

## EEZ GIVES COAST GUARD GREATER SCOPE

# THE COAST GUARD CAN NOW MORE EFFECTIVELY CONTROL A LARGER AREA

**Ships that drop anchor in protected coral reefs or otherwise break the law in waters around the BES islands have been forewarned: with introduction of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) the Coast Guard now patrols a larger area and is more effective in catching offenders**

BY OUR EDITORS

The SuperRhibs (Super Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats) can operate at a maximum speed of 42 knots along the coast of Curacao. They are twelve metres long – big enough to hold six people and suitable for patrolling coastal waters and carrying out boarding operations, in which they come up alongside and board boats for inspection. The Coast Guard has twelve of these SuperRhibs, which can operate far out to sea, for long periods and under poor weather conditions. They are ideal for carrying out the Coast Guard's tasks, which involve not only saving lives but also the control of drugs, weapons, illegal immigration and fishing, and environmental pollution at sea.

Through implementation of the EEZ, the Coast Guard now rules over a much larger area, in which it is responsible for surveillance, detection of illegal activity and detaining violators of environmental and fishing regulations. Very soon anchoring will be prohibited in the Saba Bank, and this ban may slowly be expanded to include all shipping traffic. The role of the Coast Guard is crucial. Without enforcement, implementation of the EEZ and international agreements such as the SPAW protocol and CITES treaty will have little effect (see page 26 for more information on international agreements).

### 24-hour patrols

In addition to the twelve SuperRhibs, the Coast Guard has three 41-metre cutters, four inshore vessels (for operating close to shore), one helicopter and two patrol planes. The Coast Guard works closely with the Navy, whose station ship with an on-board helicopter is available for the Coast Guard's use 92 operation days per year. The Coast Guard also has support centres on Curacao, Aruba and St. Maarten, where the ships are moored. A base for the flying units is located in Hato (Curacao).

On 13 September at 15:57 a tanker was sailing 5 miles off the coast of St Eustatius at a speed of 0.2 knots. There was no shipping activity at that time around Saba and Bonaire. This information is available 24-hours per day thanks to the Automatic Identification System (AIS), which became mandatory in 2004 for ships with a minimum volume of 299 GT (about 900 m<sup>3</sup>). To trace the smaller ships not required to use AIS, a radar system is needed. This is already available for the Leeward Islands, but not (yet) for the Windward Islands.

### Focus on the environment

The Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation commissioned Imares, an institute of Wageningen University and

Research centre, to put together an implementation strategy for the EEZ. This plan includes a pivotal role for the Coast Guard and reflects a noticeable shift in priorities towards nature and the environment. This shift stems from an increase in both commercial shipping and recreational boating in the area, which can lead to increased environmental pollution. According to statistics, violations related to fishing have decreased in recent years, while those related to pollution and damage of the marine environment have increased.

Regulations related to fishing, permits, protected species and illegal fishing materials will be strictly enforced. To protect the marine environment, extra attention will be paid to spearfishing and boats anchored in coral reefs. Patrols will also be on the lookout for anyone collecting or trading in protected species. The Ministry hopes these measures will lead to better protection of the biodiversity of the waters around the islands. ■

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## No change in course for for the Coast Guard

The Coast Guard of all the islands, both Windward and Leeward, is a partnership between the former Dutch Antilles, Aruba and the Netherlands – KWNA&A. The countries are jointly responsible for financial, legal and general policy related to the Coast Guard. The organization operates from Curacao, where its management, staff and Rescue and Coordination Centre (RCC) are located. The political changes of 10 October have had few consequences for the Coast Guard, because its

mandate remains the same. It continues to be responsible for protecting the waters around the six islands, an area that has become larger through implementation of the EEZ. The Coast Guard works closely with customs authorities, the police, military police and the Navy. It employs 240 people. Graduates of professional Coast Guard training receive the title of special agent of the police. The Ministry of Defence is the ministry responsible for the Coast Guard.

PHOTOS: BAUD SCHOENMAECKERS