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## **Jamaica Customs Agency advancing its Border Protection capabilities through upskilling of staff**



The Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA) has made a deeper dive in the fight against illegal activities within the maritime space having recently trained and licensed over forty (40) employees as Coxswains.

This strategic move was embarked on to increase the agency's capabilities in the maritime environment and staff competence in driving and basic maintenance of its current fleet of vessels.

Nashwell Thomas, Manager of the Sufferance Wharves Unit, shared that this upskilling of all his Sufferance Wharves team members and other selected employees from the Operations and Border Protection Divisions will assist in the enhanced efficiency in achieving the agency's mandates.

“The JCA Coxswains will improve the agency's ability to monitor and secure Jamaica's maritime borders including the detection and prevention of smuggling activities. The team will also be able to manage more efficiently, the agency's maritime assets getting the most return on investments,” he shared. He further added that “with the skill set of the Coxswains, they can train other JCA staff in maritime operations, in doing so, enhancing the skill level within the agency.”



Akeem Douglas, Customs Officer maneuvering one of the JCA's vessels during the recent Coxswain training.

This major achievement also aligns with this year's International Customs Day theme, *Customs Engaging Traditional and New Partners with Purpose* and the Agency's push in increasing partnerships among stakeholders. "Our Coxswains' experience in coordination and teamwork will facilitate better collaboration with other law enforcement partners involved in maritime security and border protection, such as the Jamaica Defence Force Coast Guard and the Jamaica Constabulary Force Marine Police Division," Mr. Thomas said.

The collaboration however, spans further than law enforcement partners. Jerlene Layne, Manager of the Boscobel Fish Sanctuary, shared how the availability and access of the JCA vessel has benefitted her organisation and operations.

"The JCA having a vessel at the Oracabessa post has impacted the Sandals Boscobel Fish Sanctuary tremendously by assisting us to carry out our duties as it relates to sanctuary operations, i.e. joint sanctuary patrols, use of the JCA vessel as needed, for monitoring of our boundary and assisting us by patrolling our area whenever there is a gap between our shifts," she shared.

She further added that, "they [JCA's Oracabessa Team] have played a significant role in our community not only as authorised officers but as participatory agents in our community meetings and outreach activities. I am elated to have the JCA in our region to not only assist me and my organisation but also the other stakeholders in the region."

The three days of theoretical and practical training consisted of important aspects in operating and managing a vessel to include docking of a vessel, vessel mechanics, boat operating safety, compass reading, very high frequency (VHF) radio operation, survival at sea, types of vessel hull and types of engines and ended with examinations administered and certified by the Maritime Authority of Jamaica (MAJ).

Sophia Insang, Customs Officer, shared how prepared she now feels as a licensed Coxswain after the weekend of intense training. “The Coxswain Training Programme was comprehensive and highly educational. The instructors were knowledgeable and supportive, the material used was well-rounded, and the hands-on training was invaluable. I now feel well-prepared to take on the responsibilities of a coxswain, confident in my abilities to operate a vessel safely and efficiently,” she stated.

In addition to expanding the capacity of employees to better combat illicit activities, the Coxswain training programme will further enhance the JCA’s overall border protection mechanisms and by extension its trade facilitation and revenue collection capabilities.



A JCA officer performs maintenance activity on a vessel during the Coxswain training.