

A Better Understanding

Nautical charts for navigation at sea are the oldest application of hydrography and still one of the most important ones. But navigation at sea is developing at a fast pace. The transition from paper charts to ECDIS is in full swing. The mandatory carriage of ECDIS makes that this year thousands of new vessels will be equipped with ECDIS. Also, training of mariners – navigation officers and other bridge personnel – in using ECDIS to navigate will grow substantially. The only factor that will slow down the ECDIS revolution slightly is the economic slowdown of the last few years, but all in all the revolution is inevitable and unstoppable. The maritime industry is undergoing a big change and this will have an effect on hydrography as well.

But what will these effects be, one could ask. Isn't the data delivered to be processed for paper charts the same as for electronic charts? Well, this might be true, but for one thing the perception of an electronic chart is different to that of a paper chart. This is a factor hydrographers will have to reckon with. To make it little clearer: hydrographers have to understand that users totally rely on technology without any further questions; especially younger, less experienced operators, who see information on a coloured display, backed up by a GPS overlay, tend to take its accuracy for granted. Such users may not realise that the source data could very well be quite old. It's up to the hydrographer to address this issue. The education of the digital user by the hydrographer is therefore a key point.

Furthermore, chart makers and users need better data. This means that hydrographers will have to embrace new techniques to create modern surveys more quickly; to name just two: satellite derived bathymetry and crowdsourcing are techniques that will conquer hydrography.

Lastly, those hydrographers active in chart making will need to have a growing understanding of what the users of their end products do. There are so many variables in the operation of ECDIS systems that they can no longer assume that navigators navigate in a standard way. The digital era is fundamentally changing the practice of navigation in a manner that cartographers will have to understand. They also need to understand what the manufacturers of ECDIS systems are doing and these two communities should cooperate even more closely to deliver a perfect combination of products for mariners.

We welcome two new members of our Editorial Advisory Board, who will also contribute to the column 'Insider's View' in each Hydro International issue: former UK Hydrographer Nick Lambert, and Capt Abri Kampfner, Hydrographer of the South African Navy. You may be looking forward to their first columns soon.

Let me end this first editorial of 2014 by wishing all readers of Hydro International a healthy and successful New Year. Have a great 2014!