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June 4, 2015

Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Economic Development, Agriculture and Planning Committee
1 Lagoon Street Complex
Frederiksted, St. Croix, VI 00840

Re: Bill No. 31-0100: An Act amending Title 7 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 1, to allow for the cultivation of Hemp and other related purposes.

Good morning Chairman, committee members, bill sponsor Sen. Nelson, and those present,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Hemp legislature before us today.

SEA has previously provided comment on this issue on two occasions; three years ago in August of 2012, delivered by Paul Chakroff during his tenure as Executive Director and spokesperson for SEA; updated comments by Mr. Chakroff in his capacity as an independent environmental consultant in August of 2014; and supporting comment by SEA at that time. SEA thanks Mr. Chakroff for his service and for updating his previous testimony. SEA's position today is much the same as it was 3 years ago: we are in favor of the increase in industrial agricultural production this bill is designed to provide.

Working with government to ensure steady progress toward a healthy agricultural sector has always been SEA's goal. Industrial scale agricultural production is a challenging task, but hemp appears to be a good fit for our climate, our soils, our technical capabilities, and our budget restraints, requiring little more than a minimum rainfall to generate a saleable product with many innovative uses. Hemp has the advantage of being a robust crop that would preclude the use of pesticides or chemicals and their residual effects. The availability of a cost-effective local fiber could be foundational for the creation of future value-added products based on hemp.

We can only wish for clear sailing and a streamlined bureaucratic process that will make the industrial scale cultivation of hemp a reality for the farmers and innovators who will capitalize on the availability of this product for the many current and as yet untapped potential it promises.

Sincerely,

Michael Baron, Advocacy Chair
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