Coast Guard Patrols South Pacific in Support of International Fisheries

HONOLULU – Following a stop in Fiji in late January, the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Mellon continued their South Pacific patrol in support of counter-Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported fishing and global security missions, the 14th Coast Guard District said in a Jan. 26 release.

The presence of a high-endurance Coast Guard cutter conducting operations in the region demonstrates the U.S. commitment to regional partnerships and strengthening a coalition of like-minded countries to strengthen regional maritime governance and promote a rules-based regime for fisheries.

Mellon's crew is supporting international fisheries on the high seas and enforcement of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Upon arrival in the WCPFC convention area, they partnered with the Canadian Armed Forces who flew seven reconnaissance flights improving maritime domain awareness and aiding in the enforcement of the WCPFC convention.

Patrolling over 1,110 square miles within the WCPFC convention area, the Mellon's law enforcement team boarded two vessels, one fishing vessel and one bunkering vessel. Both boardings resulted in potential violations of conservation management measures including high seas transshipment and specifications for the marking and identification of fishing vessels.

"Participating in the WCPFC ties into a broader strategy the Coast Guard is pursuing in the Indo-Pacific region," said Capt. Stephen Burdian, commanding officer, cutter Mellon. "Throughout the area, the U.S., and by extension the Coast Guard, is encouraging relationships respecting the

sovereignty, supporting fair and reciprocal trade, and the rule of law in an open and free Oceania. Through a tactical lens, that strategy looks like a Coast Guard boarding of a foreign fishing vessel, while on the high seas or in a sovereign Exclusive Economic Zone jointly with a member of that country's enforcement team. On this patrol, we are fortunate to have excellent support from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and our Canadian counterparts."

While on a port call in conjunction with the U.S. Embassy in Suva, Fiji, the crew strengthened partnerships with Pacific Islands Nation communities by participating in community relations events at a local animal shelter, children's hospital and garden. At the animal shelter crew members engaged with kittens and puppies while giving animals baths and general clean-up of the shelter. At the children's hospital and garden, the crew read books to children and tidied up the garden area.

Mellon's crew of 150 departed their homeport of Seattle shortly after Christmas. They made a brief stop in Hawaii for fuel and supplies. This stop was leveraged for training as the crew conducted Astern Refueling-at-Sea training with the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Gerczak.

Also, they worked with Air Station Barbers Point crews to complete 72 shipboard helicopter evolutions over three days, resulting in the qualification of three MH-65 Dolphin helicopter pilots and 10 flight deck personnel aboard Mellon.

The cutter also embarked two Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans officers, two U.S. Navy Aerographer's Mates, and one U.S. Marine Corps Mandarin translator while in Hawaii for the upcoming operations. The crew is more than 8,000 miles into their patrol and have taken every opportunity for professional development with more than 40 crew earning new qualifications.

Oceania covers an area of 3.3 million square miles and has a population of 40 million and is home to some of our valued strategic partners in the Pacific Island Nations as well as Australia and New Zealand, with whom the U.S. has aligned for more than a century.

The importance of the Pacific Islands is very evident as the Coast Guard continues operations in the region and the U.S. strengthens partnerships with the governments of these nations. We recognize tourism and exports, both requiring a great deal of commercial vessel traffic, are a primary economic driver. Tuna represented a nearly $5 billion industry in 2015 with more than half the world's tuna is sourced from the Western Pacific. In 2017 reported landings were 2.5 million tons of fish.

The presence of a high-endurance cutter in this part of the Pacific to enforce Conservation and Management Measures established by the WCPFC represents the U.S. and the service's commitment to our partnerships in the region. This body represents another essential collaboration. The WCPFC is an international body made up of 43 nations and international organizations. Members agree to allow the 13-enforcer nations in the pact to board and record any potential violations on their nationally flagged vessels. The findings go to the WCPFC who notifies the vessel's flag state of the suspected infraction for further investigation.

"The U.S. Coast Guard and the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans have a long history of working together to ensure the viability of fish stocks off North America. Working with experts from Canada and regional leaders like Fiji is vital to ensuring food security and the rule of law in Oceania," said Capt. Robert Hendrickson, chief of response for the 14th District. "Working together we are helping to ensure a more secure, free and open Indo-Pacific."