

Lesley Griffiths officially names new fisheries patrol vessel and hands over 'Pride of Wales' vessel to Liberia Government

As per tradition Lesley Griffiths poured champagne over the new FPV Lady Megan, which has been built and manufactured in Wales as part of the Welsh Government Vessel replacement programme, during the naming ceremony in Conwy Marina.

The vessel is named after Criccieth-born Lady Megan Arvon Lloyd George, who was a Welsh politician and became the first female Member of Parliament (MP) for a Welsh constituency.

The vessel has its own shield with a design incorporating a symbol of a Welsh dragon holding a protective portcullis symbol.

The vessel, which weighs 56 tonnes and can reach speeds of up to 28 knots, is equipped with GPS, Radar, search lights and a wet laboratory, and can accommodate eight people.

Lesley Griffiths boarded the new vessel and was given a tour to see how it will be used to protect Welsh waters from illegal fishing activity and safeguard Wales' fishing industry. It is part of a new multi-million pound fleet also including FPV Rhodri Morgan, FPV Catrin, FPV Gwenllian and FPV Siwan.

During the visit, Lesley Griffiths also officially handed over the previous fleet's FPV Aegis, which will now be renamed the 'Pride of Wales' vessel to reflect its Welsh heritage, to the Liberian Government.

It comes after the Welsh Government's 'Wales for Africa' team approached the Liberian Government about the viability of a potential donation of FPV Aegis. After extensive discussions between the team, World Bank Fisheries Department representatives, the EU Fisheries Team and Liberian Coastguard and Fisheries institutions an agreement was reached for the handover.

As a result of the donation, the 'Pride of Wales' vessel will help protect the 40,000+ Liberians who use dugout canoes to catch fish to feed their families, as well as the wider community from foreign trawlers operating illegally in Liberian waters. Fish provides 60% of the protein requirements of Liberia which has been ravaged by civil war and more recently Ebola.

During a short ceremony flags were changed on the FPV Aegis to signify its new ownership, in front of representatives from the Liberian Government

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths said: "I'm delighted to officially name the FPV Lady Megan and see the cutting edge

technology that will be used to protect Welsh waters from illegal fishing activity and safeguard Wales' fishing industry.

"It is more important than ever that we use state of the art facilities like these to ensure Wales continues to effectively enforce fisheries and marine laws. I'm immensely proud of the whole fleet we now have and look forward to seeing them in action.

"Brexit will present us with a number of challenges, but these vessels put us in fantastic stead to support our fishing industry and improve future sustainability."

Speaking about the handover of FPV Aegis to the Liberian Government, she said:

"It is a great honour to be able to hand over this retired vessel to the Liberian Government. I know it will be of great benefit to their industry. It is important assets like these can be reused, as it ensures environmental sustainability as well as helping build links with partners around the world."

Minister for International Relations, Eluned Morgan, said:

"The Wales for Africa programme has gone from strength to strength in recent years and the handover of FPV Aegis to the Liberian Government is just another example of the fantastic work being carried out.

"This will make a massive difference to the Liberian people and we hope the benefits this gesture makes to their fishing industry will be felt for many generations to come. I'm proud projects like these build relationships between Wales and Africa, at a time when it is more important than ever that we look outwards at how we can support projects abroad."