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Citing Sargassum, Drought on St. Croix and Issues at WAPA's Water Plant, DLCA Issues Island-Wide Price Freeze on Items Needed for Water Production

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Sargassum in territorial waters. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The V.I. Dept. of Licensing and Consumer Affairs has ordered a St. Croix-only price freeze on potable water, bottled water, ice, and items needed to make these products, citing limited water production capacity at the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority due to "a massive influx of sargassum seaweed on or about July 15" that negatively impacted water production at the V.I. Water and Power Authority's Richmond plant.

DLCA said the sargassum has led to challenged intake pump efficiency as a result of clogging, maximum filter backwashing, increased chlorine injection and threatened membrane and

equipment failure.

"Prices are hereby frozen at existing levels on all items necessary for the production of water and/or due to the effects of the lack of production of water at WAPA, including general supplies and services, including but not limited to items such as Bottled Water, Potable Water, Ice, Trucking Fee for Potable Water, Trucking Fee for transportation of Sargassum to land fill, etc., in accordance with VIRR Section 1015-1(d)," DLCA said in its order.

The department also restricted these items from being exported or sold outside of the territory "until such time that a subsequent order is issued lifting this protective embargo."

The DLCA [order](#) says WAPA is at the maximum capacity in water production in gallons per day "due to a 2022 long-standing drought in the territory," along with the sargassum influx that "threatens production and the planned territorial management storage of water for the community."

Additionally, WAPA's Estate Richmond Power Plant is currently under an Environmental Protection Agency Air Consent Decree requiring the availability of "ultra pure water", which is used as a control for nitric oxide emissions for the gas turbines. Production of ultra pure water may be threatened by the sargassum influx, DLCA said.

The agency said it is closely coordinating with other government agencies, manufacturers, and retailers of basic goods "to ensure availability and continuous supply in the market."

According to the order, the move is part of DLCA's and Governor Albert Bryan's desire to protect consumers from price gouging and unfair business practices.

The order took effect on Friday and further states that "all merchants are forbidden from altering the ordinary delivery methods, terms, discounts, concessions, or methods of payment for all supplies and service referenced" in the order.

"The sale price of all such items and services shall not be higher than the fixed price. All merchants are also forbidden from refusing to accept Virgin Islands Government vouchers during the emergency period," it says. The order does not provide an end date for the price freeze.