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Marine Industry Forum Charts Next Steps for Sector Growth and Local Opportunities

The Ministry of Financial Services, Economic Development and Digital Transformation, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development and The Moorings, hosted a Marine Industry Forum on 18 August at The Moorings Yacht Club. More than 70 persons attended, with others viewing the discussions on Facebook and YouTube.

The forum continued the Government of the Virgin Islands' engagement with the marine sector. Marine operators, business owners, public officers and training providers discussed practical measures to expand local business and career opportunities while improving safety, service standards and compliance.

Minister with responsibility for Financial Services and Economic Development Honourable Lorna Smith, OBE said the forum followed earlier discussions with Virgin Islanders who raised concerns about their participation in the yachting industry. She added that the Ministry recorded the concerns and recommendations raised during the forum and the proposed actions will be grouped and referred to the relevant ministries and agencies, with focused discussions to follow.

"This is not going to die. I can assure you that this is the first of several meetings that will happen," Honourable Smith said.

Junior Minister for Tourism and Culture Honourable Luce Hodge-Smith noted the close relationship between tourism and the marine industry and the need for continued cooperation between the Government and private sector.

The programme included presentations on the wider development and regulation of the industry. Policy Analyst Mr. Emery Pemberton explained how marine and fisheries, tourism and hospitality are incorporated into the National Sustainable Development Plan. Director of the Virgin Islands Shipping and Maritime Authority Mr. John Samuel outlined the state of the Virgin Islands marine industry, including its economic importance and opportunities for growth and local participation.

Chief Marine Accident Investigator Mr. Jerome Padmore also addressed marine safety. He reported that more than 20 marine accidents have been recorded in 2026, mainly collisions, along with groundings and fires. He called for stronger accident reporting, routine vessel compliance, competent operators and improved fire preparedness at marinas.

The first panel, *Current and Future Needs of Marine Tourism: Beyond Sailing*, featured Mr. Ramon George of Grandeur Charters, Mr. Edward Lindsey of Peter Island Resort and Mr. Peter Cochran, Senior Vice President of Global Operations at The Moorings BVI. The discussion covered distinctive local experiences, stronger partnerships between operators and resorts, consistent service standards and business support for local day-charter and water-taxi operators.

Operators raised concerns about licensing and regulatory costs, access to finance and insurance, operating expenses, marine infrastructure and enforcement against illegal or unlicensed activity. Honourable Smith also confirmed the Government's policy decision to reserve day-charter and water-taxi licences for British Virgin Islanders.

The second panel, *Marine Careers and Industry Development: Building BVI Talent for the Marine Economy*, featured Deputy Commissioner of Labour Ms. Felina Moss, Deputy Director of Trade Dr Lincoln Bobb, HLSCC Dean of Workforce Development and Continuing Education Ms. Marva Dawson-Wheatley and Mr. Cochran. The panel discussed the wide range of marine industry careers including business management, marine mechanics, electrical systems, vessel maintenance and other technical fields. It also examined the need for school exposure, practical training, apprenticeships and clearer routes from certification to employment.

Ms. Moss outlined the draft Blue Economy Workforce Development Strategy, which proposes introducing students to the sector from primary school and creating a blue-economy passport to record training and work experience. Dr Bobb highlighted business training supported by the Caribbean Development Bank, while Ms. Dawson-Wheatley outlined HLSCC's marine technology, STCW, powerboat and captain-preparation programmes.

Following the forum, the Ministry will consolidate the issues and recommendations, refer them to the responsible ministries and agencies and convene focused discussions on licensing and enforcement, business support, safety and service standards and workforce development. Progress will be reported when the wider sector reconvenes in the fall.

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