To: Kurell Hodge  
Executive Director  
34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory  
President 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

From: Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Chair  
Committee on Economic Development & Agriculture

Date: March 30, 2021

Subject: Committee Report for Monday, March 22, 2021 Hearing

Pursuant to the Rules of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, enclosed is the report for the Committee on Economic Development & Agriculture hearing held in the Frits E. Laweatz Legislative Chambers on St. Croix.

**Staff Present**

**Clerk**  
Myrna Pickard

**Public Affairs & Media**  
Eustace Brown  
Alvin Burke  
Alwyn Baptiste  
Bernard Matthew, Sr.  
Melissa Gustave  
Jonelle Jackson  
Winston Nugent

**Sergeant-at-Arms**  
Neal Davis  
David Johnson

The Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture met on Monday, March 22, 2021 at the Frits E. Laweatz Conference Room on St. Croix to receive testimony.
from the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Planning & Natural Resources’ Division of Fish & Wildlife, and the Cooperative Extension Services at the University of the Virgin Islands regarding the overall status of the territory’s agricultural industry, the status of the territory’s fish/vegetable markets, the sustainability of our fish and wildlife, along with the role the University’s Cooperative Extension Services plays in expanding and diversifying the Agriculture & Fisheries industries. The committee also considered Bill No. 34-0023 as outlined below.

**Hearing Start Time** 10:41 a.m.
**Hearing End Time** 5:40 p.m.

**Committee Members Present Included:**
- Vice-Chairman Senator Milton E. Potter
- Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff
- Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
- Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory
- Senator Alma Francis Heyliger
- Senator Javan E. James, Sr.

**Non-Committee Members Present included:**
- Senator Samuel Carrion
- Senator Franklin D. Johnson
- Senator Janelle K. Sarauw
- Senator Genevieve Whitaker

There were five testifiers presenting to the committee in block one. Testifiers appeared virtually at the hearing using the Teams Online Platform. Dr. William Cole did not present himself for the hearing. Senators expressed disappointment in his absence as he has important information about daily operations at the Division of Fish and Wildlife.

**Testifier:**
- **Hon. Positive T.A. Nelson**
  - Title: Commissioner
  - Department/Agency: Department of Agriculture
- **Hon. Jean-Pierre Oriol**
  - Title: Commissioner
  - Department/Agency: Planning & Natural Resources
- **William Cole, PhD.**
  - Title: Chief of Education
  - Department/Agency: Div. of Fish & Wild – DPNR
- **Sean Kelly**
  - Title: Wildlife Biologist III
  - Department/Agency: Div. of Fish & Wild – DPNR
- **Stafford Crossman**
  - Title: Associate Director
  - Department/Agency: UVI Coop. Extension Service

Senators were given 7 minutes for their first round of questioning that was followed by a 4-minute round of questioning. They exhausted all questions and proceeded to a recess called by the chair before Block II.

The second block began at 4:15 and include discussion on Bill No. 34-0023 – an Act amending title 12 of the Virgin Islands Code by adding a chapter 2A to establish the Invasive Species Eradication Community Program; establishing the Invasive Species Eradication Community Program Fund and an Imprest Account Fund for the payment of bounties under the program; and
appropriating $10,000.00 from the Animal Fund to the Invasive species eradication Community Program Fund.

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<tr>
<th>Testifier</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Department/Agency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Jenifer O’Neal</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Office Management &amp; Budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hon. Clarina Modeste-Elliott</td>
<td>Acting Commissioner</td>
<td>Department of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Jean-Pierre Oriol</td>
<td>Commissioner</td>
<td>Planning &amp; Natural Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole Angeli, PhD.</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Div. of Fish &amp; Wild – DPNR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Cole, PhD.</td>
<td>Chief of Education</td>
<td>Div. of Fish &amp; Wild – DPNR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sean Kelly</td>
<td>Wildlife Biologist III</td>
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Dr. Cole also did not present himself for discussion on the bill in the second block of the hearing. Chairman Gittens said he was frustrated with Cole’s lack of participating when called on to attend hearings because he is an integral part of data collection when it comes to discussion and solutions relative to invasive species, specifically the red tail boas that are taking over St. Croix.

Senators were given a 5-minute round of questioning, that was followed up by a 3-minute round of questioning.
Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. made the motion to have Bill 33-023 approved by the committee and forwarded to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further consideration. The motion was seconded by Senator James and Senator Johnson.

**VOTE ON 34-0023**

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<th>SENATOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Milton E. Potter</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr.</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Alma Francis Heyliger</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Javan E. James, Sr.</td>
<td>YES</td>
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During the hearing, several requests for additional information were made through the chair. They are as follows:

- Senator DeGraff asked the Department of Agriculture for definite timeline information on the development of restrooms in the area of the Vegetable Market on St. Thomas.

- Senator Johnson asked Planning and Natural Resources Department for a date certain of when they will get the security system and the ice machine in place so that they can open the La Reine Fish Market.

- Planning and Natural Resources is asked for an update for fishermen who have not received disaster assistance funding.
- Senator Sarauw asked that the Department of Agriculture submits its annual report to the Legislature by January 31st every year as mandated by the Virgin Islands Code.

Chairman Gittens thanked the testifiers, staff, and his colleagues for their contributions to the hearing and adjourned the hearing.