

APRIL-JULY 2026

PORTSIDE

Caribbean

CARTAGENA:

Impressive growth, continuing expansion

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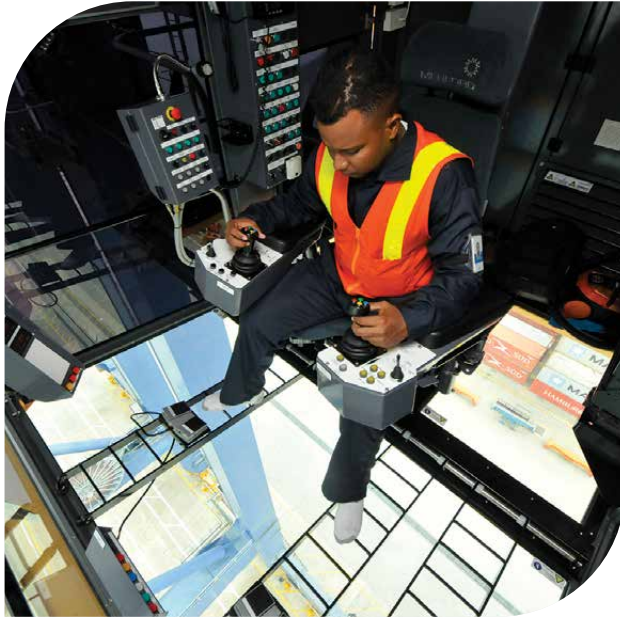
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Cartagena, Colombia



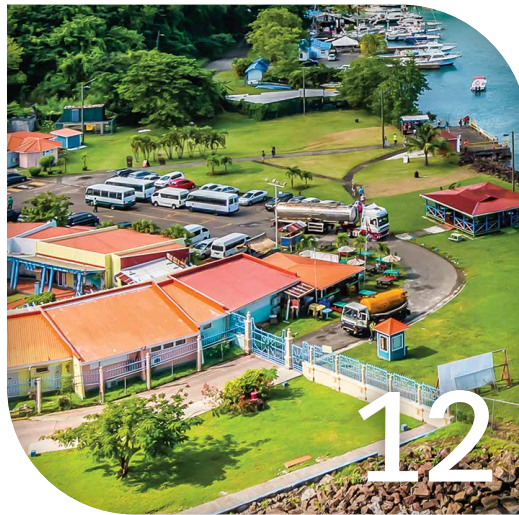
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**Port Management
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P.O. Box 929 G.P.O.
Bridgetown, Barbados
Telephone: (246) 434-6505
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www.pmac-ports.com



Mission Statement:

To foster operational and financial efficiency and to enhance the level of service to the mutual benefit of Caribbean Ports and their stakeholders, through the sharing of experience, training, information and ideas.

**Volume 7, Number 35
April-July 2026**

PORTSIDE CARIBBEAN is published by:



Tel: 866-985-9780
Fax: 866-985-9799
www.kelmanonline.com

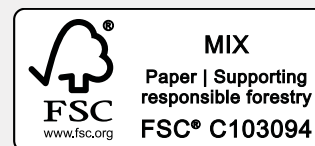


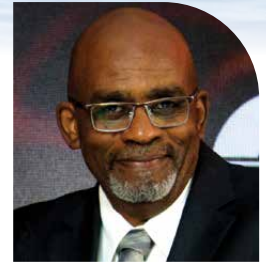
Publisher: Cole Kelman
Managing Editor: Reba Lewis
Marketing Manager: Megan Stanley
Design/layout: Kellee Breckman
Advertising Coordinator: Stefanie Hagidiakow

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When the rules no longer protect you You must protect yourself

World leaders arriving in Davos on January 19, 2026 for the annual World Economic Forum would have had no idea then that they would be leaving the little Swiss city four days later with a different worldview. But, on day two of the five-day event, Canada's Prime Minister, Mark Carney made a speech that arrested the attention of the 2,000 and more present, and millions more around the world.

The presentation of the former Governor of the Bank of Canada and subsequently Governor of the Bank of England, later described as "a defining moment" at the Davos event, laid bare the challenges and harsh realities of global trade now faced around the world. The silence of his audience was deafening as participants contemplated the immediate future of global trade and economics.

"Let me be direct, we are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition. Over the past two decades, a series of crises in finance, health, energy and geopolitics have laid bare the risks of extreme global integration. But more recently, great powers have begun using economic integration as weapons; tariffs as leverage; financial infrastructure as coercion; supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited. You cannot live within the lie of 'mutual benefit through integration' when integration becomes the source of your subordination."

"The multilateral institutions on which the Middle Powers have relied... the WTO, the UN... the very architecture of collective problem solving are under threat. And, as a result, many countries are drawing the same conclusions; that they must develop greater strategic

"... great powers have begun using economic integration as weapons, tariffs as leverage, financial infrastructure as coercion, supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited."

economy... in energy, food, critical minerals, in finance and supply chains. And this impulse is understandable.

"A country that can't feed itself, fuel itself, or defend itself has few options. When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself."

Arguing the need to build and develop new trade relationships, Carney said the rules-based international system, which for decades had been the foundation of global trade, is breaking down. While, increasingly, the largest, most powerful countries (the so-called "superpowers") are using finance, trade and supply chains in coercive strategies that ultimately stifle growth and impede development, thereby undermining the process of economic development in the so-called "middle powers".

So powerful and enlightening was Mark Carney's presentation in Davos, he was immediately invited by the Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese, to visit Australia. The invitation was not to discuss the \$6 billion Arctic Over-the-horizon Radar technology that Canada purchased from Australia in 2025. Rather, Albanese wanted Carney to address the Australian Parliament. Inspired by Carney's analytical summary of current global economics and the path to sustained development for middle-power nations, Australia's Prime Minister felt it necessary for Australian lawmakers to hear for themselves the analysis and solutions that Carney had shared in Davos.

WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES

Caribbean island states do not have the global clout of any middle power country. Individually and collectively, they are vulnerable in a world where, as Mark Carney argues: "... great powers have begun using economic

integration as weapons, tariffs as leverage, financial infrastructure as coercion, supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited." The decision by a newly elected U.S. President to slap crippling trade tariffs on the two middle-power countries with which USA had shared a cordial relationship and common borders for centuries was, at the very least, unsettling. The rules and customs governing global trade no longer protected the countries of the Caribbean.

"When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself."

Caribbean governments must move immediately and briskly to protect their economies and the process of development that has produced the gains so far made by their peoples. In this regard, initiatives to establish trade alliances with middle-power countries – of which there are about 60-plus – must be treated with the utmost urgency.

WE HAVE THE GOODS

The Caribbean region has a fascinating history; a variety of skills, talent, resources, and, unique cultures. All together the countries of the region have the capacity – not to mention the tenacity – to drive the kind of economic development that was impossible to achieve in post-colonial relationships in which price, terms and quantities were dictated.

No longer restricted by trade deals with superpowers, the peoples of the Caribbean have access to a world of opportunities. •

Mike Jarrett

Founder/Editor-in-Chief



CARTAGENA:

Impressive growth, continuing expansion

By Mike Jarrett



In just over three decades since incorporation and privatisation in 1993, the grand port at Cartagena in Colombia has evolved to be one of the Caribbean's leading container and trans-shipment hubs, moving more than four million TEU last year (2025).

Formerly a relatively small regional gateway handling just about 93,000 TEU yearly, the Group Port of Cartagena, which comprises Sociedad Portuaria Regional de Cartagena (SPRC, Manga Terminal) and Contecar, is now one of the Caribbean region's most impressive multi-terminal port systems. In just over 30 years, the group has combined network connectivity, terminal productivity and infrastructure development to fuel growth and expansion and to support Colombia's economic development.

Cartagena currently maintains service links to more than 820 ports across 120 countries through global liner services, supporting both gateway and relay cargo. Its geographic position and terminal performance have made it increasingly relevant for trans-shipment

distribution across the Caribbean Basin, as well as north-south and east-west trades.

"Growth has been driven by phased terminal expansion, liner network integration, and sustained upgrades in nautical access and equipment," said Giovanni Benedetti, senior executive and now in his 30th year as Chief Commercial Officer at the Group Port of Cartagena. "Port development in Cartagena has become closely tied to national and regional outcomes, enabling trade, supporting supply chains, creating formal employment, and helping to ensure the steady movement of food, pharmaceuticals, industrial inputs and export cargoes. All this supports Colombia's economic stability and rising living standards."

As regards network connectivity and alliance positioning, Benedetti explained: "For exporters and importers, that connectivity translates into shorter transit times, more routing options, and greater reliability – factors that directly affect business competitiveness and consumer access to goods.



Giovanni Benedetti, Chief Commercial Officer, Group Port of Cartagena

"The port's hub profile strengthened further with its selection last year (2025) as one of 14 global hubs in the Gemini Cooperation network (formed by Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd). The alliance's hub-and-spoke model prioritises ports that are capable of high berth productivity, schedule integrity, and nautical accessibility, with reliability targets of more than 90%."

Inclusion in these networks benefits the local economy in that they secure long-term vessel calls; create logistics activity and benefit local service industries, he noted.



Infrastructure scale, nautical access

Cartagena has effectively sustained its global stature as an efficient and dependable hub over decades, providing the infrastructure, systems and services demanded by client users. Growth, upgrading and terminal expansion at Group Port of Cartagena has been constant and in step with global trends. Terminal expansion therefore reflects current vessel upsizing and network consolidation trends.

DRAFT: Maximum drafts are 16.5 metres at Contecar, and 15.5 metres at SPRC, accommodating container ships of up to 18,000 TEU capacity (approx.).

SPACE: The combined terminal area now totals approximately 140 hectares, including about 40 hectares at SPRC and 100 hectares at Contecar. Total berth length now exceeds 2,000 metres across the two facilities. Current yearly throughput capacity across the complex is about five million TEU. Contecar has expanded its logistics footprint with more than 60,000 square metres of warehouse space, refrigerated cross-dock facilities and, value-added logistics services aimed at consolidation and regional distribution.

MACHINES: The quay crane fleet includes 19 Super Post-Panamax units supported by modern yard handling equipment configured for high trans-shipment density. These capabilities support not only global carriers, but also regional producers and distributors seeking faster, more flexible supply chain solutions.

Performance metrics; operational efficiency

Performance gains have been attributed to a combination of yard process redesign, equipment density, berth planning discipline, digital operating systems, workforce experience and operational culture. In this regard, the effectiveness and reliability of the port at Cartagena have drawn the attention and acknowledgement of the global shipping community.

As Benedetti noted, Cartagena has been ranked among the top-performing ports globally in berth productivity and vessel turnaround metrics. In the World Bank–S&P Global Port Performance Index for 2024, the Cartagena port complex placed third for its time-in-port indicators and operational efficiency benchmarks.



“Cartagena has also received repeated recognition from the Caribbean Shipping Association, having been judged Best Port in the Caribbean on 10 occasions. This highlights our service consistency as regards larger average vessel sizes and tighter schedule windows.”

Technology, people, service reliability

Digitalisation programmes have focused on terminal operating systems, cargo traceability, gate automation and yard orchestration tools designed to reduce transaction friction and dwell times. Benedetti observed that data-driven planning and real-time visibility have improved for both trans-shipment and gateway cargo but that technology is only part of the performance equation.

“Productivity gains depend on trained teams, safety culture and, operational discipline. Continuous investment in workforce training, safety standards, and leadership development has supported the port’s labour stability and service reliability. . . this in a sector where disruption risks can quickly ripple across supply chains. In this regard, a sustained people-centred workplace strategy has earned us repeated Great Place to Work recognition, linking employee well-being with operational consistency and customer outcomes.

“In this regard, workforce diversification has increased steadily, with higher female participation across administrative, technical, operational, and management roles – a notable shift in a historically male-dominated segment of the logistics industry. In 2025, both terminals were recognised by Great Place to Work among the top-ranked employers of women. Our management views diversity and inclusion as operational strengths tied to innovation, adaptability and decision-making quality – not only social commitments.”



Outlook: capacity, digitalisation, sustainability

The Group Port of Cartagena has firm plans for increasing capacity and productivity upgrades in 2026 to 2027. These development initiatives are aimed at supporting trade growth and accommodating larger vessels. In this regard investment in automation and digital systems will continue.

“Sustainability initiatives, including energy efficiency measures and emissions-reduction programmes, aligned with maritime sector decarbonisation targets, will be integral to our development plans. Increasingly, environment protection is being regarded as a competitive factor in port selection by both carrier and cargo owners.

“As liner strategies continue to favour fewer, higher-performing relay hubs, Cartagena’s connectivity profile, infrastructure depth and productivity metrics position it to remain a primary trans-shipment platform for the Caribbean and the wider Americas. Port leadership frames the next phase not only in terms of volume and efficiency, but also impact – serving economies, creating wealth, enabling trade, and contributing to better living conditions in the communities connected to the port’s activity.” ●

First time in 28-year history

OAS-CIP REGULAR MEETING IN A CARIBBEAN STATE

14th Regular Meeting of the CIP will be held in Bridgetown

Representatives of the 34 member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-American Committee on Ports (CIP), from Argentina to Canada, including the Caribbean, will gather in Barbados in June 2026 for the 14th Regular Meeting of the CIP.

The CIP, created in 1998 by the General Assembly of the OAS, is the only permanent Inter-American governmental forum that brings together the National Port Authorities of sovereign countries in South America, Central America, the Caribbean and North America. Barbados, by way of Barbados Port Inc. (BPI), is the first country in the English-speaking Caribbean to Chair the CIP's Executive Board. Not surprising therefore, the 14th Regular Meeting of the CIP will be held in Bridgetown, from June 8 to 10, 2026.

Regular Meetings of the CIP provide a high-level forum for dialogue and cooperation among national port authorities, public-private sector entities and stakeholders on emerging challenges and opportunities. Presented under the banner "Scope of AI: Reshaping Strategies for Sustainable and Secure Ports", the meeting in Barbados will focus on issues relating to port innovation, sustainability, security and operational efficiency.

SECURE SUSTAINABLE SEAPORTS

The CIP was created to promote and support development of competitive, secure, sustainable and inclusive ports in the Americas. Driven by the active involvement of local private sector, the CIP's work is guided by four specific mandates: policy dialogue; capacity building; technical assistance; and cooperation with the private sector.

Programmes generated by these mandates and organised in six priority areas are delivered by six technical advisory groups include:

1. Logistics, innovation and competitiveness
2. Port protection and security
3. Waterways, inland and cruise ports
4. Sustainable port management and environmental protection
5. Public policy, legislation and regulation
6. Port-city relations, social responsibility and gender equality

In addition to electing a new CIP Executive Board, the 14th Regular Meeting of the CIP will also approve a new plan of action for the next three years. This plan of action will guide regional cooperation, technical assistance and policy priorities in the port sector. ●



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PMAC SECRETARIAT NOW IN SURINAME



The Secretariat of the Port Management Association of the Caribbean (PMAC) is now located in Paramaribo, Suriname. The move from its previous location in Barbados marks the start of a new chapter in PMAC's historical mission to promote, support and sustain port development across the length and breadth of the Caribbean region.

The PMAC Secretariat is now located in Suriname Port Management Company's Port Service Centre building at Havenlaan Zuid 5.

Formalities signifying the start of PMAC operations in Paramaribo took place in November last (2025) during a formal visit by PMAC representatives, including the Association's former Executive Secretary, Glenn Roach, former Executive Assistant, Linda Profijt-del Prado, and PMAC Consultant, Dr. Everton Walters.

NEW EXECUTIVE TEAM

The new PMAC Secretariat team is:

- PMAC Executive Secretary: **Mary-Ann Abdoelkariem**
(from the Suriname Port Management Company)
- PMAC Executive Assistant: **Sandy Bouchenafa**
(from Grand Port Maritime De La Guyane)
- PMAC Training Administrator: **Glenn Roach**
- PMAC Events Coordinator: **Linda Profijt-del Prado**

"In the world of maritime trade, ports are more than gateways for cargo. They are engines of economic growth; connectors of nations; and, catalysts for innovation. By relocating the Secretariat in Paramaribo, PMAC reinforces its commitment to geographic diversity and regional balance," said PMAC's Executive Secretary, Mary-Ann Abdoelkariem in commenting on the reorganisation and expansion of the PMAC headquarters.

WHY SURINAME

Since its founding in 1998, having emerged from a foundation established by the *Port Management Association of the Eastern Caribbean (PMAEC)*, PMAC has evolved into an energetic network. The Association's membership now comprises

27 Caribbean ports and more than 40 Associate Member entities from an array of sub-sectors including port services, technology, training and innovation.

The Suriname Port Management Company (SPMC) has been an active and committed PMAC member since 2010. During that period, the SPMC persistently demonstrated consistent engagement and regional leadership in PMAC's development initiatives. Ultimately therefore, the decision to relocate PMAC's headquarters to Paramaribo was driven by the sustained energy for development within Suriname's maritime sector. Indeed, Suriname's keen focus on port modernisation, professional development, and international connectivity made relocation to Paramaribo a prudent decision.

LOOKING HEAD

"As global shipping faces rapid change, driven by digital transformation, climate resilience, and evolving trade patterns, Caribbean ports must work together more closely than ever before," the PMAC Executive Secretary said.

"PMAC will continue to serve as the Caribbean region's coordinating force, connecting people, sharing solutions, and ensuring that Caribbean ports remain competitive, resilient and future-ready." ●

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AI IN PORT OPERATIONS: WHY HUMAN OVERSIGHT STILL MATTERS



AI CAN BE USED TO DRAFT CONTRACTS, HOWEVER, WE HAVE TO BE CAREFUL. IT OFTEN OMITS OUR LOCAL LEGISLATIONS, AND IT TRIVIALISES CERTAIN TERMS.

This caution was shared by Jermaine Reid, International Maritime Lawyer and lecturer at the Caribbean Maritime University, during the PMAC Presents webinar on “Contracts, Claims & Cargo”, hosted in partnership with ADVANTUM.

It reflects a broader reality facing ports today, as artificial intelligence (AI) becomes embedded in daily operations, delivering efficiency, while introducing new areas of risk and responsibility.

Many ports now rely on AI-driven systems to improve efficiency, increase speed, and strengthen decision-making. These technologies provide real-time insights and predictive capabilities, from forecasting vessel arrivals, to optimising crane deployment and labour allocation, to automating routine administrative tasks.

For port managers, these gains translate directly into faster turnaround times, improved resource utilisation, and stronger cost control.

This increased reliance on AI, however, raises a critical question: where does responsibility sit when systems make or influence decisions? As AI’s role expands, so does the need for careful oversight, particularly in environments where decisions carry operational, legal, and financial consequences.

Reid in his presentation, underscored this point: “AI can enhance how quickly and efficiently ports operate, but it does not shift responsibility. The accountability for decisions, outcomes, and risks still rests with the legal parties involved, not the technology itself.”

AI systems are only as reliable as the data they use, and without proper validation, flawed data can lead to flawed decisions. Operators must therefore actively validate AI-generated outputs. They need to question anomalies and apply contextual understanding, which machines may lack. AI also struggles with unexpected situations such as sudden disruptions or labour challenges, where human judgement and discretion are critical.

The most effective approach, therefore, is to treat AI as a decision-support tool rather than a decision-maker. It enhances human capability by providing faster insights, identifying inefficiencies, and reducing manual workload. However, final decisions, especially those related to safety, compliance, and financial impact, must remain in human hands.

As digital transformation continues across the maritime industry, the role of the operator is changing, not diminishing. Ports that succeed will be those that maintain a balanced approach, leveraging AI to improve performance while upholding strong governance, investing in training, and ensuring that operators remain actively engaged in decision-making.

AI is transforming port operations. The question is no longer whether AI should be used, but how it should be governed. Getting this balance right will define the next generation of port management.



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BIODIVERSITY

Some steps to improvement are easy

Biodiversity loss – An apocalyptic catastrophe

*Life on planet Earth is sustained by a diversity of living things (a biodiversity) ... a vast variety of life forms, from animals to micro-organisms and everything in between ... flora and fauna, on land and sea, underground and above ground. This biodiversity includes the entire spectrum of species... varieties, genetic peculiarities and habitats. Should there be a sudden, significant decline or an expansive reduction in the number of species, their habitats and that which keeps them present and alive... a massive **biodiversity loss**... survival of life on planet Earth would become challenging if not impossible. Jesper Goodley Dannisøe discusses how to avoid a possible cataclysmic biodiversity loss.*

– Editor



By Jesper Goodley Dannisøe

***Jesper Goodley Dannisøe**, DHI, Denmark, is a Senior Project Manager and Biologist with working experience in 40+ countries and the Caribbean Region.

The 10 'FACTS' listed in the box attached here collectively indicate the importance of a healthy biodiversity. As human beings, can we do something to improve the biodiversity of planet Earth? Is it too late?

No, it is not too late. And yes, human beings can do something. Some steps to improve biodiversity are relatively easy.

Before I wrote this article, I took a tour on Google Earth and looked at some of those seaport areas for which many ports carry managerial responsibility. Naturally, port areas have been optimised to support all the functions necessary in the day-to-day operations, e.g., ensuring access to areas for loading or offloading cargo.

GREENING THE PROPERTY

In my Google tour, I observed port headquarters with nicely kept front lawns and some with trees and palms, all of which, I am sure, will please visitors. But a bit of well-kept lawn and a few decorative trees will hardly support biodiversity.

In Denmark, we have implemented a new approach called "Wild on Purpose" where landowners are encouraged to: let the grass grow; plant more trees; and reduce maintenance to a minimum. It requires a change of mind to understand that, if I do not mow my lawn, I am helping the lawn to change from mono-crop (the planted grass) to a state where other plants can actually grow in the lawn area.

To give you some tools on how to change current practice for a better situation, one which brings biodiversity into focus, I have elaborated on some ideas. To begin, it may be necessary that you go through the port area for which you have responsibility and do some simple mapping of the space.

“ The introduction of the lionfish in the Caribbean Sea is a well-known disaster. This fish has no natural enemies in the Caribbean Sea.

Protect, restore natural habitats

Safeguard existing natural habitats that are within the port boundaries, including small forests or groups of trees, permanent wetlands, and any grasslands, including decorative lawn spaces. If you are a port authority, you may also have marine areas under your jurisdiction. Study and discuss how those areas could be effectively protected or, if necessary, restored.

Increase habitat connectivity

All species survive by being able to migrate. This is easy for birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians but not so for plants and insects. Accordingly, consider possibilities for connecting green spaces in the port area to other green areas by way of grass-covered strips of ground; shrubbery; hedges; or, even green roofs, in order to physically link fragmented ecosystems.

Promote native species

If you want to improve habitats, you should use native plants in landscaping and restoration projects. They support local insects, pollinators, and birds. Remember that more trees will increase shade thereby reducing heat during the summer months and, possibly, the need for air conditioning.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Take care not to introduce flowers, trees and other living species that are not native to your country. In contrast to native species, they may in all likelihood not support insects and birds. There are a vast number of horror stories about introduction of non-native species, all of which end in disaster.

The introduction of the lionfish in the Caribbean Sea is a well-known disaster. This fish has no natural enemies in the Caribbean Sea. Accordingly, it has multiplied voluminously in the Caribbean, taking over large areas of coral reefs, eating all other species. Another example is the release of Burmese pythons into the Everglades in Florida. This python has no natural enemies, and its numbers have grown immeasurably.

Reduce pesticide and herbicide use

Stop using any chemical compound on your land. Accept that “nature” grows. If you need to keep control, encourage integrated pest management and organic practices to protect beneficial species.



Support pollinators

A pollinator is any organism which carries pollen from plant to plant. It could be a hummingbird, an insect or a bat. Supporting pollinators is good for sustaining biodiversity. So, plant diverse, nectar-rich flowers and trees that bloom throughout the season, provide nesting sites. It is important to understand that without pollinators, many of our basic crops may not be able to provide us with food. Pollinators contribute significantly to global agriculture by way of increased yields and improved crop quality.

Protect freshwater systems

If port lands border a wetland, you need to know whether water run-off from the port area ends in the wetland causing negative impacts. Simple surface-water treatment systems based on natural root-zone systems are available and could improve the water quality entering the wetland. Better water quality improves wetland biodiversity.

Engage communities and education

Improving biodiversity in a limited port area will be a step in the right direction. Good public relations is to spread the idea beyond the port to the wider community. An alliance with adjoining communities for preserving the biodiversity of the port area is a positive port-community initiative. If you begin by engaging neighbouring communities in conservation, citizen science and stewardship programmes, the port will be seen and appreciated as a positive force in the community.

Strengthening biodiversity is not just about bees and trees. It's about engaging whole communities and supporting entities in a historic process of rebuilding a healthy planet Earth. ●

The FACTS

1. Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on planet Earth, including genes; species; and entire ecosystems.
2. Biodiversity includes all living organisms: plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms.
3. High biodiversity ensures that ecosystems flourish and remain resilient and stable.
4. Biodiversity supports essential services including pollination; clean water; and, fertile soil.
5. Biodiversity helps to regulate climate and buffers extreme events.
6. Biodiverse environments sustain life on Earth. Many medicines that keep human beings alive and healthy originate in (or are produced by) species living in biodiverse environments.
7. Biodiverse environments are threatened by pollution, climate change and invasive species.
8. Biodiversity declines when ecosystems collapse or lose key functions.
9. Protecting biodiversity protects nature and humanity.
10. Conservation, sustainable land use, and climate action are crucial to preserving biodiversity.

ASSET MANAGEMENT: CRITICAL STEPS IN DEVELOPING A PLAN

Data management and condition assessments for Caribbean ports

By Helga Sommer** and Erik Stromberg*

It is worth reinforcing a central theme: the value and the challenge of asset management (or AM) is that it must be tailored to the port authority's needs and resources. There is no universally 'correct' approach. The goal is better management of critical assets, as the owner deems appropriate at the time. Resources, institutional maturity, organisational capability, and risk tolerance are key factors to be evaluated, prioritised, and integrated into the decision process.

For Caribbean public ports, this often means calibrating ambition against reality. Most ports, not just in the Caribbean but worldwide, operate with limited staff, ageing infrastructure, fragmented records, and competing operational priorities. In addition, Caribbean ports face heightened exposure to hurricanes, corrosion, sea-level rise, and supply chain disruptions.

Asset management in this context must be practical, scalable, and resilient; not theoretical or technology-driven. The goal is not perfect data or exhaustive inspections. The goal is sufficient, credible information to support decisions that are better than those made yesterday.

FROM FRAGMENTATION TO FUNCTIONALITY: WHY DATA MANAGEMENT MATTERS

Data is the raw material of asset management. It underpins valuation, risk assessment, lifecycle modelling, and capital planning. Yet in many ports, data exists in disconnected forms: in paper drawings, legacy spreadsheets, inspection reports, maintenance logs, procurement files, and institutional memory held by long-tenured staff. The challenge is not always the absence of data – but rather its fragmentation, inconsistency, and inaccessibility.

Without deliberate data management, ports face several common pitfalls:

- Decisions based on anecdote rather than evidence
- Inability to prioritise assets or asset classes based on quantified, strategic value
- Over- or under-investment due to uncertainty
- Loss of institutional knowledge through staff turnover

WHAT DATA IS ACTUALLY NEEDED

An effective AM programme does not start by collecting **all** data. It begins by identifying decision-critical data. For most ports, this includes:

- Asset inventory (what exists, where, and who owns it)
- Basic asset attributes (age, material, function)
- Description of the required 'fit-for-purpose' condition of critical assets or asset classes
- Replacement or rehabilitation cost (order-of-magnitude) to regain fit-for-purpose condition
- Condition indicators (even if qualitative), relative to the required fit-for-purpose condition
- Operational criticality (what happens when an asset's performance is subpar or it fails).

It is important to be mindful that the asset data available, when collected across the organisation and harmonised to facilitate comparison, is often sufficient to begin **risk-based prioritisation**. Continuous improvement in data collection and organisation, focused on decision-making requirements, should be a key objective and a measured outcome.

HARMONISING AND NORMALISING DATA

One of the most underestimated challenges in data management is comparability. Ports frequently have different data standards for various asset classes, wharves, pavements, buildings, and utilities, making it challenging to evaluate trade-offs across the portfolio.

Effective AM requires harmonisation, not perfection:

- Standard condition rating scales (even if coarse)
- Consistent terminology across assets and asset classes
- Shared spatial references (GIS when possible)
- Precise version control and ownership of records

Many ports have successfully started this process using simple, low-cost tools – structured spreadsheets, shared databases, or basic GIS platforms – before investing in enterprise asset management systems.

UNLOCKING 'HIDDEN' DATA

A significant portion of valuable data often resides outside formal systems.

- Maintenance crews know which assets fail repeatedly and/or require the most attention.
- Operators understand which disruptions or performance levels are unacceptable.
- Engineers recall past repairs and undocumented modifications.

Capturing and recording this knowledge (through workshops, interviews, or structured templates) and applying it are among the highest-value early steps in asset management. Organisational buy-in is facilitated when cross-functional and hierarchical communication yields strategic epiphanies.

CONDITION ASSESSMENTS:

RIGHT-SIZING AN EXPENSIVE NECESSITY

Why condition data is critical

Condition assessment provides insight into where an asset sits in its life cycle and how quickly risk is increasing. Without condition data, ports are forced to rely on age-based assumptions or reactive maintenance, neither of which is reliable or cost-effective, particularly in corrosive marine environments. However, condition assessments are also expensive and resource-intensive, especially for marine structures, pavements, and buried utilities.

The threshold question is which assets require what level of condition assessment.

Condition monitoring varies from "run to failure" to careful monitoring depending, e.g., on the asset's criticality and the ease and cost of replacement. Unanticipated asset failure can be expensive to the port authority in several ways. A comprehensive condition assessment programme – which assets, how often, to what level of detail – is worth the investment in time and effort.

A tiered approach to condition assessment

One best practice emerging across the port industry is the use of tiered condition assessments, in which effort and cost are aligned with asset criticality and risk.

"THE VALUE AND THE CHALLENGE OF ASSET MANAGEMENT IS THAT IT MUST BE TAILORED TO THE PORT AUTHORITY'S NEEDS AND RESOURCES."

A typical tiered approach may include:

- **Level 1:** Screening-level assessments: Visual inspections, historical review, and qualitative ratings are used to identify red flags and prioritise further study.
- **Level 2:** Targeted detailed assessments: Focused inspections (e.g., non-destructive testing, underwater inspections) for high-risk or high-value assets.
- **Level 3:** Forensic or design-level investigations: Reserved for designated critical assets approaching major rehabilitation or replacement decisions.

This approach allows ports to stretch limited budgets, applying the most rigorous assessments where outcomes materially influence strategic decisions.

Leveraging opportunistic inspections

Another effective strategy is to "piggyback" condition assessments onto other activities:

- During construction or rehabilitation projects
- As part of regulatory inspections
- Following extreme weather events
- During routine maintenance access

This reduces mobilisation costs and improves data coverage over time.

Carefully using proxies and extrapolation

In many cases, ports must make decisions with incomplete condition data. This is not a failure of asset management. It is a reality. What matters is **transparency within and across management levels** about assumptions and uncertainty in the valuation of decision outcomes. Quantifying value and risk is a useful way to facilitate comparisons and drive outcomes.

Common, defensible proxies include:

- Age combined with exposure conditions
- Performance history
- Similar asset behaviour elsewhere in the port
- Industry benchmarks

When used carefully, extrapolation enables progress while signalling where better data would improve confidence.

OVERCOMING INERTIA AND ORGANISATIONAL BARRIERS

The human factor

Inertia is one of the most persistent obstacles to asset management. Starting an asset management programme requires time and attention – across departments and management levels. **Patience and defined end-state values** will help to overcome frustration with the lack of short-term, visible payoffs.

In addition, creating a stand-alone asset manager role does not automatically solve this problem. If asset management is perceived as someone else's responsibility, there is a risk that it becomes another silo.

Successful programmes share several traits:

- Clear executive sponsorship
- Defined corporate priority
- Integration with budgeting and planning cycles
- Respect for operational realities

In many ports, progress depends on a credible champion, someone with technical understanding, organisational trust, and persistence.

Maintaining momentum

Early asset management efforts – data clean-up, workshops, basic inventories – often feel tedious. The benefits – better capital alignment, fewer surprises, and improved resilience – tend to materialise later.

To maintain momentum, ports have found value in:

- Delivering early, visible wins (including avoided failures)
- Linking AM outputs directly to budget outputs
- Communicating successes and their quantified value internally and externally
- Iterating progress, rather than waiting for perfection

Why this matters – tangible and intangible benefits

The benefits of effective data management and condition assessment extend well beyond spreadsheets and reports. Tangible benefits include:

- More defensible capital budgets
- Reduced emergency repairs and operational downtime
- Improved grant competitiveness
- Better alignment of maintenance and capital spending

- Alignment and compliance with relevant operating agreements and lease terms

Intangible benefits include:

- Increased staff confidence and morale
- Greater transparency and credibility with stakeholders
- Improved credibility with regulators and lenders
- Stronger organisational resilience
- Increased customer and stakeholder satisfaction and reputation

For Caribbean ports navigating climate risk, tourism growth, and fiscal constraints, these benefits are not theoretical. They are operationally critical. •



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Within the offshore value chain, operations are structured according to a well-defined division of responsibilities. The operator – responsible for overall project management and investment decisions – contracts international service companies for the engineering and execution of complex offshore activities. These parties, in turn, depend on a robust logistics infrastructure for the transport, handling, and storage of materials, equipment, and supporting goods. This is precisely where the added value of the port lies.



A recent milestone was the first unloading of offshore equipment destined for ongoing and future offshore operations. This equipment is being stored at a newly constructed site in the northern section of the port.

With these initial steps in supporting offshore operations, a foundation is being laid for long-term collaboration with international partners. The port will therefore continue to focus on further capacity expansion, process optimisation, and ensuring compliance with international standards in the areas of safety, efficiency, and sustainability.

Geopolitics and the Future of Maritime Law

BY DENIECE M. AIKEN*



Power shifts, institutional strain, and what lies ahead for the rules that govern the seas

Oceans have always tested the boundary between power and law. In 1603, that tension surfaced when the SS Santa Catarina, a Portuguese carrack loaded with spices, was seized by the Dutch. Portugal called the incident piracy. The Dutch responded with an idea. Jurist Hugo Grotius argued that the sea could not be owned and that trade required open passage. His case for *Mare Liberum* (the free sea) became the foundation of modern maritime law. Four centuries later, the tools have changed, but the dynamic has not. When the United States of America (USA) recently seized an oil tanker under sanctions enforcement, it argued the same logic: power justified through law, law shaped by power.

Then as now, maritime rules are forged in moments of confrontation. Maritime law has never been neutral. It evolves when states act, when ships are stopped, when legal arguments are presented in order to legitimise force. Yet, the past is not a prologue. It is still playing out at sea.

At present, the international maritime legal framework is under pressure. The global system is entering a period of geopolitical tension not seen in decades. Strategic rivalry among major powers, economic nationalism, sanctions and security-driven trade policies are reshaping how states interact at sea. Shipping lanes are no longer viewed solely as commercial corridors, but as strategic assets. Legal instruments once designed to smooth trade are increasingly being used to project influence, enforce policy, or signal resolve. At the same time, the institutions meant to manage cooperation are facing growing scepticism and financial strain. Multilateral bodies that once set standards and quietly resolved disputes are now contested, underfunded, or bypassed altogether. Where consensus once smoothed enforcement, politics now fills the gaps, making compliance uneven and the application of maritime law increasingly selective.

The result is a shift in the character of maritime law itself. What was long considered a technical, specialist field concerned with safety, liability and navigation, is becoming a frontline arena for global politics. For governments, businesses, insurers and port operators alike, the question is no longer whether geopolitics affects maritime law, but how deeply it will redefine it and how prepared they are for the change.

Fragmented international order

International relations are not collapsing into disorder, but there are competing ideas and theories about how the world should be governed. Great-power competition has again taken centre stage. Sea lanes, chokepoints and offshore resources are increasingly viewed through a strategic lens, not merely a commercial one. Governments are now more willing to intervene in shipping, finance and logistics, even at the cost of efficiency. There is a clear shift away from universal multilateralism toward selective cooperation.

Smaller groups of aligned states are collaborating by setting their own standards, while global consensus becomes harder to achieve and easier to bypass. Maritime law is at the convergence of all these forces. It governs the movement of goods, energy, data, and people across borders, and when political order fragments, the law of the sea absorbs the pressure. A clear signal of this shift came in early 2026 with the decision by USA to withdraw from 66 international organisations¹, including 31 entities associated with the United Nations (UN). This decision was presented as a recalibration of national interest to address inefficiency, politicisation, and misalignment with USA's priorities. Regardless of the stated rationale, the consequences extend way beyond diplomacy. International maritime governance depends on coordination, shared standards, technical cooperation, and the participation of major maritime powers.

When a leading actor steps back, the system does not collapse – its universality weakens, resulting in a world where rules still exist, but with uneven implementation where uncertainty, cost and conflict begin.

United Nations financially strained

This fragmentation is unfolding against the growing strain on the multilateral system itself. The UN is facing serious financial pressure.² Its Secretary-General, António Guterres, has warned that persistent funding shortfalls could leave the organisation struggling to function.

For maritime law, the implications are immediate. Many of the UN's most important functions are out of sight: technical assistance to states, shared data systems, dispute facilitation, and coordination across agencies. These mechanisms energise legal principles, turning written rules into workable practice. They are often the first to be trimmed when budgets tighten, slowly eroding global industrial capacity. As that institutional backbone weakens, risks are that maritime law drifts away from shared stewardship toward something more transactional. Rules remain on the page, but outcomes increasingly depend on leverage, resources and bilateral bargaining.

In such an environment, power does not replace law, but bends it – quietly and persistently. And as history reminds, the law of the sea changes most drastically when power shifts across the oceans.

Caribbean states, ports, shipping

For Caribbean states, these shifts are not abstract. They impact port operations, freight rates, insurance premiums, and, the daily movement of cargo, which sustains small economies.

In a fragmented maritime order, small and trade-dependent states experience the effects first and often, most sharply. Ports in the Caribbean are positioned along some of the world's most heavily trafficked sea lanes, yet they operate with limited margins for disruption. When maritime law becomes more politicised, uncertainty naturally follows. Sanctions enforcement, enhanced inspections, and shifting compliance expectations can often slow port clearance, increase administrative burdens, and raise costs for carriers

and cargo owners alike. Even when Caribbean jurisdictions are not the target of geopolitical measures, they can become collateral checkpoints in a more securitised maritime environment.

Ship operators face similar pressures. Insurance and financing decisions are increasingly shaped by geopolitical risk rather than purely operational performance. Vessels calling at smaller ports may encounter higher premiums or more stringent 'due-diligence' requirements; not because of local failings but because global risk models are tightening. In such conditions, reputation and regulatory credibility become as important as infrastructure.

For Caribbean governments, the challenge is compounded by capacity. As multilateral institutions weaken and technical assistance declines, more responsibility shifts to national authorities often without corresponding resources. Port State Control, beneficial ownership transparency, environmental enforcement and sanctions compliance all demand expertise and investment. Where these systems lag, jurisdictions risk being viewed as weak links in a tightening global chain.

Opportunity

Yet, there is also opportunity. Jurisdictions that demonstrate clarity, consistency and cooperation can distinguish themselves. Strong maritime administration; modern port governance; and, regional coordination can reduce risk perceptions and attract business seeking stability in uncertain waters. Above all, this moment underscores a hard truth: maritime law no longer operates in the background. For Caribbean states and industries, it is becoming a strategic factor, shaping access, cost, and competitiveness.

The future of maritime law is unlikely to be defined by collapse, but rather by sustained tension between cooperation and competition, global norms and national interests. The rules of the sea are not vanishing; they are being reshaped under strain. USA's withdrawal from several international bodies and the growing financial fragility of the United Nations, are not isolated events. They signal a broader shift toward a more fragmented and transactional global order; one in which coordination is harder, enforcement less uniformed, and power more visible in the making of rules.

Climate change mitigation in shipping relies on shared frameworks and credible oversight. As governance fragments, progress risks becoming uneven, with ambitious standards in some corridors and regulatory gaps in others. The same is true for economic diversification and digitalisation. In this environment, maritime law is becoming a strategic domain in its own right. And how smoothly, fairly and safely the world's seas continue to connect us will depend not only on the strength of the rules, but on a collective will to sustain them in an era where cooperation is harder to achieve yet more necessary than ever. •

- 1 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/>
- 2 <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/un-warns-financial-strain-trumps-us-funding-pullback-factor-1775244>

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PORT READINESS AGENDA 2026

Preparing for global rules tightening

BY COLIN P. YOUNG



As the first quarter of the 21st Century came to an end, the global maritime system entered one of the most transformative periods since the introduction of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code in 2002.

Indeed, international organisations, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations Security Council, the World Bank and regional security alliances are currently reshaping expectations for how seaports operate, secure their environments and contribute to global sustainability goals.

For Caribbean ports, these shifts are not abstract. They will directly influence competitiveness, compliance, investment flows and the Caribbean region's ability to position itself as a reliable node in global supply chains. During 2026, port authorities, governments and operators must therefore prepare for a convergence of new standards in security, decarbonisation, digitalisation and governance.

1. Maritime security and critical infrastructure protection

Security has reemerged as the dominant global concern. The IMO, UN Security Council and major maritime powers are responding to escalating geopolitical tensions, attacks on shipping lanes and the rise of illicit maritime activity. For the Caribbean, this intersects with the **Caribbean Maritime Security Strategy (CMSS)**, which emphasises:

- Strengthening maritime domain awareness;
- Protecting critical port infrastructure;
- Enhancing legal and operational cooperation across states; and
- Building cyber and technological capabilities.

Additionally, EL PACCTO 2.0*, which aims to raise to the highest level the cooperation between justice and security actors in the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, through the investigation and prosecution of organised crime, is now underway. The programme embodies three expectations.

1. Strengthen collaboration of national and regional institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean, and intensify opportunities for strategic dialogue and cooperation with the European Union on Justice and Security.
2. Strengthen the capacities of Justice and Security institutions in the fight against organised crime, applying a gender and human rights approach and involving civil society.
3. Develop operational coordination of Justice and Security actors to investigate the main areas of organised crime activity.

Port systems in the Caribbean will face heightened expectations to demonstrate:

- Robust perimeter and access control.
- Integrated surveillance and monitoring systems.
- Stronger coordination with coast guards, customs, and regional security agencies.

WHY IT MATTERS

Ports are now treated as national security assets. International partners will increasingly assess Caribbean ports not only for efficiency, but for resilience against threats ranging from trafficking to cyberattacks.

2. Decarbonisation and Global Green Port Transition

The IMO's decarbonisation agenda is accelerating. In 2026, ports will be expected to support:

- Cleaner fuels (LNG, methanol, ammonia);
- Shore power ("cold ironing") for vessels at berth;
- Energyefficient cargo handling equipment; and,
- Transparent emissions reporting.

Caribbean ports, many of which operate with ageing infrastructure, must navigate the challenge of upgrading while maintaining affordability.

Opportunities for the CARIBBEAN region

- Access to climate finance for green port projects
- Participation in emerging "green shipping corridors"
- Positioning as sustainable trans-shipment or bunkering hubs.

WHY IT MATTERS

Ports that cannot demonstrate progress toward environmental compliance risk losing calls from major carriers now under pressure to meet global emissions targets.

In January 2026, the IMO hosted a regional conference in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago under its GreenVoyage2050 Programme, in collaboration with Global MTCC Network (GMN Phase II). Participants focused on moving from analysis to implementation by aligning policy, infrastructure planning, energy systems and finance.

The participation of multilateral and regional development banks alongside policymakers and industry linked technical ambition with financial realism at an early stage.

3. Ship registration irregularities and substandard shipping

International organisations are tightening oversight of ship registries in order to counteract:

- Fraudulent vessel registration;
- Growth of "dark fleets" evading sanctions; and,
- Weak flagstate enforcement

Several Caribbean states operate Open Registries or otherwise have vessels operating under their flags.

As scrutiny increases, ports will be expected to:

- Conduct more rigorous document verification;
- Strengthen Port State Control inspections; and
- Ensure alignment with IMO compliance frameworks.

WHY IT MATTERS

Reputational risk is real. A single high-profile incident involving a vessel linked to a Caribbean registry can affect the credibility of the entire Region.

The IMO Final Report of the Study Group on Fraudulent Registration and Fraudulent Registries of Ships identified 24 ships from three Caribbean states whose flags were fraudulently used.

4. Digitalisation, data governance, and cybersecurity

The global maritime sector is currently undergoing rapid digital transformation.

International organisations are advocating:

- Maritime Single Window systems;
- Standardised data exchange protocols;
- Digital port community systems; and
- Cyberresilience frameworks for ports.

Digital governance and cybersecurity in Caribbean ports are shifting from traditional security to robust digital resilience, driven by the Updated CARICOM Cyber Security and Cybercrime Action Plan (CCSCAP) 2025. As ports digitise with Terminal Operating Systems, they face increased vulnerabilities. This makes cybersecurity a top priority for stakeholders to protect against ransomware and ensure operational efficiency.

PRIORITIES FOR 2026

- Implementing secure digital customs and logistics platforms
- Conducting cyberrisk assessments and resilience planning
- Integrating port systems with regional and global data networks

WHY IT MATTERS

Digital readiness is now a prerequisite for trade facilitation, security, and competitiveness. The integration of the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and big data ('SmartPorts') demands stricter cybersecurity measures to secure digital assets, as noted by Maritime Cyber Insurance.

5. Supply chain resilience and regional connectivity

Global organisations are emphasising, after years of disruptions, the need for more resilient logistics networks. For the Caribbean, this includes:

- Reducing port congestion and turnaround times;
- Improving interisland connectivity;
- Strengthening hinterland logistics and lastmile delivery; and,
- Investing in climateresilient port infrastructure.

The Caribbean Shipping Association's recent outlook continues to highlight the Caribbean region's vulnerability to external shocks and the need for coordinated investment.

WHY IT MATTERS

Ports that can guarantee reliability and resilience will attract more traffic and investment.

6. Workforce development; seafarer welfare

The IMO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) are prioritising:

- Improved working conditions for seafarers;
- Updated training and certification standards; and,
- Mental health and welfare support.

Caribbean seaports must prepare to support:

- Training for digital and green transition skills;
- Compliance with updated labour standards; and,
- Better facilities for seafarers calling at regional ports.

WHY IT MATTERS

A skilled, supported workforce is essential for safe and efficient port operations.

New era of port governance for Caribbean states

The international maritime agenda for 2026 is clear: seaports must be secure, sustainable, digitally integrated and governed with transparency and accountability. For Caribbean states this is both a challenge and an opportunity.

Ports that adapt early will:


- Strengthen their position in global supply chains;
- Attract investment and new shipping services;
- Enhance national security and economic resilience; and
- Build a foundation for longterm competitiveness.

Those that delay will risk falling behind in a rapidly evolving global system.


The next two years, 2026 and 2027, will be decisive. ●

**Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organised Crime*

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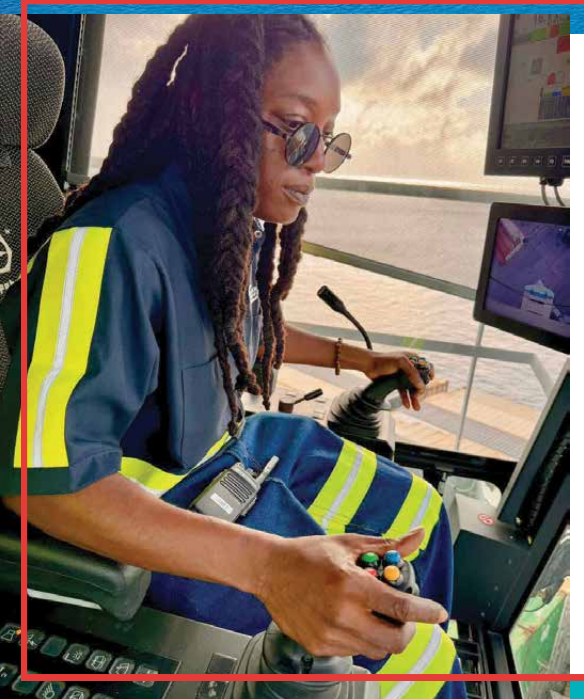
  



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Shoulaiika Maduro, is now Port St. Maarten's first female certified crane operator. The entire Port St. Maarten Group (PSG) proudly celebrates a significant and historic moment for its operations, recognizing their first female employee to achieve full certification as a container crane operator.

This accomplishment is more than just a personnel update; it is a powerful symbol of gender equality and the dismantling of traditional barriers within maritime industries globally.





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