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## PFA Approves \$17 Million For Dredging at WICO to Allow For Larger Cruise Ships

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**Cruise ships docked at WICO. By. ERNICE GILBERT, VI CONSORTIUM**

The V.I. Public Finance Authority during its Friday meeting approved \$17 million for the dredging of the West Indian Company (WICO) dock to accommodate larger cruise ships.

"We have met all the local permitting requirements and are awaiting approval from the Army Corp of Engineers to ensure that this harbor will be able to accommodate bigger cruise ships," PFA Board Chairman Governor Albert Bryan said during the meeting, referring to WICO.

According to PFA Director Nathan Simmonds, financing for the project is secured through earnings in the territory's Debt Service Reserve Fund for the Gross Receipts Tax Bonds held with The Bank of New York Mellon Trust Company. The earnings resulted in an overfunding of the

Debt Service Reserves totaling \$17 million. Mr. Simmonds said these funds can be withdrawn and used for specific projects tied to the government of the Virgin Islands.

The Gov't Employees' Retirement System, which owns the Havensight Mall that is adjacent to the WICO dock, in June expressed support for dredging, stating that the accommodation of larger ships would be a boon for its merchants.

"Over the past 10 years, GERS as the owner of the Havensight Mall has been on record along with the Havensight Merchants Association in support of the dredging of the harbor to allow Oasis class ships to dock at the WICO dock," G.E.R.S. said in the statement. "During the past fiscal year, WICO turned away 21 ships because they were too large to enter the constricted harbor. Larger ships will result in an increase of visitors, increase revenues to the Havensight Mall tenants and WICO, increase revenues to the taxi concession, increase gross receipts taxes to the government, increase in the bottom line of the GERS, and overall, an economic boost to the economy of the territory."

Following the PFA board approval of the funds on Friday, the board then moved to forward the appropriation to the V.I. Legislature for further vetting.

The board also approved a \$100,000 allocation to the Virgin Island Cricket Board to complete the construction and preparation of cricket grounds in Estate Nazareth on St. Thomas, among other items.