U.S. Coast Guard Patrols Micronesian Waters in Support of Operation to Combat Illegal Fishing

HONOLULU – Crews of two U.S. Coast Guard cutters and a long-range HC-130 patrol aircraft recently completed combined operations to help combat illegal fishing across Oceania, the Coast Guard 14th District said in a release.

The crews teamed with shipriders from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) as part of Operation Rai Balang 2019, a Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) mission.

For three weeks, U.S. Coast Guard cutters Sequoia (WLB-215) and Kiska (WPB-1336) embarked FSM shipriders to patrol the FSM exclusive economic zone and on the high seas, supported by the HC-130.

In addition to the Coast Guard and FSM combined operations, Operation Rai Balang also involved ships and aircraft from the remaining Pacific Quadrilateral Defense Partners – Australia, New Zealand and France – in support of other Pacific Island countries across Oceania.

Illegal, unregulated and underreported fishing threatens resource security and sovereignty. Enforcing international fishing regulations on the high seas and helping Pacific island countries protect their waters from illegal fishing promotes maritime governance and reinforces a rules-based international order that is essential to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

“The U.S. Coast Guard and our Pacific Quadrilateral Defense

Partners have two decades of experience working together with Pacific Island countries to help ensure resource security and the viability of tuna stocks in the Pacific," said Capt. Riley Gatewood, chief of enforcement for U.S. Coast Guard 14th District.

"Working with experts from these nations and regional leaders like the [FSM] is vital to ensuring food security and the rule of law in Oceania. Working together we are helping to sustain and increase a secure, free and open Indo-Pacific," Gatewood added.

Estimates show that illegal fishing accounts for about 30 percent of all fishing activity worldwide, representing up to 26 million tons of fish illegally harvested each year, valued at between $10 billion and $23 billion.

"IUU fishing can act as a nexus for economic, social and political instability or unwanted influence of countries looking to gain a foothold in the region – all having direct economic and security implications for the United States if not effectively controlled," said Lt. Cmdr. Conor Sullivan, of fisheries enforcement for the Coast Guard 14th District.

The U.S. bilateral shiprider arrangement with FSM is only one of 11 such agreements across Oceania. The Coast Guard regularly conducts bilateral fisheries law enforcement with these Pacific Island Countries, often as part of planned FFA operations across the region.