

Lack of Crew Keeping New Zealand Naval Vessels at the Pier

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Royal New Zealand Navy has tied up three of its nine ships due to crew shortages.

279-foot offshore patrol vessels titled the HMNZS Wellington and HMNZS Otago and 180-foot inshore patrol vessel HMZNS Hawea are in docked at the Devonport Naval Base because there aren't enough Sailors to operate and maintain the ships.

Wellington, which reportedly returned early from a scheduled three-month deployment in November because of manpower shortages, is the latest ship to be taken from service and placed in a "care and custody" status.

Wellington and Otago have crews of 50 personnel and perform missions similar to U.S. Coast Guard medium endurance cutters. The Hawea has a crew of 27, and is similar in size and mission to U.S. Coast Guard fast response cutters.

Personnel from the three ships have been reassigned to other ships in the New Zealand fleet to keep them operational. No date has been set to return the ships to full duty. One of the causes for the attrition is competition from better paying jobs. Officials have cited a "widening gap between our sailor remuneration and what the highly competitive job market is offering."

As the U.S. and its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific Region counter China's growing economic and military posture in the region, the need for the presence of naval and coast guard ships becomes more acute. With 15,000 personnel, New Zealand's defence force is not large by regional standards, but it does provide search and rescue coverage for a large

part of the South Pacific, and provides vital support to smaller nations in Oceania. Having fewer ships available makes the job even harder.