

U.S. Coast Guard Visit to Republic of Palau Strengthens Maritime Navigation and Cooperation



U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia Sector Guam personnel and Marine Transportation leadership observe the installation of fixed ATON from the government of Japan being installed in Palau on May 14, 2024. The team completed a vital weeklong mission in the Republic of Palau, setting the stage for future collaboration and bolstering safe maritime navigation and security. This visit, in response to a request from Palau Marine Transportation, focused on an Aids to Navigation (ATON) Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE). (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

From U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam, May 20, 2024

KOROR, Republic of Palau – On May 14, 2024, the U.S. Coast Guard completed a vital weeklong mission in the Republic of Palau, setting the stage for future collaboration and bolstering safe maritime navigation and security.

This visit, in response to a request from Palau Marine Transportation, focused on an Aids to Navigation (ATON) Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE). The exchange laid the foundation for a future SMEE planned for later in the year, including personnel from the 225-foot sea-going buoy tender, USCGC Hickory (WLB 212).

Palau, a nation consisting of approximately 340 islands and renowned for its maritime heritage and strategic location in the Pacific, plays a crucial role in regional maritime safety, security, and environmental stewardship. With its vibrant

tourism industry and commitment to marine conservation, Palau's efforts are vital for the economic and ecological health of the region.

Lt. Anna Maria Vaccaro and Lt. Jay DeInnocentiis led the U.S. Coast Guard SMEE team. They met with Palau Marine Transportation leadership and ATON technicians to discuss the fixed and floating ATON constellation in Palau. The team also reviewed the equipment storage and set-up for fixed and floating aids. They went to sea with the marine transportation team to inspect the aids on the reef and observed the establishment of a fixed aid.

Palau requested U.S. Coast Guard assistance with establishing four additional fixed aids in locations challenged by the rapid depth changes and strong currents. A microbeacon barge, a type of barge equipped with microbeacon technology which often is used for shallow water ATON positioning and coastal navigation, is the most suitable asset for this task due to the channel's bathymetry. The barge is provided by the U.S. Coast Guard and will be delivered by USCGC Hickory upon the buoy tender's arrival back to the Western Pacific. The Palauan team plans to use the microbeacon barge for servicing coastal aids to navigation in shallow waters.

In addition to the SMEE, Capt. Nicholas Simmons, U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam commander, and Capt. Robert Kistner, the incoming commander, traveled to Palau for brief yet impactful introductions and to express gratitude for the support received during Capt. Simmons' tenure as commander.

Strategic Importance of ATON

The strategic relationship between the U.S. Coast Guard and the Republic of Palau is vital for ensuring maritime safety, security, and prosperity in the Pacific region. The ATON

system is crucial for safe navigation, preventing maritime accidents, and ensuring the smooth flow of marine transportation. This system supports economic activities, fisheries, and the overall security of maritime routes, which are essential for Palau and its partners.

“The economic and environmental value of ATON in maintaining a safe and efficient maritime transportation system cannot be overstated,” said Capt. Simmons. “Our collaboration with Palau Marine Transportation demonstrates our commitment to enhancing maritime safety and supporting our partners in the Pacific. It has been a privilege to be in Palau, and I am profoundly grateful for the exceptional relationship and hospitality extended to us.”

Trip Highlights

- **Leadership Engagement:** Lt. Vaccaro and Lt. DeInnocentiis met with senior leaders at Palau Marine Transportation to discuss the ATON constellation. They observed the implementation of fixed aids provided by the government of Japan and witnessed the installation of a fixed aid on the reef.
- **Promotion Ceremony:** They observed the promotion ceremony of a U.S. Naval colleague Cmdr. Brendan Kruse, COFA Security Cooperation Officer, further supporting Department of Defense relationships in the region.
- **Community Participation:** Lt. Vaccaro participated in Palau National Police Week’s 5K Walkathon and candlelight vigil.
- **Key Introductions:** Capt. Kistner met with critical partners in Palau, including National Security Coordinator Ms. Jen Anson, U.S. Embassy Palau Charge d’Affaires Mr. Andrew McLean, and U.S. Maritime Advisor to Marine Law Ms. Jennifer Ketchum (USCG Ret.). The team toured the Port of Malakal, the Joint Operations Center, and visited the PSS Remeliik II, a Guardian-class patrol boat in the service of Palau’s Division of Maritime Law Enforcement, built and provided by Australia.

Future Support

The Service tentatively plans an ATON SMEE accompanied by the Hickory and crew for late 2024 to further engage with Palauan partners and establish a realistic timeline for servicing aids in Palau. This continued partnership underscores the U.S. Coast Guard's commitment to supporting maritime navigation and security in the region, reinforcing the positive impacts and legacy of reliability.

"Our continued collaboration with the Republic of Palau is a testament to the strong strategic partnership we share," said Capt. Kistner. "By working together, we can enhance Palau's maritime transportation system and build local capacity, ensuring the safety and security of its waters and contributing to the stability of the broader Pacific region. We are deeply grateful for Palau's cooperation and support in this mission."

The U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam team focuses on maritime safety, security, and stewardship in Oceania. With a primary presence in Guam and Saipan and over 300 members across Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the team maintains a strong U.S. presence in the Micronesia sub-region and adjacent areas, closely tied to local communities.