

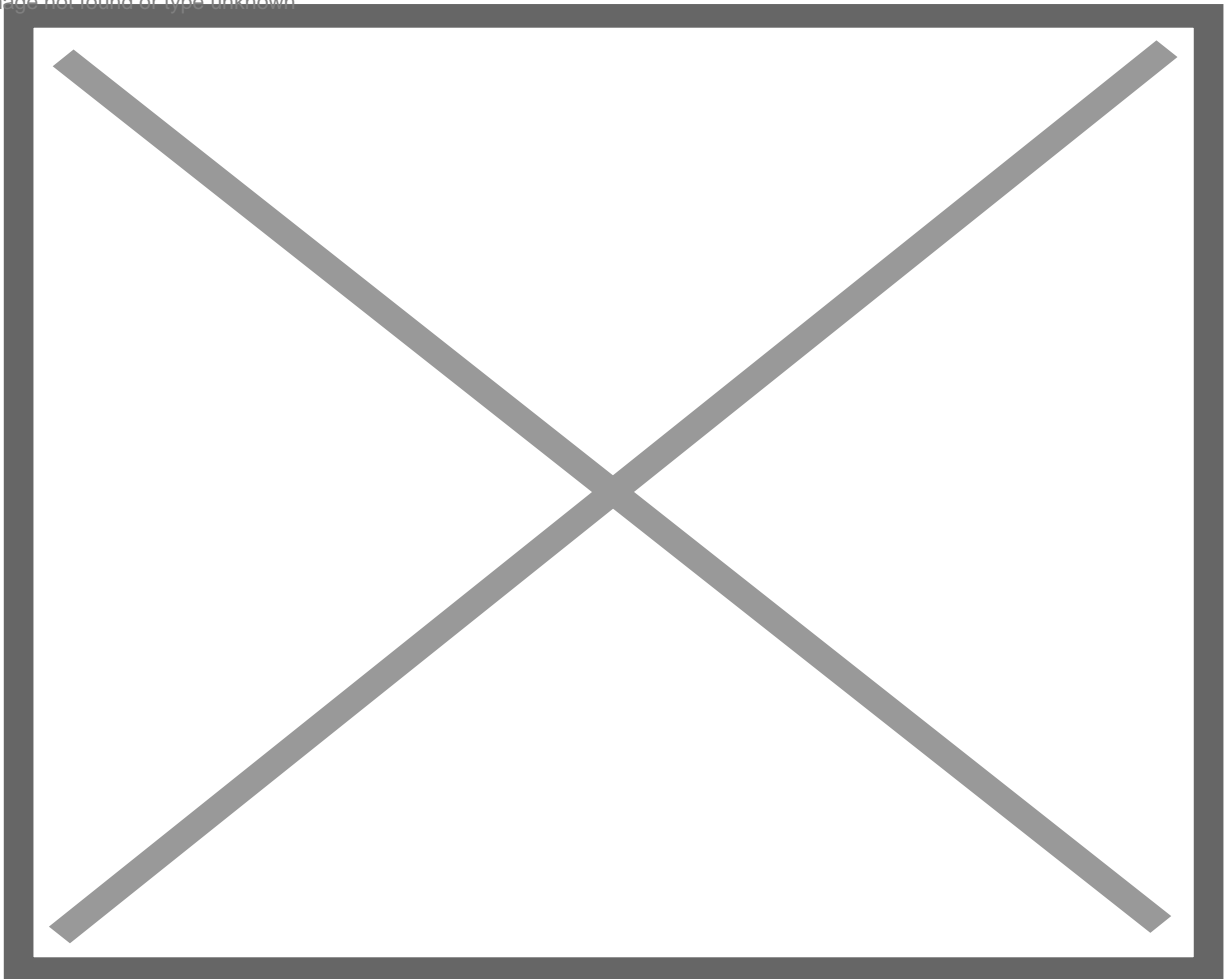
BVI Cabinet Strengthens Integrity Commission with New Powers

Amendments to Public Life Act boosts oversight and anti-corruption efforts

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The Cabinet of Ministers in the British Virgin Islands has agreed to amend the territory's Integrity in Public Life Act to provide more powers to the Integrity Commission.

Following an independent 3rd party review, the Cabinet has decided to grant the Commission the power to make inquiries and conduct investigations to verify whether declarations or statements of registrable interests made are accurate.

The Integrity Commission will also now be able to examine public bodies to uncover potential corrupt practices in the absence of a statutory duty to perform this task falling on any other person.

The Commission will also be in a position to impose fines on those who do not comply with the stipulations in the Integrity in Public Life Act, and receive reports from the Registrar of Interests on any members who are facing suspension or salary withholding.

The Cabinet decision will also expand the definition of “family” to align with the territory’s criminal code - parents, siblings, and common law spouses will now be included, as will adopted and step-children.

The move comes as now-departed Governor John Rankin slammed the government for dragging its feet on implementing the reforms recommended by the Commission of Inquiry. Following his [request for more powers](#) to be granted to the Office of the Governor to push reforms forward, Mr. Rankin noted a deluge of promises regarding actions set to be accomplished in upcoming weeks.

“Frankly, I’ve heard more in the past six days than I’ve heard in the past six months of development in this area,” Mr. Rankin told a local radio station last week. “Let’s see if that can be delivered upon.”

For his part, the former BVI governor said that whether the reforms come through the BVI government or the expanded powers of the governor’s office, “if we can get delivery of the Commission of Inquiry recommendations, I will welcome them.”

Mr. Rankin’s request for more powers from the UK government sparked an intense backlash from the territory’s political directorate, with the animosity exemplified by the conspicuous absence of the BVI Premier from Mr. Rankin’s farewell ceremony. The Governor’s Office noted that both Dr. Natalio Wheatley and Leader of the Opposition Ronnie Skelton were invited to Mr. Rankin’s last public address as Governor, and said pointedly that “the Leader of the Opposition sent his apologies in advance.”

Mr. Rankin’s push for more powers has been countered by a request from Dr. Wheatley asking the UK instead maintain the status quo. The incoming governor, Daniel Pruce, is expected to pick up where Mr. Rankin left off when he takes up his appointment later this month.