# U.S. Coast Guard, Republic of Palau strengthen maritime partnership for regional stability



Release from U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam

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SANTA RITA, Guam – Following the signing of an expanded bilateral law enforcement agreement in August, during the Joint Heads of Pacific Security conference, representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard and the Republic of Palau embarked on a series of meetings and initiatives to advance maritime partnership and promote regional stability Oct. 6 to 13, 2023.

“Our work with Palau goes beyond signatures on an agreement; it’s about the actions we take together. It’s about standing side by side to safeguard our shared maritime environment and ensure regional security,” said Capt. Nicholas Simmons, U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam.

In a strategic effort to deepen collaboration and build stronger bonds, members of U.S. Coast Guard District 14 Legal and Intel, along with members of U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam’s Intel and Compact of Free Association departments, conducted an Enhanced Shiprider Tabletop Exercise in Palau with members of the government and local enforcement agencies. This tabletop exercise served as a platform for key stakeholders from both sides to lay the groundwork for future endeavors. They also met with the governor of the northernmost state, Ngaraard, Governor Sharp Sakuma, and the president of Palau Community College, Dr. Patrick Tellei.

**Near future initiatives include:**

– Palau Search and Rescue Exercise – Set to take place in early 2024, demonstrating our joint commitment to the safety of life at sea.
– Enacting the Enhanced Agreement –U.S. Coast Guard asset crews in the region will seek to employ the enhanced bilateral agreement.
– Ngaraard State Projects – Focusing on improving maritime safety by developing a better marking system for vessel traffic in Palauan waters.
– Palau Community College – U.S. Coast Guard Academy presentation aimed at recruiting and fostering education among young talent while building skills for local residents to bring back to Palau.

The U.S. Coast Guard will also participate in the Palau Joint Committee Meeting scheduled for Nov. 15 to 17 in Palau, where, in addition to other items, discussions will consider the

practical implementation of U.S. Coast Guard support to Palauan partners.

The Republic of Palau, known for its rich culture and stringent marine conservation laws, is committed to protecting its marine environment. With this partnership, the U.S. aims to support Palau's efforts while also enhancing regional security.

**About the Agreement**

The enhanced bilateral agreement empowers the U.S. Coast Guard to enforce regulations in Palau's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) without a Palauan officer present. It represents a significant step forward in our shared commitment to regional maritime security. However, it is essential to clarify that this agreement does not replace joint work with physical shipriders; instead, it augments enforcement capabilities.

This collaborative bilateral effort follows a similar agreement signed with the Federated States of Micronesia in October 2022. It is part of a broader strategy to strengthen regional security, including a bilateral defense agreement and bilateral maritime law enforcement with Papua New Guinea in May 2023, which enabled U.S. Coast Guard boarding officers alongside their Papua New Guinea counterparts to conduct boardings in PNG's EEZ for the first time in over ten days at sea in August and September yielding four bilateral boardings, six observation reports, the identification of a vessel monitoring system violation and subsequent fine to the vessel operator by the PNG National Fisheries Authority.

**Operation Blue Pacific**

Through Operation Blue Pacific and Operation Rematau, led by U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam, the U.S. actively exercises maritime law enforcement agreements with

Pacific Island Countries. These agreements reinforce maritime law enforcement operations, bolster maritime domain awareness, and contribute to security, safety, sovereignty, and economic prosperity throughout Oceania.

The U.S. Coast Guard’s shiprider program is a cornerstone of these efforts, aligning with the Pacific Partnership Strategy and embodying our commitment to maritime safety, security, and stewardship in Oceania.

“With this historic agreement and the ongoing collaboration, the U.S. reaffirms its presence in the Pacific, contributing to regional stability, security, and resilience. Collaborating with partners like Palau amplifies our ability to protect resources and maintain a free and open Blue Pacific for all nations that uphold the rule of law,” said Simmons.