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USVI Charter Industry Seeks Federal Action as BVI Fee Hikes Is Said to Trigger Major Economic Losses

USVI maritime representatives say sharply increased BVI licensing and entry fees have led charter vessels to relocate and reduced regional activity, prompting the coalition to meet with federal agencies and policymakers in Washington.

Business / **Published On November 27, 2025 07:29 AM /**

Staff Consortium **November 27, 2025**

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The Crown Bay Marina, home base for many USVI charter operators, is shown along its calm waterfront as the industry pushes for federal action in response to sharply increased BVI licensing and entry fees. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

A delegation representing the U.S. Virgin Islands maritime sector recently traveled to Washington, D.C. seeking urgent federal action in response to what it describes as a “predatory

and unfair” fee structure recently enacted by the British Virgin Islands. The group is calling for immediate intervention as rising costs reshape charter activity across the region.

The delegation is led by Kosei Ohno, president of Crown Bay Marina and Lead of Project Fair Waters (PFW), joined by VI and D.C.-barred attorney Michelle T. Meade of Meade Law. According to PFW, the coalition reflects a wide span of the USVI’s maritime economy and includes industries beyond charter operators, such as marine suppliers, fuel providers, marinas, restaurants, grocers, hoteliers, and transportation operators.

As of June 1, 2025, the BVI enacted steep increases in licensing and entry fees. Annual multi-night charter licenses that previously cost about \$800 now stand at \$24,000 per vessel. Day-trip licenses rose from \$200 to \$8,500 per vessel, in addition to customary customs and immigration charges that can add another \$900 to \$1,200 or more for each entry.

PFW says these changes have already prompted at least 90 charter vessels that once operated from the USVI to relocate to the BVI. The shift has pulled nearly \$14 million in direct spending out of the USVI economy, with projected losses reaching an estimated \$100 million annually when accounting for provisioning, maintenance, hospitality, and transportation impacts.

Because the British Virgin Islands’ external affairs fall under the authority of the United Kingdom, territorial officials in the USVI cannot negotiate independently for relief. For that reason, PFW is pressing for federal engagement.

During the Washington visit, coalition representatives conducted briefings or initiated outreach with the U.S. Department of State, the United States Trade Representative, the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Department of Commerce, according to a release issued by the group. The effort is also being coordinated with the U.S. Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress, and letters outlining the concerns have been sent to senior policymakers, including the White House.

Explaining the timing of the visit, Ohno said, “We came to Washington during the holidays because our season is starting right now. Without swift action, the U.S. Virgin Islands will continue losing American businesses, American jobs, and critical maritime capacity.”

Project Fair Waters is a coalition of U.S. Virgin Islands maritime and shore-based industries focused on securing fair and competitive access to regional waters for U.S. charter operators and the local economy connected to them.