# Alpha Zulu RoPAC Programme

A research-based case for Caribbean maritime connectivity, food security and sustainable regional shipping

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## Executive summary

The Alpha Zulu RoPAC programme responds to longstanding structural weaknesses in Caribbean intraregional maritime transportation that have been identified repeatedly by regional researchers, international institutions and maritime industry specialists.

Three important studies published between 2009 and 2012, together with a contemporary 2026 industry assessment, establish a consistent argument: **the Caribbean requires maritime services designed around its own geography, relatively small cargo consignments, fragmented markets and limited port infrastructure, rather than relying exclusively upon shipping systems developed for large-volume international container trade.**

Alpha Zulu proposes to address these constraints through a new generation of Caribbean-built, Caribbean-owned and Caribbean-crewed, sail-assisted, zero-emission cargo/passenger vessels providing scheduled, temperature-controlled, palletised less-than-container-load (LCL) services.

The programme is therefore not simply a vessel development project. It is a proposed component of **Caribbean Maritime Economic Infrastructure**, intended to improve food security, reduce logistics costs, facilitate regional commerce and strengthen maritime self-reliance.

## 1. The historical evidence

### Sánchez and Wilmsmeier — ECLAC, 2009

Ricardo J. Sánchez and Gordon Wilmsmeier, in *Maritime Sector and Ports in the Caribbean: The Case of CARICOM Countries*, published by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the

Caribbean (ECLAC), examined the structural constraints affecting maritime freight transportation and port competitiveness.
This study is already included as **Item 22** in Champion Maritime Limited's existing bibliography and should not be duplicated.
It is particularly relevant to Alpha Zulu. On page 14, the authors identify the importance of small regional carriers transporting less-than-container-load consignments, including individual pallets, and emphasise the importance of reliable schedules and local market knowledge.
The study expressly recognises that regional operators handle small consignments that do not fit the operational model of larger shipping companies. It also identifies the importance of fixed-day sailings, frequent deliveries and dependable transit times for small island economies.
On page 16, the authors observe that smaller economies experience disproportionately long transit times and that fixed-day shipping schedules are vital to commercial operations.
**Relevance to Alpha Zulu:** These findings provide particularly strong support for a scheduled palletised cargo service capable of transporting modest consignments directly between Caribbean markets, without requiring exporters to accumulate full container loads.

**Pinnock and Ajagunna — CIGI, 2012**

Fritz H. Pinnock and Ibrahim A. Ajagunna, in *The Caribbean Maritime Transportation Sector: Achieving Sustainability through Efficiency*, published by the Centre for International Governance Innovation, examined Caribbean maritime inefficiencies and the need for coordinated regional reform.
The authors identify a maritime infrastructure system shaped historically by colonial trade patterns and subsequently adapted to containerisation and cruise tourism, often without sufficient consideration of the requirements of regional cargo transportation.

They document the consequences of fragmented maritime policy, inefficient port operations, restrictive handling arrangements and competition between cargo and cruise vessels for berthing facilities. Significantly, the authors recognise the continuing importance of traditional schooner services in the maritime networks serving Dominica and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

**Relevance to Alpha Zulu:** The programme offers a potential modernisation of the traditional Caribbean schooner concept, retaining its suitability for relatively small cargo movements while introducing scheduled services, refrigerated compartments, modern cargo-handling systems and low-emission propulsion.

The study also reinforces the importance of port-operating reforms and regional coordination alongside investment in new vessels.

**OECS Schooner Cluster/Pool initiative — 2011**

The 2011 OECS Schooner Cluster/Pool initiative, referenced in the Inter-American Development Bank's 2018 *Short Sea Shipping Network and Finance Model for the Caribbean*, represents an earlier institutional attempt to strengthen and coordinate traditional inter-island schooner operations.

Its relevance lies in the recognition that small-vessel maritime transportation constitutes a distinct and potentially valuable component of regional connectivity.

**Relevance to Alpha Zulu:** The proposed fleet could provide a modern, technically standardised successor to the schooner-based transport model, combining scheduled operations, palletised cargo handling, temperature control and improved environmental performance.

The original OECS initiative documentation has not yet been independently examined. Accordingly, it should be cited as a historical initiative referenced by the IDB, rather than presented as a separately verified feasibility study.

## 2. Contemporary industry confirmation — Michanitzis, 2026

In *Barbados: A Maritime Nexus in the Making*, published in *Business Barbados* on 2 January 2026, maritime consultant George Michanitzis argues for Barbados to assume a strategic role in developing scheduled Caribbean maritime liner services.

He emphasises predictable schedules, regional connectivity, green logistics, modernised port infrastructure, public-private collaboration and harmonised maritime corridors.

Importantly, Michanitzis identifies scheduled shipping as essential not only to trade facilitation but also to disaster resilience and regional integration.

His assessment provides contemporary industry support for the strategic direction of Alpha Zulu, particularly the potential establishment of Barbados as a hub for scheduled services linking the Windward Islands, Leeward Islands, Trinidad and Tobago and the Guianas.

## 3. How Alpha Zulu responds

The findings of these publications converge upon several practical requirements which the Alpha Zulu programme is specifically intended to address.

**Identified regional requirement Proposed Alpha Zulu response**

Small, irregular cargo consignments Palletised LCL transportation without full-container requirements

Unreliable or indirect connections Published weekly regional sailing schedules

Agricultural losses and cold-chain limitations Configurable frozen, chilled, cool and ambient cargo compartments

High cargo-handling costs Roll-on pallet-handling arrangements designed to simplify loading and discharge

Limited infrastructure at smaller ports Shallow-draft vessel design and reduced dependence on container-handling equipment

Maritime emissions and fossil-fuel dependence Wind-assisted propulsion with proposed zero-emission electric/hydrogen systems

Fragmented regional transport markets A coordinated fleet operating complementary inter-island routes
Regional industrial dependence Caribbean vessel construction, maritime training and local employment

These are proposed design and operating characteristics, not independently demonstrated commercial or technical outcomes. Their economic and engineering performance must be established through detailed studies, classification review and pilot operations.

## 4. Strategic implications for Barbados and CARICOM

Taken together, the studies demonstrate that Caribbean maritime connectivity is a longstanding structural development challenge, rather than a newly identified commercial opportunity.
The distinction is important.
The research supports the need for more appropriate maritime services, but does not by itself establish that a particular vessel design, route network or financing structure will be commercially viable.
Alpha Zulu offers a concrete private-sector programme through which the region can test and potentially implement several recommendations emerging from decades of maritime research.
The proposed approach has implications beyond freight transportation:
**Food security:** More dependable movement of agricultural produce and refrigerated goods between regional producers and consumers.
**Economic integration:** Improved access to neighbouring markets for small manufacturers, farmers and exporters.
**Industrial development:** Establishment of Caribbean shipbuilding and associated technical capabilities.
**Climate resilience:** Reduced dependence on fossil-fuel propulsion and potential deployment of vessels for disaster relief and emergency logistics.
**Human capital:** Development of maritime employment, apprenticeships and seafaring opportunities for Caribbean nationals.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendation

**The evidence supports moving beyond repeated diagnosis of Caribbean maritime transport deficiencies towards a coordinated programme of practical implementation.**

Sánchez and Wilmsmeier identified the importance of small-consignment shipping, schedule reliability and local market knowledge in 2009. Pinnock and Ajagunna demonstrated the consequences of fragmented maritime infrastructure and policy in 2012. The OECS schooner initiative recognised the need to strengthen small-vessel regional services. Michanitzis reaffirmed the strategic importance of scheduled maritime connectivity and Barbados's potential leadership role in 2026.

The Alpha Zulu RoPAC programme brings these complementary propositions together within a proposed integrated maritime transport, industrial development and decarbonisation initiative.

It is therefore recommended that **Alpha Zulu be considered as a candidate Barbados-led, private-sector regional maritime infrastructure demonstration programme**, subject to independent market validation, technical appraisal, regulatory approval and a credible financing plan.

Such consideration would provide a practical opportunity to translate established regional research into modern Caribbean maritime capability.

## References

1. Sánchez, Ricardo J., and Gordon Wilmsmeier (2009). *Maritime Sector and Ports in the Caribbean: The Case of CARICOM Countries.* ECLAC, Natural Resources and Infrastructure Series No. 140. Existing bibliography Item 22.

2. Pinnock, Fritz H., and Ibrahim A. Ajagunna (2012). *The Caribbean Maritime Transportation Sector: Achieving Sustainability through Efficiency.* Centre for International Governance Innovation, Caribbean Paper No. 13.

3. OECS (2011). *Schooner Cluster/Pool initiative.* Historical initiative referenced in CPCS and Trevor Hamilton & Associates (2018), *Short Sea Shipping Network and Finance Model for the Caribbean*, IDB Technical Note 1419. Original documentation requires verification.
4. Michanitzis, George (2026). Barbados: A Maritime Nexus in the Making . *Business Barbados*, 2 January 2026.
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