

Papua New Guinea leads joint maritime operations with U.S. Coast Guard



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PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea – Papua New Guinea (PNG) has invited the USCGC Myrtle Hazard (WPC 1139) to join their lead in maritime operations to combat illegal fishing and safeguard maritime resources during August 2023.

This collaborative effort marks the first time a joint patrol effort will be executed at sea since the signing and ratification of the recent bilateral defense agreement between PNG and the United States, which allows the U.S. to embark shipriders from PNG agencies aboard the ship to conduct at sea boardings on other vessels operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) under their national agency authority. This is the U.S. Coast Guard vessel deployment first announced during Secretary of Defense Austin's engagement with Prime Minister James Marape in July.

PNG's lead in this mission aligns with their sovereign rights to protect the EEZ and emphasizes the country's commitment to maritime domain awareness, fisheries regulation enforcement, and sovereignty protection. The PNG government requested the U.S. Coast Guard's participation to utilize the platform and crew of the Guam-based 154-foot Fast Repones Cutter, currently on an expeditionary patrol, to expand coverage of the heavily trafficked maritime EEZ.

“Through our recent operational planning and subject matter exchange, the partnership between the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and the U.S. Coast Guard reached new heights. The spirit of collaboration and shared mission to ensure regional maritime security reflects our nations’ aligned values and commitment. This initiative fosters growth in our bilateral relationship and paves the way for innovative approaches to safeguard our waters and the sustainable use of our ocean resources. Working alongside the U.S. Coast Guard is an honor, and PNGDF eagerly anticipates our cooperative efforts’ continued growth and success,” said Commodore Philip Polewara, the Acting Chief of the PNG Defence Force.

The PNG-led patrol aims to observe activity and conduct boardings to reduce illegal fishing and illicit maritime activities in PNG’s EEZ. It’s part of a long-term effort to counter illegal maritime activity and safeguard the sustainable use of maritime resources.

This collaboration is vital to Operation Blue Pacific and augments ongoing efforts by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. It underscores the recent bilateral agreement, signed in May and ratified in the last few weeks, enabling the Myrtle Hazard crew to work collaboratively within PNG’s legal framework and strengthen relations with agencies with shared objectives.

The USCGC Oliver Henry (WPC 1140) crew was the first U.S. Coast Guard Fast Response Cutter to call on port in Papua New Guinea during their southern expeditionary patrol in the fall of 2022 to build relations, conduct engagements, and resupply.

The USCGC Myrtle Hazard’s crew is building on the work of their colleagues – already engaging with the PNG Defense Force

through exchanges in the northern part of the country on this patrol, bolstering cooperation and understanding. This activity included subject matter exchanges with the PNG Defense Force Patrol Vessel Ted Diro crew and a port call in Rabaul, where the team engaged with the local community at the Rabaul Yacht Club. Additionally, the advance team and cutter crew conducted operations planning and subject matter exchanges across agencies in Port Moresby and ship tours for the embassy team and partners.

“We are deeply honored to collaborate with the Papua New Guinea Defense Force, Papua New Guinea Customs Services, Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority, and the Department of Transport’s Maritime Security Division at the invitation of the Papua New Guinea Government,” said Lt. Jalle Merritt, commanding officer of the USCGC Myrtle Hazard. “Our shared mission reflects PNG’s leading role in regional security, and we are committed to supporting their goals in this significant undertaking.”

For more information about this patrol and other related activities, please contact Chief Warrant Officer Sara Muir at sara.g.muir@uscg.mil or the respective agencies in Papua New Guinea.