

**BEFORE THE THIRTY-FIRST LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

**TESTIMONY OF ST. CROIX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
IN SUPPORT OF APPROVAL OF THE CZM PERMITS TO ALLOW FOR THE  
DREDGING OF THE SCHOONER BAY CHANNEL**

Good afternoon, Mr. President and distinguished Members of the Thirty-First Legislature. I am Shack Hawkins; I serve as the volunteer President of the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce. It is an honor to be before you tonight to express our request for your body's approval of the CZM permit to perform a maintenance dredging of the Schooner Bay Channel.

As a voice for the St. Croix Business community, we believe that having adequate deep water port access is critical to the redevelopment of our marine industry. Not only for the Schooner Bay Channel, but for all of our ports. If they are not properly maintained, they become unsafe and we lose the opportunity to utilize their value as economic drivers. Each and every port under the VI Port Authority's control needs to be properly maintained to protect our economic interests.

The Schooner Bay Channel has a controlling depth of 18 feet. This does not allow for large cruise ships, but will allow for small, boutique cruise ships and private yachts to access the Gallows Bay area. As anyone in St. Thomas can attest, the thriving yacht and cruise industry is vitally important to the continued success of our local businesses. It provides not only jobs, but also an influx of revenue into the territory. When we bring in outside revenue to the territory, it has the same effect within our economy as if we produced a good and exported it.

My office is in the Gallows Bay area, and I can attest that the area could become a very attractive location for tourist. It is ripe for development and has many of the conveniences that the private yacht community is looking for, such as close-by restaurants, marine supply stores, a hardware store, a pharmacy, grocery stores, etc. The proximity to Christiansted is also a great feature of this area.

Through my contacts in the marine services industry, I was informed that a small, boutique cruiseline named SeaDream Yacht Club has expressed interest in coming to Gallows Bay. Their last communication was requesting a confirmation of the date in which the channel will be dredged. Their cruises are high-end, small capacity cruises (with around 100 guests per voyage) with the intent of exploring locales different from the ordinary cruise ships. This type of cruise passenger differs greatly from the average cruise passenger. They not only are spending more on the cruise, but also splurge on shoreside excursions. These activities are exactly the type that our St. Croix can provide. Their website shows itineraries into 2017 and it is an absolute shame that St. Croix is not listed as a destination.

The St. Croix Chamber of Commerce believes that this project is just the start of the redevelopment of our marine industry. We implore this body to make a swift recommendation to approve the CZM permits so that this vital work can be completed as soon as possible.

Thank you.