

Good afternoon Mr. Lameier,

I registered for tomorrow's meeting as a concerned citizen from the U.S. Virgin Islands where I reside on the island of St. John on the shores of Round Bay in the town East End. My intent was to attend in person, and while I still hope to do so, it now seems improbable. For that reason I am sending some comments and photographs in this email, in the form of a link to an editorial that was published last week in a local online newspaper, The V.I. Source.

[Open Forum: Keep Round Bay for All Ah We, Not the Charter Industry](#)



**Open Forum: Keep Round Bay for All Ah We, Not
the Charter Industry**

I just learned that the territory is set to host The
United States Coral Reef Task Force annual
jurisdictional m...

I wrote this editorial because I am passionate about saving the coral reefs that still exist, particularly those in Round Bay. I am well aware of how important our coral reefs and marine ecosystems are to the health of our planet. I know that the challenges to preserving and protecting these precious resources have become overwhelming to many people, scientists included. Addressing such issues as global

warming, climate change or coral disease in the context of this email is not likely to make anyone take notice. Of course, these are the larger issues that must be addressed, but hopefully not at the expense of losing sight of solutions that already work.

It may not be modern, or edgy, or even scientific, but one of the best ways to "keep things," is to take proper care of them and protect them as best we can. In the interest of preserving our natural resources for the benefit of all, including future generations, laws have been created to ensure that public treasures are protected. The laws make everyone accountable to the same standards. They provide equity.

The power of law, backed by the teeth of enforcement, is a cornerstone of "environmental democracy." The World Resources Institute (on the website "environmentaldemocracyindex.org") states:

Environmental democracy is rooted in the idea that meaningful public participation is critical to ensure that land and natural resource decisions adequately and equitably address citizens' interests. At its core, environmental democracy involves three mutually reinforcing rights:

1. the right to freely access information on environmental quality and problems
2. the right to participate meaningfully in decision-making
3. the right to seek enforcement of environmental laws or compensation for harm

My editorial, "Keep Round Bay for All Ah We" advocates environmental democracy by applying the laws that protect the natural resources of the U.S. Virgin Islands and enforcing those laws. Live coral is one of the Virgin Islands most precious natural resources and it is under attack by violators of the VI boating and anchoring laws. In Round Bay, disrespecting the law is an everyday occurrence because there are no consequences for anchoring in coral or seagrass, speeding in endangered turtle habitat, or dragging anchor and chain over an historic shipwreck. It is a well known fact that there are never citations issued for documented violations in Round Bay by the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources. I am pretty confident that other VI bays have been equally disrespected by DPNR and are probably suffering similar destruction and lack of protection.

The laws are already in place to protect coral and all other sea life from the physical damage that can happen from disrespectful or ignorant boaters and irresponsible recreationists. This is a kind of destruction that is preventable. However, without consequences for breaking the laws, the laws might as well not exist at all. "No law" means that the territorial treasures that by all rights belong to everyone, become the spoils for whoever chooses to take advantage. "No law" means the corals reefs, the seagrass beds, the endangered turtles, the fish, the entire ecosystem is up for grabs. It is as simple and easy as that. "No law" is fast acting and more virulent than a scuticociliate in a bay of spiny sea urchins. The fact that an obvious, violent, and preventable type of coral damage is rarely acknowledged, much less addressed, is absurd.

How does all this align with the goals and promulgations of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force? Think of the millions of the things that the task force does to preserve and protect our precious coral: all the money and effort for marine studies and the research of NOAA; all the development, coordination and implementation of treatment plans for coral disease; all the countless hours of dedicated volunteers and devoted employees that have made saving coral their livelihood and mission; all the continual fund raising and legislative work; all the experimentation and nurturing of coral nurseries, framework and implantations; all the caring in the world that this group and others associated with it give from their hearts and their brains in order to SAVE THE CORAL. All of this... is... for...nothing if the laws are forgotten. These laws were made by leaders with foresight to keep the coral we have alive for everyone.

All the caring is for nothing, if the laws that were put into place to protect and preserve our natural resources, including the precious corals, are virtually ignored. In my opinion, the coral that grows in Round Bay is just as valuable as the coral in a laboratory or an experimental reef. It deserves the same respect and attention as any laboratory coral. Please remember, once those coral baby structures grown in a lab become part of a reef on the ocean floor, they are going to need the protection that only actual enforcement of the law can provide.

For leaders in the coral preservation movement to ignore or play down the very real problem of coral destruction by anchors, chains, sediment upheaval, pollution, and sewage is irresponsible. Even worse, for leaders to present themselves as champions of coral reef protection and restoration by taking on promotional roles, yet not make even modest enforcement efforts or call out blatant violators of the laws is the height of hypocrisy in my book. Worse, it does absolutely nothing to SAVE THE CORAL.

Thank you for the opportunity to have input for such an important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Kathy Vargo