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KAUST TO BUILD WORLD-CLASS VESSEL FOR MARINE RESEARCH

KAUST selects naval architecture firm Glosten to design a new ship with advanced capabilities for Red Sea research.

Thuwal, Saudi Arabia — In keeping with its mission to provide world-class marine research and support Saudi Arabia's goals to study and protect marine environments, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (**KAUST**) is investing in a state-of-the-art oceanographic research vessel (RV) to replace the existing RV *Thuwal*. KAUST has selected the naval architecture company **Glosten** to design the ship.

The new RV will bring advanced research capabilities for work in both shallow reef and deep-water environments, a reconfigurable deck for multipurpose jobs and equipment, and weather hardy traits for managing the unique conditions of the Red Sea.

The near 22-year-old RV *Thuwal*, originally designed as a fishing vessel for navigating the coastal waters of Australia, has served KAUST scientists for as many as 220 days at sea per year since 2013. However, the retrofitted 34.7-meter long *Thuwal* vessel is limited in the tasks and sea conditions it can manage. As KAUST expands its research ambitions for studying the Red Sea, a robust vessel with optimal functionality is required.

The Glosten-designed ship will bring increased stability and reliability for operating year-round in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aqaba, and areas with similar tropical waters and climatic conditions. Custom designed features will meet a broad range of oceanographic missions, including seawater, sediment, and biological sampling to the full depth of the Red Sea, approximately 3000 meters.

At 50 meters long, the vessel will be significantly larger and offer a greater range of operational capabilities. The deck will be designed to deploy heavy equipment and sophisticated instrumentation for multiple disciplines, including geoscience, bioscience, marine science, and oceanographic research interests. The RV will be equipped with an advanced positioning system to enable deployment of long-duration remote and autonomous vehicles as well as geoscience sampling systems.

The combined features will position KAUST to make new discoveries that will enhance investigations and collaborations, and evolve knowledge about this young ocean that will, in turn, better support the Kingdom and its environmental and economic initiatives, including the NEOM, Amaala, and Red Sea giga-projects. The ship will be the only advanced marine vessel of its kind that is uniquely built for and dedicated to conducting research in the Red Sea and run by scientists and crew with expertise specific to this body of water.

"KAUST is a major hub for marine research in the Red Sea, and we are expanding our activities to better integrate with the Kingdom's growing interests. Our investment in a world-class research vessel underscores a commitment to fully support our partners here in Saudi Arabia and around the world, and give KAUST faculty, researchers, and students unrivaled infrastructure to pursue their exciting research plans," said KAUST Vice President for Research and Distinguished Professor Dr. Donal Bradley.

Glosten has provided design and engineering support to the oceanographic research community for more than 60 years, working with scientists and operators to provide economical designs that are optimized for marine science, operational areas, and low emissions. The firm will provide the design, shipyard tendering support, and construction oversight through delivery to KAUST, with the project slated to complete in 2026.

Glosten Principal Ken FitzGerald said, “Our team is excited to bring this new level of research vessel capability to the Red Sea region. Optimizing a vessel for KAUST for the specific conditions of the operating area and science research needs requires a high level of engagement between our engineers and the KAUST team. This is when we are at our best.”

Contact:

Maggie E. Moon, Director of Business Development

Glosten

Phone: (206) 624-7850

Email: memoon@glosten.com

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