GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

Tel: (284) 468-2730 | website: gov.vg

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Government and Private Sector Must Work Together to Advance Marine Tourism

Policy Analyst in the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development, Mr. Emery Che Pemberton, has called for closer collaboration between the Government and private sector to implement the National Sustainable Development Plan and expand local ownership within the marine tourism industry.

Speaking at the Marine Tourism Forum held at The Moorings on 18 August, Mr. Pemberton said the National Sustainable Development Plan 2021–2036 was developed with the understanding that The Virgin Islands cannot achieve its development goals through Government alone, particularly within the marine and blue economy sectors.

“Government policy and private capability have to combine, because neither side can do this alone,” Mr. Pemberton said.

He explained that marine tourism sits at the intersection of two key areas addressed by the Plan: Marine and Fisheries, and Tourism and Hospitality. The Plan calls for public-private collaboration in managing marine industries, developing opportunities in marine tourism and the blue economy, and increasing local participation within those sectors.

Mr. Pemberton also highlighted the desire of Virgin Islanders to move beyond employment and assume greater ownership within the tourism industry. “We do not just want to be workers; we want to be owners and investors,” he said, quoting one of the people’s priorities reflected in the Plan. He said this vision includes creating opportunities for Virgin Islanders to own, invest in and benefit more directly from marine tourism and other blue economy ventures.

The Policy Analyst in the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development also emphasised that economic growth must be balanced with the protection of the natural resources upon which the industry depends. The Virgin Islands’ reef assets cover approximately 300,000 acres and form an important part of the Territory’s environmental and economic foundation.

“By 2036, the ambition is that BVI has reaped real benefit from the blue and green economy, while preserving the ocean resources that make that benefit possible in the first place. Growth and stewardship as one goal, not a trade-off,” he said.

The Plan identifies several targets intended to support that ambition, including partnerships to address coral bleaching, continued mangrove and salt pond restoration, improved marine infrastructure and the development of systems to measure sustainable employment within tourism.

Mr. Pemberton said collaboration with industry stakeholders is also necessary to ensure that government policies are informed by accurate operational, visitor and industry data. “The marine space is where BVI’s identity and BVI’s economic future sit closest together. We’d rather build that future with you at the table now than explain it to you later,” he said.

The National Sustainable Development Plan serves as the Territory's 15-year development roadmap and is being implemented through successive three-year action cycles. The current cycle covers 2026 to 2028.

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About:

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development is responsible for advancing the Territory's tourism sector, preserving and promoting cultural heritage, and implementing policies that support sustainable growth and environmental stewardship.