



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By

The Honourable Renee Ming, JP, MP
Minister of National Security

Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard Update

24th July 2020

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this house about the Coast Guard activities over the past five months; the highlights being their role during the Government's Covid-19 response, where they were protecting Bermuda's people and interests.

Mr Speaker, the Coast Guard was initially launched in February 2020, and since the Covid 19 regulations were introduced, the soldiers of the Coast Guard have been on 24 hour embodiment operations for 119 days. The Coast Guard has been manned by 9 soldiers on 24 hour operations working on a rotation of 9 continuous days on duty away from their families followed by 2 day's rest. During this period they have worked alongside 2 Bermuda Police Service Marine Section officers & 2 Parish Constables with Sergeant Major Jeffery Patterson, a 30 year veteran of the Regiment commanding daily operations.

Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity to issue my personal thanks to those soldiers and police officers working in the Coast Guard who have, and continue to keep our waters safe for all of us to enjoy. We are all indebted to their families, as they have shouldered the enormous domestic burden whilst the soldiers in their lives have been away from their homes for so long. Finally, we give thanks to their employers who have released these part time soldiers from their normal work to serve their country during such a difficult time.

Mr Speaker, throughout this period these part time soldiers, in collaboration with their full time police colleagues have been living and operating from their depot at The Police Barracks and Club in Dockyard. They have been active on the water for an average of 68% of every 24 hour period patrolling in 4 hour cycles across the Island. Their 7 vessels have performed over 1,942 hours of engine time during their 543 operations, averaging 4.56 patrols per day. Of the 119 days on operations, there were only 3 days where no patrols were conducted due to bad weather. They have recorded or intercepted 10,112 vessels, averaging 18.62 vessels per patrol.

Mr Speaker, this time on the water has seen this unit provide significant safety and security measures to ensure the safety of our people, in detail they have issued tickets or assisted with:

- 69 summons for COVID-19 breaches, including Raft ups or Curfew offences,
- Arrested 11 individuals for suspicion of operating a vessel under the influence,
- Issued 73 tickets for associated marine violations, such as no navigations lights, no safety equipment, 5kts no wake 100m from shore offences,
- Search and Rescue of a lone kayaker on the night of 14 June during the thick fog/mist,
- 9 responses to gang related activity performing 6 arrests,
- 1 arrest for lobster diving out of season, which was within the statutory 1 mile zone and during the “23 hour shelter in place”. The individual was convicted of the offenses the following day.
- 4 night operations for illegal fishing east of the St. George’s area,
- 3 joint Fisheries operations for illegal fishing within the East and West Hind/Rock Fish grounds,
- Collaborated with Marine and Ports in assisting the public with moorings as well illegal vessels on public docks.

Mr Speaker, additionally during this period, the Coast Guard has:

- Simultaneously dispatched personnel to conduct Community Advisory Points in the East and West end of island,

- Conducted Winching, Formations, and Communications testing with the Royal Navy's Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship *Argus* on her way to patrol the Caribbean. RFA *Argus*, in collaboration with HMS *MEDWAY* are the 2 Royal Navy ships that standby to assist Bermuda during times of exceptional disaster.
- Continuously performed daily quarantine checks on foreign Sailing Vessels in St. Georges Harbor.
- Observed and stopped/reported 5 x individuals who have broken the quarantine to RCC and HM Customs,
- Played an integral part in the arrest of the individual who jumped off of a cliff in order to evade the BPS Roads Policing Unit,
- Arrested 1 non-compliant Jet Ski user for suspicion of operating a vessel under the influence and failing to proceed at a safe speed,
- Participated in the ongoing investigation of a fatal Jet Ski accident.

Mr. Speaker, although the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard is designed to be a legally and operationally integral part Bermuda's military, their soldiers have been operating under the auspices of the Bermuda Police Service's Special Constable programme. This is because the supporting legislation, namely the Defence (Coast Guard Unit) Amendment Act 2018 has not been brought into effect. The Special Constable programme has allowed the soldiers to enforce Health Regulations and Maritime Security Laws using police powers.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Bermuda Regiment were provided \$1,495,938 at the start of the financial year to cover operating costs and hire 9 full time and 14 part time Coast Guard personnel. This hiring process was initially stalled by the effects of Covid 19, but the funding has now been frozen in their budget. They have identified, assessed, and shortlisted 9 highly qualified personnel to enlist when the hiring embargo is lifted.

Mr. Speaker, the Regiment have requested \$1.6 Million in capital funds to purchase vessels to replace their aged fleet, which is predominately comprised of retired vessels formerly from the BPS, some of which are over 30 years old. New vessels would be fit for role to carry out their mandated tasks to 12 Nautical Miles. It is the Government's ultimate ambition over the next 10 years to be able to patrol and secure its entire maritime domain out to the 200 Nautical Mile EEZ. The EEZ is a currently unsecured and therefore our Blue Industry is vulnerable to exploitation by other country's maritime fleets.

Mr. Speaker, the Coast Guard requires manning to be at 16 officers to provide the International Maritime Organisation's required standard of 24 hour in-shore search and rescue. The initial tranche of 9 soldiers must be complemented by 7 full time police officers or officers from other government departments who support maritime laws, such as Marine and

Ports, Customs, or Environmental Protection. The annual cost of salaries for a Coast Guard fully manned by 16 Royal Bermuda Regiment soldiers is \$1.4M.

Mr Speaker, the Coast Guard has proved its unquestionable worth and resilience over the past 4 months, and is now working through the peak of the boating season. The impending implementation of the Coast Guard Act is an important next step for Bermuda's maritime security and must be in tandem with employing the correct personnel for this vital role.

Mr Speaker, I reiterate my personal thanks to these soldiers for their exceptional work since March, and to their families and employers who have humbly supported them whilst they have conducted their service to the country.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.