

U.S. Coast Guard, Australia to Begin Officer Exchange Program



Rear Adm. Kevin Lunday, commander, Coast Guard 14th District, and Kingsley Woodford-Smith, the assistant commissioner, Australian Border Force, virtually sign a memorandum of agreement creating a system of mutual officer exchange. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew West

HONOLULU – The U.S. Coast Guard and the Australian Department of Home Affairs on April 27 signed an agreement for a system of mutual officer exchange from their offices in Hawaii and Canberra, the Coast Guard 14th District said in a release.

Rear Adm. Kevin Lunday, commander of the 14th District, and Kingsley Woodford-Smith, assistant commissioner of Australian Border Force, signed the memorandum of agreement.

“The memorandum of agreement solidifies an already incredible relationship with our Australian partners in the Blue Pacific region,” said Cmdr. Jason Brand, chief of enforcement with the 14th District.

“The agreement enhances the interoperability between the U.S. Coast Guard and Australian Department of Home Affairs by creating a personnel exchange system designed to share experience, professional knowledge and doctrine between the partners. This exchange is another tool for our work to promote and further a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

The memorandum establishes a seagoing officer exchange program allowing one Australian Border Force marine unit officer to serve a four- to six-week assignment among the units in Honolulu. A U.S. Coast Guard officer will deploy with the

Australian Border Force fleet.

Upon signing the agreement, Rear Adm. Lunday commented, "The U.S. and Australian alliance is built on over a century of mateship. This agreement reflects the importance of our combined operations to maritime governance and security across Oceania, especially as the U.S. Coast Guard is expanding its permanent presence and operations in the Pacific."

In attendance was Ambassador Jane Hardy, the Australian consul-general in Honolulu, who said of the agreement "this significant bilateral initiative will develop further our mutual efforts to maintain and enhance regional security. The skill and bravery of our U.S. Coast Guard 'mates' and Australian Border Force exemplify the heart of the Australia-US Alliance."

Australian and Coast Guard personnel often find themselves working alongside one another during joint missions throughout the Pacific from search and rescue cases to the prevention of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU).

Examples of such efforts include the work of Royal Australian navy HMAS Toowoomba and a Coast Guard Station Honolulu 45-foot response boat-medium crews to respond to a de-masted sailboat off Hawaii in 2018 and joint exercises between the HMAS Choules and the Coast Guard Cutter Walnut in the South Pacific during Operation Aiga 2019.

Both countries annually contribute resources to operations of the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and Pacific Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (P-QUAD) such as the recent FFA Operation Rai Balang.

Under Op Rai Balang, crews from Coast Guard Cutter Sequoia, an Air Station Barbers Point HC-130 Hercules aircrew, and the crew of the Australian navy's HMAS Maryborough all contributed to the surveillance operation to disrupt IUU fishing in March.

The joint efforts protect the organization's member states' exclusive economic zones and ensure Pacific fish stocks remain sustainable.

Scheduled later this year, the partners will reach a new milestone when the Coast Guard sends a surface asset for the first time to serve alongside Australia's during P-QUAD's Operation Nasse.

"We plan to send crews aboard Coast Guard Cutter Kimball (WMSL 256) and an Air Station Barbers Point HC-130 Hercules airplane to support the P-QUAD operation for the first time," Brand said.

"The U.S. and Australia have been standing side-by-side for more than 100 years. This is more than a partnership, it is mateship. As we increase operations with our Australian counterparts, this new personnel exchange allows us to take the next step to integrate further for more fruitful outcomes maximizing the value of the experience and resources of our nations."