U.S. Navy, Estonian Partners Conduct Ice Diving Training to Enhance Baltic Maritime Readiness

Equipment Operator 1st Class Devon Maher, U.S. Navy Seabee Diver assigned to Underwater Construction Team (UCT) One, Construction Dive Detachment Bravo (CDD/B), conduct ice diving operations during a bilateral ice diving exchange with Estonian Rescue Board and Estonian Navy divers at Rummu Quarry Lake, Feb. 10, 2026.

by 22nd Naval Construction Regiment, Feb. 19, 2026

ESTONIA – U.S. Navy Seabee Divers assigned to Underwater Construction Team (UCT) One, Construction Dive Detachment Bravo (CDD/B), are conducting ice diving and underwater demolition training with the Estonian Rescue Board (ERB) and Estonian navy divers during an annual bilateral ice exercise

scheduled from Jan. 31 to Feb. 17, 2026.

The exercise focuses on developing cold weather capabilities that enhance maritime security, improve Alliance readiness, and reinforce Estonia’s contributions to the conventional defense of the Baltic Sea region.

“This opportunity builds real-world capability in one of the most demanding dive environments imaginable,” said Senior Chief Constructionman Keith Reed, master diver assigned to UCT-1 CDD/B. “Operating under ice requires absolute trust in equipment, procedures, and teammates, especially in conditions where precision, readiness, and discipline directly affect mission success.”

The exercise takes place at Rummu Quarry Lake and Miinisadam Naval Base and includes classroom instruction, pier-side safety training, practical ice dives, and a salvage survey of a submerged barge.

Estonia faces a significant volume of explosive remnants of war, particularly in waterways and coastal regions affected by historic conflicts. The training supports humanitarian mine action objectives while improving Allied capacity to detect, assess, and respond to underwater hazards that threaten maritime infrastructure, commercial traffic, and regional security in all weather conditions.

“Ice diving stresses every element of a diver’s training from planning, communications, emergency response, and execution,” Reed said. “Working alongside Estonian Rescue Board and navy divers allows us to exchange techniques, leverage their local expertise, and carry lessons forward that strengthen cold-weather and Arctic diving operations across the Naval Construction Force.”

Beyond technical dive training, the training is designed to improve interoperability, expand operational readiness, and support NATO maritime safety and deterrence efforts

by ensuring regional forces are prepared to operate effectively in austere and contested environments.

“This engagement reflects years of trusted coordination with Estonia and deliberate planning across U.S. and host-nation teams,” said Chief Builder David Madmon, diving action officer assigned to 22nd Naval Construction Regiment (22NCR). “Our role was to align the right capabilities, ensure safety and logistics were in place, and create a training environment that delivers lasting operational value for both nations.”

This training builds on previous U.S.–Estonian humanitarian mine action engagements dating back to 2017 and supports NATO objectives to enhance maritime readiness, resilience, and safety across the Baltic Sea region.

It also reinforces a forward defense posture by strengthening European Allies’ ability to lead regional maritime safety and security efforts, with U.S. forces providing specialized capabilities and operational support.

UCT-1 CDD/B, currently deployed under 22NCR, is a specially trained and equipped unit within Navy Expeditionary Combat Forces that specializes in diving, light salvage, underwater construction, and military engineering operations in austere environments.

22NCR commands naval construction forces for Navy Expeditionary Forces Europe-Africa/Task Force 68 across the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations to defend U.S., Allied, and partner interests.

U.S. Submarine Maintenance Period Demonstrates Forward Sustainment in Australia

From Ashley Calingo, AUKUS Integration & Acquisition Public Affairs, Feb. 20, 2026

HMAS STIRLING, Western Australia - Last November, on the edge of the Indian Ocean, just beyond mainland Australia and across the Garden Island Causeway to HMAS Stirling, a U.S. Virginia-class submarine quietly completed the first submarine maintenance period without the support of a U.S. submarine tender—a specialized vessel that provides mobile repair and supply services.

What appeared to be a routine maintenance stop for the USS

Vermont (SSN 792) carried far greater meaning for the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. The availability marked a decisive step in turning the AUKUS security partnership into an operational reality, reinforcing the Department of War's peace through strength approach to security in the Indo-Pacific. By expanding allied capacity to repair, sustain and re-supply submarines forward in a strategically relevant region, AUKUS strengthens deterrence and ensures combat-credible forces are postured to deter aggression across the Indo-Pacific.

"This was the first time a maintenance availability at this level has ever been done on a Virginia-class outside the United States," said Cmdr. Matthew Lewis, commanding officer of Vermont. "The ability to work through differences, uphold safety standards and execute all the planned work was huge."

At the center of that effort was a blended American and Australian maintenance team led by Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility (PHNSY & IMF), whose flyaway workforce provided the technical backbone for the submarine's availability in Australia and demonstrated the ability of allied forces to operate as a single, integrated maintenance team.

"This maintenance period demonstrates what AUKUS Pillar I is designed to deliver," said Rear Adm. Rick Seif, U.S. Navy, AUKUS Integration and Acquisition program manager. "We are moving from planning to execution. Each successful availability strengthens allied readiness and our ability to sustain submarines forward in the Indo-Pacific."

Before any maintenance could occur, the team first had to solve a more fundamental challenge: how to support a maintenance availability for a nuclear-powered submarine at a foreign pier without the familiar infrastructure of a U.S. shipyard or tender. Bipartisan legislation in the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act, followed by

approval from Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, provided the authority for the Navy to conduct submarine maintenance in a foreign port.

“Seventy-five to 80 percent of any submarine maintenance availability is simply setting the conditions to do the work,” said Capt. Jason Pittman, AUKUS I&A ’s liaison to the Australian Submarine Agency “Temporary shore power, high-pressure air, chilled water and staging all have to be in place before you can even begin.”

During this maintenance period, Australian industry set many of those conditions through structures and systems that were locally sourced, procured and installed.

Among the most significant was a mobile pure water purification plant—the first of its kind in the world—manufactured in Western Australia and positioned directly on the pier for the maintenance period. The systems on U.S. nuclear-powered warships require high purity water, which is traditionally delivered by fixed facilities. The mobile system demonstrated how AUKUS partnerships can drive innovation that benefits both U.S. submarine operations and Australia’s growing sustainment capacity.

“We provided the chemical specification for the water we needed, and Australian industry developed the solution,” Pittman said. “It is efficient, affordable, mobile and performs exactly as required.”

One blended workforce, one plan

The integration extended across Royal Australian Navy Fleet Support Unit sailors, divers, Australian industry and local logistics providers. Each day required tight synchronization between maintenance execution, diving operations, port traffic, base operations and Australian safety standards.

“This availability was not just about maintaining a submarine,” said Lt. Cmdr. Ryan Willis, the AUKUS I&A representative at HMAS Stirling and the maintenance operations liaison during the submarine maintenance period. “It was also about demonstrating capabilities, proving that Australia can support maintenance of nuclear-powered submarines with local solutions.”

By the time the submarine prepared to depart HMAS Stirling, the blended maintenance workforce had completed more than 200 individual maintenance tasks, ranging from hull preservation and temporary service installations to complex system access, testing and restoration.

Many of the Australian sailors and civilians executing those jobs had trained earlier this year at PHNSY & IMF, working alongside the same U.S. maintenance professionals supporting the SMP in Western Australia.

“For me, equally important to the physical work we did on the deck plate were the relationships we forged with the shipyard teams and the U.S. maintenance side,” said Royal Australian Navy Fleet Support Unit Chief Petty Officer Steven Sheakey, one of the sailors who trained at PHNSY & IMF last year. “That trust is what makes everything else possible.”

Royal Australian Navy Fleet Support Unit Petty Officer Christopher Warnes said the experience reshaped how he viewed Australia’s growing sustainment role.

“This was the first time we’ve performed maintenance at this level on a nuclear-powered submarine,” said Warnes. “We proved we could do it. For instance, in my section, if someone was missing a part or resource, I was able to take them to the amazing facilities that we do have here to find a solution.”

A shipyard thousands of miles from home

Leading the technical execution was PHNSY & IMF Project Superintendent Maea Lefotu, whose flyaway team brought decades of submarine maintenance experience to an unfamiliar operating environment.

“For me, this is about sharing more than 20 years of experience and applying it in a new environment,” Lefotu said. “The work is familiar, but the environment and logistics are not. Everything here requires more coordination, more communication and more trust.”

Without the proximity of a home shipyard, every decision carried operational weight, from material sourcing to documentation to safety verification.

“Maintenance is rarely executed to a plan written weeks ahead of time,” Willis said. “It is about identifying issues, adapting and delivering safe, clean results under tight conditions.”

Lefotu said the disciplined daily coordination kept the project aligned.

“Our meeting rhythm kept everyone on the same plan,” he said. “The Pearl [Harbor] team, along with the ship’s force, the Australian and U.K. sailors and civilians were all working toward the same goal.”

Trilateral by design

The U.K. embedded engineers and officers throughout the maintenance availability as they prepared for their o wn nuclear-powered submarine maintenance period at HMAS Stirling in early 2026.

“The U.K. does not consider a U.S. submarine maintenance availability at HMAS Stirling to be a U.S.-only maintenance availability,” said Capt. Shaun Southwood, the U.K.’s liaison officer for AUKUS in Australia. “Every submarine maintenance

period here is trilateral.”

British personnel observed technical demonstrations, safety drills and procedure validations across the availability. Lessons learned during the availability now feed directly into preparations for the U.K.’s first submarine maintenance period at HMAS Stirling, scheduled for early 2026.

“What the U.S. learned here directly supports the upcoming U.K. maintenance period,” Southwood said.

Why it matters

For Pittman, the significance of the maintenance period extends far beyond a single submarine.

“Each maintenance period builds toward a future where Australia can support submarines forward deployed,” he said.

Willis said the operational payoff is immediate, noting, “a submarine that can receive maintenance here instead of returning to Hawaii saves weeks of transit time.”

Lewis agreed with Willis’ assessment of the operational payoff.

“This is a huge enabler,” Lewis said. “It gives the forward-deployed operational commander flexibility in how submarines are managed. Having another location where we can safely execute maintenance makes it easier to sustain forward presence in the Indo-Pacific.”

“This is about building a network of trusted partners who can sustain undersea forces forward, at speed and at scale,” said Seif. “What was demonstrated at HMAS Stirling moves us closer to that goal and keeps AUKUS on track to support increased allied submarine presence when and where it matters.”

AUKUS moves from concept to reality
From mobile pure water production to intermediate maintenance execution, workforce qualification and local industrial integration, the 2025 submarine maintenance period showed that AUKUS Pillar I is no longer just an agreement in principle.

“This is how submarine sustainment in Australia becomes real,” Pittman said. “Through people, partnerships and proven capability.”

With the U.K. preparing to conduct its first submarine maintenance period at HMAS Stirling soon, Western Australia is no longer just a destination for visiting submarines. It is becoming a hub for trilateral undersea capability, supporting the maintenance, readiness and forward presence of allied submarines in the Indo-Pacific.

GA-ASI Develops Long-Range Weapons Capability for MQ-9B

Industry Leading UAS Expands Mission Roles To Include Naval Strike

From General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc.

SAN DIEGO – 23 February 2026 – General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI) is developing the addition of long-range standoff weapons to its top-of-the-line MQ-9B SkyGuardian® and SeaGuardian®.

Demand continues from naval and air warfighters for platforms that can hold targets at risk from great ranges, especially over the expanses of air and water in the Western Pacific. That's why GA-ASI engineers have begun the work of adapting MQ-9B's payload, stability, range and other features to accommodate the new generation of extended-range precision weapons.

"MQ-9B continues to impress in the field and we keep adding to our global customer list," said GA-ASI President David R. Alexander. "We want to continue to build value in the aircraft by expanding into more missions. MQ-9B features extraordinary payload capacity, so it only makes sense to add to our mission sets with the ability to carry long-range

weapons."

So far, GA-ASI has performed all the performance analytics and is confident in MQ-9B's ability to carry long-range weapons over long distances, while providing a measure of persistence and endurance. Company engineers and others continue to refine the technical aspects of this integration and potential concepts of operation, eyeing weapons such as the Lockheed Martin Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile and Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile, as well as the Kongsberg/Raytheon Joint Strike Missile.

GA-ASI plans to fly at least one of these new weapons as early as 2026.

Hypothetically, a mission profile might look like this: MQ-9Bs could launch from a number of friendly bases in the Western or Southern Pacific, fly to a hold point and loiter there outside a hostile power's weapons engagement zone. If the order came to release the weapons, the aircraft could launch them in coordination with other U.S. or allied operations.

In addition to the SkyGuardian and SeaGuardian models, MQ-9B also includes the Protector RG Mk1 that is currently being delivered to the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force (RAF). GA-ASI also has MQ-9B procurement contracts with Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, India, Japan, Poland, Taiwan and the U.S. Air Force in support of the Special Operations Command. MQ-9B has also been featured in various U.S. Navy exercises, including Northern Edge, Integrated Battle Problem, RIMPAC, and Group Sail.

U.S. Navy Approves Raytheon's StormBreaker Smart Weapon for use on Super Hornet Fleet

A Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet undergoes weapons testing with the StormBreaker, also known as the Small Diameter Bomb II, at NAS Patuxent River, Md. This all-weather, precision-guided munition achieved its first operational use on an F/A-18 during a limited early operational capability in 2025. (U.S. Navy photo)

Precision strike capability will increase fleet lethality and survivability

From RTX

TUCSON, Ariz., (February 20, 2026) – The U.S. Navy has approved Raytheon's StormBreaker® smart weapon for operational

use on the F/A-18-E/F Super Hornet strike fighter. Raytheon is an RTX (NYSE: RTX) business.

StormBreaker is the only operational smart weapon that can engage moving and stationary targets in both fair and adverse weather conditions, at land or at sea. Its compact size allows a single aircraft to engage more surface targets than previously possible. The weapon can also fly to strike mobile targets, reducing the amount of time that aircrews spend in harm's way.

"The Super Hornet plays a critical role in the Navy's air combat strategy and equipping it with StormBreaker increases the aircraft's lethality by enabling precision strike in all weather conditions," said Sam Deneke, president of Air & Space Defense Systems at Raytheon. "StormBreaker's accuracy and versatility gives operators the upper hand in the most degraded environments, ensuring they can complete the mission and return home safely."

In 2023, the Super Hornet became the first U.S. Navy aircraft to carry StormBreaker. It has had exceptional performance in combat on the aircraft.

StormBreaker is approved for use on the F-15E and the F/A-18-E/F Super Hornet, and is currently being integrated on the F-35A/B/C.

L3Harris Secures Full-Rate Production Contract for US

Navy Submarine Communication Systems

The Virginia-class attack submarine USS Texas (SSN 775) underway.
From L3Harris Space & Mission Systems

CAMDEN, N.J., Feb. 18, 2026 – L3Harris Technologies (NYSE: LHX) has received its largest full-rate production contract for communications systems from General Dynamics Electric Boat to deliver 26 shipsets for Virginia- and Columbia-class submarines. By utilizing state-of-the-art technology, these systems will enhance situational awareness and communication across submarine crews.

The follow-on award includes production for both submarine classes through 2033, with support extendable to future Columbia-class platforms and allied navies worldwide.

“The ability for submarines to operate undetected is vital to the U.S. Navy’s strategic advantage,” said Nino DiCosmo, President, Maritime, Space and Mission Systems, L3Harris.

“With decades of experience in submarine technology and in partnership with General Dynamics Electric Boat, L3Harris will deliver highly reliable, undetectable communications systems to enhance operational effectiveness.”

This award builds on L3Harris’ decades-long legacy of supporting U.S. Navy submarine programs, including the Ohio- and Los Angeles-class submarines. Virginia-class submarines are nuclear-powered, fast-attack vessels designed for both littoral and deep-sea operations. The Columbia-class submarines, under development, will replace the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines as the cornerstone of the nation’s sea-based nuclear deterrent.

Austal USA President, Michelle Kruger, to Retire

Release From Austal USA

MOBILE, Ala. – Austal USA President Michelle Kruger has announced her plans to retire effective June 1, 2026. Kruger was promoted to president in April 2024, after serving as vice president of global services and support, a role she assumed in 2022. During her tenure as president, Kruger guided Austal USA through a period of remarkable growth and transformative progress. Under her leadership, Austal USA enhanced its operational capabilities, moved critical strategic initiatives forward, and laid a strong foundation for the company’s continued long-term success.

“We are deeply grateful for Michelle’s vision, commitment, and the lasting impact that she has made on our organization,” stated Austal USA’s Board of Managers Chairman, Chris

Chadwick. “While Michelle is retiring from the day-to-day responsibilities of President, we’re pleased that she will continue her relationship with Austal USA as President Emeritus through June 1. In this role, she will remain a valued advisor and ambassador for the company.”

As part of this planned transition, Austal USA Chief Operating Officer Gene Miller has assumed the position of Interim President. His steady leadership during this interim period will help maintain momentum, operational excellence, and organizational stability as the company advances into our next chapter.

To further support the organization during this transition, Chadwick will serve as Austal USA Executive Chairman, working closely with Miller and the leadership team to ensure focus, momentum, and alignment with Austal USA’s long-term strategy. This transition has been carefully planned, and Austal USA is confident in the leadership structure in place.

I MEF Marines Evaluate Fiber-Optic FPV Drones During DIU Challenge

From 1st Lt. Logan Tompkins, Communication Strategy and Operations, I Marine Expeditionary Force

MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. – U.S. Marines with I Marine Expeditionary Force partnered with the Defense Innovation Unit and industry professionals, Jan. 27-29, 2026, to evaluate first-person view small unmanned aircraft systems that use fiber optic cables, marking the U.S. Marine Corps' first field evaluation of the technology for sUAS employment in contested environments.

The three-day assessment focused on "ready now" FPV drone solutions designed to maintain command-and-control and video feeds when radio-frequency links are degraded. Unlike traditional unmanned aircraft systems that rely on wireless signals, fiber optic cables provide a physical data connection between the operator and the aircraft, reducing vulnerability to electronic warfare and enabling more reliable employment in denied environments.

The evaluation brought together Marines from 3rd Light Armored

Reconnaissance Battalion and 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, with I MEF coordinating the event alongside DIU as part of Project G.I., a Department of War-wide effort intended to accelerate the fielding of solutions that address warfighter problem sets for the joint force. Participating vendors for the fiber-optic evaluation included Auterion, Kraken, ModalAI, Neros, and Nokturnal AI, with support from Contact Front Technologies.

“Fiber-optic tethered FPV capabilities are required on today’s battlefield,” said Col. Michael Carroll, assistant chief of staff, G-9, I Marine Expeditionary Force. “By deliberately building trained cadres within the command, I MEF is positioned to scale pilots and capability rapidly, and to responsibly leverage every opportunity to integrate, evaluate and familiarize warfighters with proven systems.”

During the event, Marines evaluated systems based on how quickly operators could transport, set up and employ the aircraft while wearing full combat equipment, as well as the durability of controllers, displays and supporting equipment. Marines also assessed how effectively each platform integrated with tactical command-and-control tools and how reliably the fiber optic cable performed during over-water control and data transmission. The over-water flights marked the U.S. Marine Corps’ first deliberate over-water evaluation of fiber-optic cable performance for FPV sUAS.

The event also served as a hands-on integration point for participating companies, allowing engineers to observe operator workflows and receive direct feedback on usability, reliability and mission-driven requirements. Marines compiled observations and recommendations throughout the assessment to inform iterative improvements and future evaluations.

“The pace of change in robotics and autonomous systems is unlike anything we’ve seen before. Capabilities are evolving

daily, not over years," said Maj. Steven Atkinson, I MEF DIU mission partner. "In that environment, there will never be a single 'silver bullet' system, which is why the Blue UAS List must be continuously updated with a diverse set of best-of-breed platforms and components. Through our partnership with DIU, I MEF brings together Marines from multiple units, MOSs, and backgrounds to do exactly that, ensuring the systems added to the Blue List are not only policy-compliant, but operationally lethal, interoperable, and survivable in contested environments."

Project G.I. launched in June 2025 with a prize funding pool to support live evaluations across multiple design reference missions. The project used an accelerated approach intended to move mature technology from proposal to hands-on testing in months rather than years. DIU designed the effort to involve operators early, stress systems against real operational constraints and rapidly iterate toward capabilities that can be integrated and scaled for units across the services.

I MEF has played a leading role in the challenge by organizing field-based evaluations, bringing together Marines with recent operational experience and ensuring feedback from end users is captured, translated into actionable requirements and pushed directly to industry teams. Last summer, Marines assigned to I MEF partnered with DIU and vendors during a larger Project G.I. evaluation at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, which combined familiarization training with scenario-based demonstrations and informed follow-on selection and development.

The January event built on that momentum by concentrating on fiber optic cable performance, a capability increasingly associated with maintaining drone effectiveness under electronic attack. Marines assessed how FPV systems connected by fiber optic cables could support tactical kinetic-effects while sustaining control and video in environments

where traditional links can be disrupted.

“A fiber optic cable connected to an attack drone gives the ground force commander more options when it comes to precision fires in a GPS or communications-denied environment,” said 1st Lt. Kienan Morrissey, an intelligence officer with 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion who directly supported the evaluations. “Operator-to-vendor feedback is critical in this phase of the evaluation to ensure drone systems are mission capable, continuously improved and lethal in the hands of the end users.”

Insights from the evaluation will inform continued refinements as Project G.I. advances. As platforms complete compliance verification and cybersecurity review, selected systems are expected to move closer to procurement pathways and broader availability for DoW purchase and operation.

I MEF provides combatant commanders a globally responsive, expeditionary, and fully scalable Marine Air-Ground Task Force, capable of generating, deploying, and employing ready forces and formations for crisis response, forward presence, major combat operations, and campaigns.

Coast Guard, Homeland Security Task Force Partners Seize and Offload $13.3M in Cocaine

A suspected drug smuggling vessel is beached off Camuy, Puerto Rico, Feb. 13, 2026. Coast Guard law enforcement crews disrupted a drug trafficking go-fast vessel and seized 2,083 pounds of cocaine. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)
From U.S. Coast Guard Sector San Juan Public Affairs

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The U.S. Coast Guard and partners with Homeland Security Task Force – San Juan Region, disrupted a drug trafficking go-fast vessel and seized 29 bales of cocaine in the Atlantic Ocean north of Puerto Rico, Friday.

The seized contraband weighed a combined 2,083 pounds worth an estimated $13.3 million. No apprehensions were reported. Homeland Security Investigations is leading the investigation into the case.

During a routine patrol Friday night, the air crew of a Coast Guard HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft sighted a panga-style go-fast vessel carrying multiple bales and fuel containers, approximately 100 nautical miles north of Camuy, Puerto Rico. Sector San Juan Command Center diverted Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier to interdict the suspect vessel and coordinated with Homeland Security Task Force – San Juan region partners, including Customs and Border Protection

Caribbean Air and Marine Branch, Ramey Sector Border Patrol and Homeland Security Investigations.

As the cutter Joseph Napier approached, the suspected smugglers began evasive maneuvers before jettisoning their cargo overboard and fleeing. The crew of the Joseph Napier recovered 29 bales from the water, which later tested positive for cocaine. U.S. Border Patrol agents subsequently located the abandoned go-fast vessel ashore near Arecibo, Puerto Rico. The seized drugs were transferred to Homeland Security Investigations agents in San Juan.

“Fantastic work by the Joseph Napier, Air Station Borinquen and Air Station Miami crews for their efforts sighting and pursing the suspect vessel and subsequently locating the 29 jettisoned bales of cocaine,” said Lt. John Groen, commanding officer of Joseph Napier. “If you are thinking about smuggling drugs to Puerto Rico, think again; the Coast Guard and our Homeland Security Task Force partners will use all available resources to find you and stop you.”

“This successful interdiction and seizure are a testament to the outstanding teamwork and coordination among the Homeland Security Task Force San Juan partners,” said Yariel Ramos, Acting Special Agent in Charge, Homeland Security Investigations San Juan. “Our joint efforts with the U.S. Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and U.S. Border Patrol demonstrate our unwavering commitment to protecting our borders and disrupting the flow of illicit drugs into Puerto Rico and the United States. We will continue to leverage our combined resources and expertise to safeguard our communities and hold criminal organizations accountable wherever they are.”

“Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands comprise the United States’ Caribbean border and serve as critical entry points into our country,” said Roberto Vaquero, CBP Director of Field

Operations for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. “Our location places us on the front line of defense against maritime and aerial threats. CBP’s presence here is vital to protecting the United States’ Caribbean border. Through teamwork, technology, and dedication, we keep our communities safe and support a secure and prosperous future for all. This operation highlights the importance of our partnerships and our commitment to stopping drug smuggling and securing our borders.”

The Coast Guard is part of a whole-of-government approach to protect our maritime approaches in the Eastern Caribbean and secure our nation’s borders by interdicting drug smuggling activities at sea and dismantling foreign terrorist organizations and transnational criminal organizations, including narco-trafficking and human smuggling operations.

This counterdrug interdiction is part of the Homeland Security Task Force HSTF initiative established by Executive Order 14519. Protecting American People Against Invasion. The HSTF is a whole of government partnership dedicated to eliminating criminal cartels, foreign gangs, transnational criminal organizations, and human smuggling and trafficking rings operating in the United States and abroad. Through historic interagency collaboration the HSTF directs the full might of the United States law enforcement towards identifying, investigating, and prosecuting the full spectrum of crimes committed by these organizations, which have long fueled violence and instability within our borders. In performing this work, the HSTF places special emphasis on investigating and prosecuting those engaged in child trafficking or other crimes involving children. The HSTF further utilizes all available tools to prosecute and remove the most violent criminal aliens from the United States. HSTF San Juan Region comprises agents and officers from Coast Guard Sector San Juan, the Coast Guard Investigative Service;

the Drug Enforcement Administration Caribbean Division; the Federal Bureau of Investigation San Juan Field Office; United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement – Homeland Security Investigations; U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Office of Field Operations, Air and Marine Operations Caribbean Branch, and U.S. Border Patrol Ramey Sector; the United States Marshals Service Districts of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; the U.S. Postal Inspection Service Miami Division – San Juan Field Office; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives – Miami Field Division; the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area – Puerto Rico / Virgin Islands; the Transportation Security Administration – Federal Air Marshal; the Federal Aviation Administration, the Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security – RAC San Juan, the United States Secret Service and the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico.

Navy Issues RFP for Construction Manager to Accelerate Medium Landing Ship Acquisition

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy has issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Vessel Construction Manager (VCM) to oversee the acquisition of the new Medium Landing Ship (LSM). This strategy is designed to maximize commercial practices to

accelerate delivery, improve cost discipline, and expand the U.S. shipbuilding industrial base, with a contract award anticipated for mid-2026.
From Naval Sea Systems Command, Feb. 18, 2026

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy has issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Vessel Construction Manager (VCM) to oversee the acquisition of the new Medium Landing Ship (LSM). This strategy is designed to maximize commercial practices to accelerate delivery, improve cost discipline, and expand the U.S. shipbuilding industrial base, with a contract award anticipated for mid-2026.

For initial production, the Navy will direct the VCM to manage LSM construction at two shipyards: Bollinger Shipyards and Fincantieri Marinette Marine. Bollinger Shipyards was awarded a contract to support LSM long lead time procurement and lead ship engineering design activities in September 2025; Fincantieri will execute LSM work to build four ships. The VCM will then have the ability to decide the best strategy for awarding the remaining three ships authorized under the base contract.

The VCM will hold the prime contract with the Navy and, in turn, issue and manage its own subcontracts directly with the shipyards. This places the VCM in direct contractual control of shipyard performance and creates a buffer that, along with a proven design, is expected to reduce cost and schedule risks.

“The VCM approach not only accelerates construction timelines but also strengthens our industrial base by engaging multiple shipyards,” said Rear Adm. Brian Metcalf, program executive officer, ships. “By providing a mature, ‘build-to-print’ design and empowering a VCM to manage production, we are streamlining oversight for this acquisition. This approach accelerates the timeline and strengthens our industrial base, ensuring we have the capacity and expertise needed for

sustained maritime advantage.”

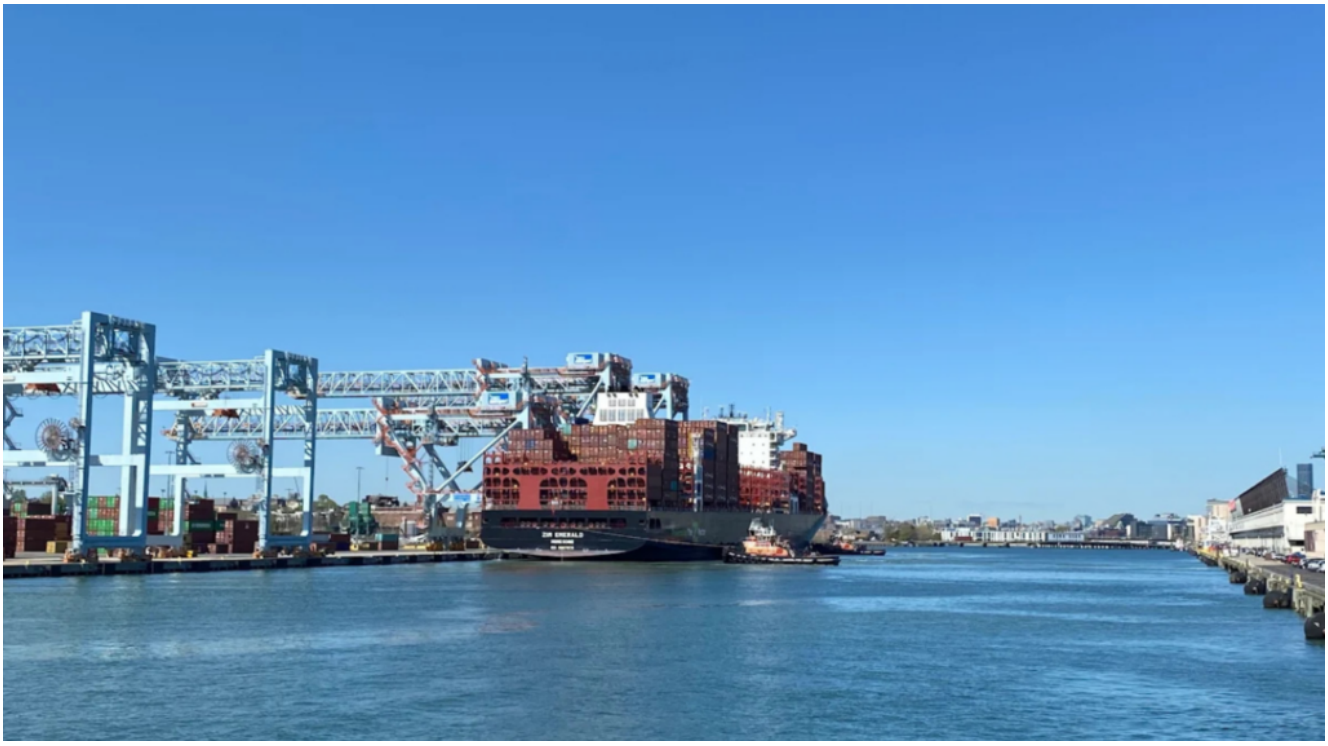
This acquisition strategy is a key component of the Navy and Marine Corps’ effort to address readiness in the Indo-Pacific and reflects a change in how the Navy traditionally contracts and oversees ship construction. Leveraging this new approach, the VCM is responsible for managing the entire construction program, from the design phase through to vessel delivery and post-delivery support.

The VCM will manage production across multiple shipyards in parallel using proven commercial shipbuilding practices, with significantly fewer Navy personnel than a traditional shipbuilding program would require.

The Navy will provide a mature, “build-to-print” vessel design, significantly reducing technical and schedule risks. In December 2025, the Navy and Marine Corps jointly announced Damen Naval’s LST 100 – a proven, non-developmental design – would serve as the baseline to help rapidly field LSM capability.

The LSM will fill the capability gap between smaller, short-range landing craft and the Navy’s long-duration, multi-purpose amphibious warfare ships. It is essential for the maneuver and sustainment of Marine forces, providing the critical littoral mobility required in contested environments. The program will deliver a 35-ship fleet that enhances expeditionary agility and supports the Marine Corps’ concept of distributed maneuver and logistics.

NOAA Installs New PORTS Environmental Monitoring System in Boston Harbor



A container ship is docked at Massports Conley Container Terminal on Boston Harbor in 2024. (Image credit: Colleen Roche/NOAA Office of Coast Survey)

New navigational system will improve safety in one of nation's busiest ports

From Alison Gillespie, NOAA, Feb. 17, 2026

NOAA announced today the successful installation of a Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS) in Boston Harbor. The system includes observational equipment at MassPort's Conley Terminal and on the Tobin Memorial Bridge.

The Boston Harbor PORTS, established in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, is the 41st installation in a broad, public-private partnership program, providing commercial and other vessel operators with accurate and reliable real-time information about

environmental conditions to support safe navigation.

“Boston Harbor is a vital gateway for economic activity in the United States,” said Neil Jacobs, Ph.D., NOAA administrator. “I am proud of NOAA’s dedication to developing and deploying systems that ensure navigational safety and enable more efficient commerce through our nation’s ports and waterways.”

The Boston Harbor PORTS® will consist of one current meter and one meteorological station that will collect wind, air temperature and barometric pressure data. The new PORTS system is also slated to include the installation of a new air gap sensor at the Tobin Memorial Bridge over the Mystic River. The sensor will provide real-time data on the amount of bridge clearance that is available to ships in an area where the tides can shift dramatically throughout the day. NOAA’s existing National Water Level Observation Network station at Boston Harbor will also be included in this newly established PORTS.

PORTS benefits for New England’s marine commerce

Growing ship size and increasing maritime traffic continue to present potential risks to maritime commerce and the coastal environment. NOAA’s PORTS systems mitigate those risks by integrating real-time environmental data and meteorological parameters with forecasts and other geospatial information. These systems have a proven track record of helping prevent collisions and groundings in ports across the nation, including in busy Boston Harbor.

“Boston Harbor PORTS will help mariners safely navigate shipping routes and make better, more efficient schedules supporting the resilience of our nation’s supply chain,” said Nicole R. LeBoeuf, director of NOAA’s National Ocean Service. “Through this effort, we will help support economic prosperity in the region while reducing risks to life, property and the coastal environment.”

Boston has a rich maritime history, operating the nation’s oldest port, first established in the 1600s. Today, it is Massachusetts’ primary seaport, and the nation’s third busiest cargo port, handling more than 2.3 million tons annually. Conley is the only full-service container terminal in New England, connecting the Northeast to key global markets and tourism opportunities. The port also supports more than 66,000 jobs and generates billions of dollars in annual revenue for New England.