity of the BVI Tourist Board to support product development in the cultural, culinary, and creative sectors.

8.1.12. Establish a creative economy desk or unit within the BVI Tourist Board or in partnership with relevant cultural bodies to lead development in this area.

8.1.13. Establish a National Heritage and Cultural Tourism Framework to guide preservation, activation, and storytelling at cultural sites.

8.1.14. Secure multi-year funding for interpretive signage, storytelling initiatives, and partnerships with churches and private owners of historic landmarks.

8.1.15. Strengthening National Tourism Agencies

8.1.16. Designate and invest in Anegada's port as a strategic tourism gateway, with formal status as a Port of Entry and regular staff presence.

8.1.17. Upgrade the dock and surrounding port infrastructure to meet minimum standards for passenger comfort, safety, and branding.

8.1.18. Task the BVI Tourist Board with producing short-form promotional content highlighting stories of local farmers and fishers contributing to tourism.

8.1.19. Create a dedicated sports tourism desk within the BVI Tourist Board with responsibility for product development, branding, and market activation.

8.1.20. Expand staff and technical capacity of the cruise unit within the BVI Tourist Board to coordinate multi-agency cruise development.

8.2. *Adding Value to the Tourism Function at the Regional Level*

8.2.1. Participate in OECS and other regional initiatives to benchmark and update park management practices and funding frameworks.

8.2.2. Advocate for the Virgin Islands to lead regional pilot initiatives in integrating immigration and tourism systems for small island states.

8.2.3. Draw on regional tourism policy alignment (e.g., OECS framework) to standardize indicators, training content, and integration models for broader regional comparability and support.

8.2.4. Champion the inclusion of sports and entertainment tourism within regional tourism programming, including the OECS Tourism Strategy.

8.3. *Public Agency Partnership Arrangements*

8.3.1. Create formal agreements (e.g., MOUs) among regulatory, investment, and tourism promotion agencies to ensure alignment between policy, investment incentives, and service quality expectations.

8.3.2. Strengthen inter-agency coordination between the National Parks Trust, Ministry of Natural Resources, and tourism entities for integrated site planning and enforcement.

8.3.3. Integrate service standard compliance into the investment approval and support process for new or expanding tourism businesses.

8.3.4. Create an inter-ministerial tourism facilitation task force to oversee implementation of new systems and ensure that border control measures support national development goals.

8.3.5. Establish structured partnerships between the Ministry, Department of Human Resources, and H. Lavity Stoutt Community College for co-delivery of training and certification programmes.

8.3.6. Formalise public agency roles and accountabilities regarding tourism-related education and certification to ensure continuity beyond personnel changes.

8.3.7. Revise interagency agreements to define roles and data responsibilities, particularly for integrated workforce, licensing, and compliance systems.

8.3.8. Establish structured inter-agency arrangements between the BVI Tourist Board, Department of Culture, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Youth Affairs to support holistic product development.

8.3.9. Develop policy frameworks that formalise joint responsibility for niche tourism sectors such as culinary, heritage, and marine-based tourism.

8.3.10. Strengthen collaboration between the BVITB and the Department of Culture and other public entities to ensure coherent programme delivery, joint budgeting, and shared KPIs for culture-based tourism initiatives.

8.3.11. Ensure cruise-generated revenues are transparently captured and reinvested into Virgin Gorda's infrastructure and services.

8.3.12. Reform cruise tourism policy to restrict access during peak periods and adjust passenger fees to reflect true environmental and infrastructural impacts.

8.3.13. Coordinate land titling efforts across the Ministry of Natural Resources and Labour, Department of Lands and Survey, and the Registry to address systemic delays and local barriers to property ownership.

8.3.14. Reintroduce regular inter-agency concept review meetings for tourism proposals, involving core entities such as Planning, Environment, and Tourism.

8.3.15. Coordinate planning, resource allocation, and programme implementation across agriculture, tourism, education, and health sectors through formalised multi-agency agreements.

8.3.16. Establish MoUs between planning, environment, and tourism ministries to streamline accommodation development approvals.

8.4. Regional Partnerships

8.4.1. Engage with regional conservation networks and development finance institutions to address funding shortfalls and technical gaps in tourism-related conservation efforts.

8.4.2. Leverage existing vendor relationships and regional case studies (e.g., Palm Beach, Mass General Hospital, EU aviation training) to guide system customization and benchmarking.

8.4.3. Seek partnerships with marine conservation NGOs and academic institutions to scale up Blue Economy research and monitoring.

8.4.4. Strengthen coordination with regional environmental and tourism bodies to share lessons, pool resources, and scale up best practices in sustainable tourism governance.

8.4.5. Facilitate cross-border event collaborations and talent exchange programmes with OECS and other regional partners.

About the Consultative Meetings' Participants

The consultation series engaged 151 participants across nine consultation themes, (Figure 2) reflecting broad-based interest from community members, private operators, civil society, and public officials. Overall participation skewed slightly female—53.6% female (81) to 46.4% male (70) (Figure 3)—indicating healthy representation of women in the dialogue and decision-shaping process.

Attendance clustered around themes that mirror the Territory's core tourism assets and policy concerns. Community Meetings accounted for the largest single share (19.2%, 29 participants), signalling strong grassroots engagement across islands and providing rich place-based insights (e.g., access, cleanliness, crowding, and service experience). Product-side interests were also prominent: Sports, Entertainment & Events drew 16.6% (25), Sustainability & Ecotourism 14.6% (22), and the marine-focused sessions—Blue Economy (12.6%, 19) plus Cruise & Transportation (10.6%, 16)—collectively represented nearly a quarter of all participants (23.2%). Participation in Agriculture & Fisheries (8.6%, 13), Food/Culinary & Cultural Heritage (7.9%, 12), and Education (6.6%, 10) underscores the relevance of inter-sector linkages and human capital. By contrast, Accommodations registered the smallest share (3.3%, 5), suggesting a need for targeted outreach to hoteliers and guest-house operators during drafting and validation.

Taken together, the profile indicates a constituency that is deeply invested in community-led development, marine and events-driven product growth, and sustainability safeguards. For policy formulation, the distribution of participants points to four practical follow-ups: (1) preserve strong community channels as implementation partners; (2) translate marine and events input into clear capacity, safety, and infrastructure actions; (3) embed sustainability tools (e.g., site capacities, waste rules, reef/beach protections) where interest is high; and (4) close the engagement gap with the accommodations sector through focused consultations on service standards, grading/certification, investment facilitation, and compliance.


Figure 2

Gender Distribution

70

81

Female
Male
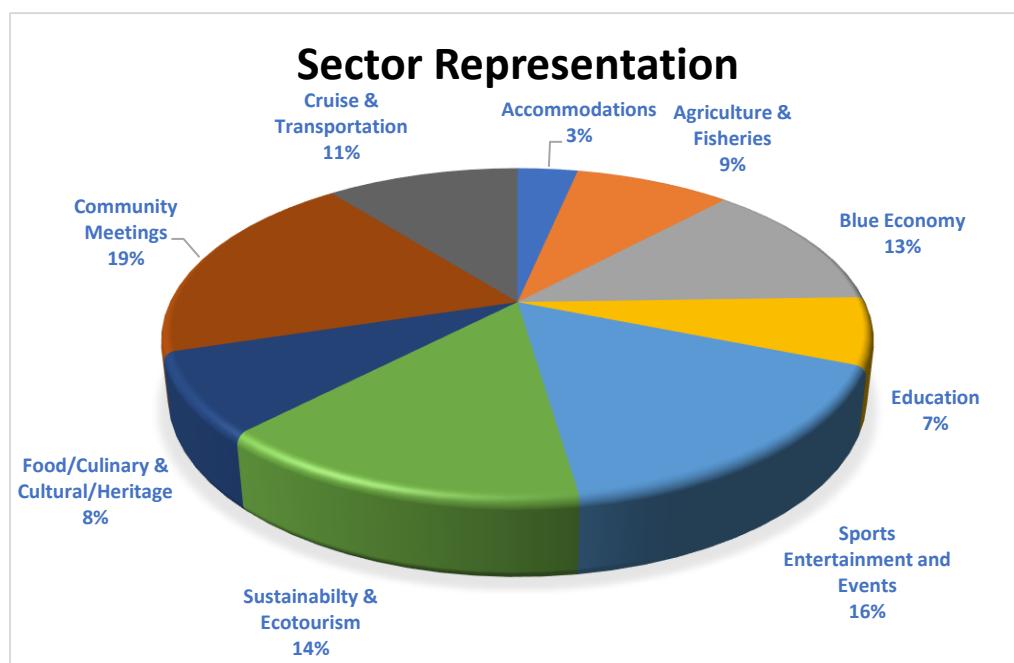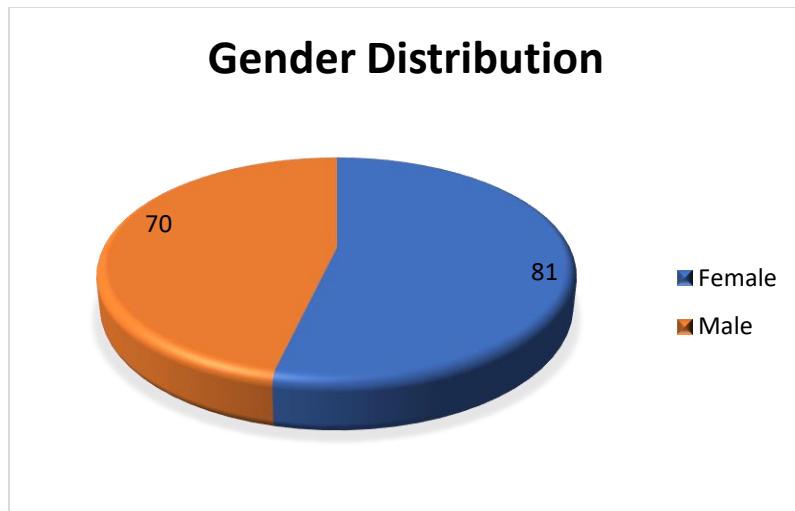
Figure 3

Public Officers' Consultations Held on 11 June 2025 and Facilitated by the VI Public Service Learning Institute

The Virgin Islands Public Service Learning Institute convened two consultative sessions (morning and afternoon) on 11 June 2025 for public officers. The combined attendance total based on public officers who completed a post-training survey is 349 participants[1] (Table 1).

Participation was broad-based across central government, revenue and regulatory bodies, the justice sector, social services, and frontline service-delivery entities. The strongest representation came from the Social Development Department (27; 7.7%), Treasury Department (24; 6.9%), and the BVI Post Office (20; 5.7%), followed by the Immigration Department (14; 4.0%) and Inland Revenue Department (14; 4.0%). Notable additional clusters included MEYAS (13; 3.7%), the Judiciary (13; 3.7%), the Education Department (11; 3.2%), the House of Assembly (11; 3.2%), and Adina Donovan Home (11; 3.2%). Taken together, these top ten departments accounted for 158 participants (45.3%) of total attendance.

Beyond these, attendance was widely distributed across many other departments, generally in small numbers, underscoring system-wide interest in the National Tourism Policy's implications—from fiscal administration and border management to social protection, education/workforce development, cultural services, and day-to-day visitor-facing operations.

The blend of strong showings from finance and revenue agencies (Treasury, Inland Revenue), social and community services (Social Development, Adina Donovan Home), border/entry management (Immigration), justice and legislative bodies (Judiciary, House of Assembly), and education (Education Department, MEYAS) indicates cross-government ownership of the tourism agenda.

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[1] This number represents only those officers who completed post-training surveys. The total number of participants online exceeded 400 individuals.

Table 1

Department	Participants
Adina Donovan Home	11
Agriculture & Fisheries	3
Archives Unit	1
Attorney General's Chambers	5
Audit Department	2
BVI Post Office	20
BVI Tourist Board & Film Development	1
Cabinet Office	1
Central Statistics Office	6
Civil Registry & Passport Office	4
Constitutionally Established Departments	6
CSCC	1
Department Of Agriculture And Fisheries	3
Department Of Culture	2
Department Of Facilities Management	3
Department Of Health	2
Department Of Human Resources	6
Department Of Immigration	1
Department Of Information And Public Relations	2
Department Of Motor Vehicles	1
Department Of Waste Management	2
Department Of Youth Affairs And Sports	1
Deputy Governor's Office	9
Director Of Public Prosecutions	1
Education Department	11
Elmore Stoutt High School	1
Health And Social Development	2
HM Customs	6
HM Prison	10
House Of Assembly	11
Human Resources	2
Immigration Department	14
Information & Public Relations	1
Inland Revenue Department	16
Internal Audit	1
Judiciary	13
Labour & Workforce Development	5
Land And Survey Department (Lands Unit)	2
Library Services	2

Department	Participants
Magistrate Court	10
MCW	3
MENRCC	7
MEYAS	13
MFSEDDT	6
MHSD	8
Ministry of Finance	4
MTCSD	3
Office of Director of Public Prosecutions	7
Office Of Gender Affairs	1
Office Of The Auditor General	4
Office Of The Deputy Governor - Sister Islands Programme Unit	7
Old Government House Museum	1
Premier's Office	7
Public Health	2
Public Works Department	10
Records Management Centre	1
RVIPF	2
Service Commission Secretariat	1
Social Development Department	27
Trade Department	2
Treasury Department	24
Virgin Islands Public Service Learning Institute	1
Water And Sewerage Department	7
	349