

A new VLIZ workboat: increased seagoing capacity for Flemish researchers

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With the RV Simon Stevin and the RHIB Zeekat, VLIZ operates two complementary vessels, both intensively used by the Flemish research community. The RV Simon Stevin is a 36-meter-long research vessel, equipped with state-of-the-art acoustic devices and sampling equipment, while the RHIB Zeekat is a 6-meter-long rigid inflatable boat, especially suitable for nearshore environments and work at monopiles. Over the last 5 years, the Simon Stevin averaged 180 days at sea each year, while the RHIB Zeekat saw an increase in deployments from 30 to 70 days each year. Both vessels have reached their operational capacity, while more and more applications for shiptime are being received each year. This indicates that the seagoing capacity should be increased to optimally serve the Flemish marine scientific community. Hence, the need for a cost-efficient, complementary, flexible workboat was detected, allowing to perform more near- and offshore research.

VLIZ has acquired the necessary funds to obtain such a workboat and has started the tendering process. Three main general activities are envisaged for this new workboat. First, diving activities should be possible from the afterdeck, which should be equipped with a diving platform. Second, the workboat should contain a moonpool and ample cabin space, to optimize (geophysical) surveys. Third, the workboat should be equipped with sufficient lifting capacities to easily deploy the VLIZ marine robotics and recover/deploy small equipment from and into the water.

A final decision is expected in Q3 of 2022 and the arrival of the new workboat can be expected in the summer of 2023 (timeline subject to changes). With this new workboat, additional and competitive research will be possible, and Flanders will be able to maintain its position at the top of the European marine science community.