

# Coast Guard Reducing Some Marine Protector Patrol Boats for Budget Reasons, Commandant Says



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Ibis (WPB 87338), anchored in the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. in May, 2003. Ibis is an 87-foot Coastal Patrol Boat and part of the Coast Guard's Marine Protector Class of vessels. *U.S. Coast Guard / Joseph P. Cirone*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Budget constraints are the main reason the Coast Guard is decommissioning a few 87-foot Marine Protector-class patrol boats, the Coast Guard commandant said, but the capabilities of other boats will compensate for the change.

“We are taking some 87-footers out of service,” said Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz, responding to a question from *Seapower* during a March 11 in a teleconference with reporters following his State-of-the-Coast Guard address in San Diego. “That’s a budget reality.”

Schultz explained that, during the 1980s, 49 Island-class 110-foot patrol boats were built, but with six deployed to the Persian Gulf with Patrol Force Southwest Asia and six retired after a failed hull-length extension, the fleet in domestic waters was down to 34 and has been reduced since to less than 20. However, the 64 larger Sentinel-class 154-foot responses cutters (FRCs) being built – of which 58 will be stationed in the United States and its territories – have been replacing the Inland-class boats.

“So, there is a lot more new ship capacity,” Schultz said. “When you look at an FRC versus an Island-class patrol boat – significantly more linear feet across the waterline,

significantly more tonnage, about 28 to 30-knot speed, eight more crew members, an over-the-horizon boat capability, just a lot more C5 [command, control, communications, computers, combat systems, intelligence capability]. So, there's a lot more capability and capacity on the waterfront with the swap out."

Schultz said the Congress funded more 87-foot patrol boats than the program of record's requirement when the Marine Protector program started.

The commandant said some of the Marine Protectors may be declared excess defense articles and offered to foreign navies and coast guards, just as some Island -class patrol boats have been.

"We may hold some to bring back into service," he said.

It is absolutely budgetarily influenced and informed within the topline, he said. "I'm the last guy as a cutterman who wants to remove a cutter from service, but I think we'll have plenty of capacity. That fast response cutter – its seakeeping, its legs – is considerably more [capable] than the patrol boats it's replacing."

Referring to the March 10 decommissioning of the Marine Protector-class USCGC Dorado at Crescent City, California, Schultz pointed out that with the mission demands and capabilities in that area resident in the Coast Guard's heavy-weather-capable 45-foot response boats and the nearby aviation capability, 'taking out some of those 87's was a relatively rational, hard choice we had to make."