

Boeing Begins Build on New Zealand's First P-8A Aircraft



A Boeing P-8A flies over the Great Barrier Reef near Queensland, Australia. *BOEING*

WICHITA, Kan. – Boeing P-8A team members and Spirit AeroSystems employees have laid the keel beam for New Zealand's first P-8A, Boeing said March 17.

This process, also called 'keeling,' was done at the Spirit AeroSystems facility where all Boeing 737 fuselages, nacelles and pylons are designed and built. Laying the keel is an important production milestone during the build of any ship or aircraft and represents the cornerstone of this latest P-8.

Rosemary Banks, New Zealand's ambassador to the United States, who was on hand to witness the keeling said, "Today's keeling

ceremony is the beginning of a new era for New Zealand's maritime patrol and response capability. Our four P-8A Poseidons will better equip our defence forces to extend their reach into the Pacific and beyond, working with our partners and friends."

An aircraft keel runs the length of the fuselage belly. Due to the innovative in-line approach to the build of commercial derivative aircraft pioneered on the P-8A, the keel beam on a P-8 is different from the typical 737 keel beam. The P-8 keel includes unique aspects of the P-8 configuration, such as the integration of an internal weapons bay.

"The excitement of seeing this come together was contagious," said Brian Stuart, P-8 program manager for New Zealand. "Not only are we kicking off the journey to the first New Zealand P-8A delivery, but we are strengthening our relationships with suppliers like Spirit as well as our U.S. Navy and Royal New Zealand Air Force customers."

The panel and other fuselage components will be completed on Spirit's existing 737 production line. Spirit will ship the P-8A fuselage to a Boeing Commercial Airplanes facility in Renton, Washington, for final assembly. After that, Boeing Defense, Space & Security employees will install mission systems and complete testing prior to delivery to New Zealand later this year.

In total, four Boeing P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft will eventually replace New Zealand's current fleet of six aging P-3K2 Orion aircraft providing advanced capabilities to maintain situational awareness in neighboring waters on and below the surface of the ocean.