

HYDRO INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS PAUL HORNSBY, CHAIRMAN OF IFHS

A New Era for the IFHS?

In July last year Paul Hornsby, President of the Australasian Hydrographic Society (AHS), became Chairman of Council of The Hydrographic Society (THS). On 2 November last year, during HYDRO 4, the representatives of five National Hydrographic Societies signed a resolution with which the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the new Federation were endorsed. By doing so THS ceased to exist and IFHS came into force. Will the ambitious new chairman develop a new course for IFHS? Paul Hornsby agreed to be interviewed on his plans.

At HYDRO 4 you stated, that you are a customer rather than a hydrographer. Please explain briefly to our readers your professional background and how and why you became involved in hydrography.

By education I'm a marine geologist and by profession a member of the mine warfare and diving community. Hydrography came to my utmost attention about 17 years ago when I found myself in command of an experimental mine hunter. A Senate Committee had just concluded that mine clearance was "not the top priority of the Navy - it was the top priority of the entire Defence Force". At the time my crew and I had been exercising in one of Australia's industrial ports - and had lacked any comprehensive hydrographic information. This presented a challenge to our clearance mission to say the least. In a blinding flash of the obvious it was apparent that if the top priority of Australia's defence was mine clearance, then its foremost science would have to be hydrography. I joined THS to enhance my professional understanding on taking an appointment as the Navy's Test Director for Hydrographic Ships and Projects. Concurrently, the Society catalysed a long held fascination with early maritime exploration and undersea archaeology. As such, professionally and personally I had found myself a proverbial customer of hydrographic services.

For those of our readers, who are not familiar with the THS history, can you give a brief summary of the THS history and the reasons for the transition into the IFHS?

Essentially THS was established in response to the rapid expansion of the world's oil and gas industries; with the first "gathering" held at BP's headquarters in March 1972. The Society's principal aims were obviously the promotion of hydrography (and related sciences), as well as fostering recognised standards of education and training in the profession. Individual and Corporate subscriptions flourished throughout the 1970s, with members eventually being drawn from over 70 countries. By 1980 this growth resulted in the formation of a branch in the US, followed by a Benelux branch, and in time, by further branches in the UK (1985), Denmark and Australasia (1986).

The process of decentralisation continued, with several Branches going on to create their own Regions and Chapters. After three decades as a successful and independent organisation it was almost inevitable the Society's success would be the very undoing of its established format. Accordingly, the Federation has evolved to allow national interests to be autonomous, while providing a global focal point for all those with an expressed interest in the subject.

There is a saying: "a new broom sweeps clean". Will the IFHS under your chairmanship, look for entirely new objectives and ways?

I agree; the Society was successful, but had developed some assumptions about what people wanted; assumptions that needed cleaning out. While the Federation's overall mission remains the same - that being to promote hydrography worldwide, how that is achieved needed a fresh approach.

As such, while the Federation now has a new constitution to provide a necessary legal framework, of more importance is that it now has strategic and business plans that set out enabling objectives to achieve its mission. These examine external and internal factors, provide a strategic direction that relates to what members really want (and need), in addition to articulating the sort of values that will distinguish the Federation from other groups.

It should be said that the former THS established a lot of very beneficial processes and lines of communication, with its great strength being its diversity. The Federation retains many of the associated copyrights and will compliment these with new programs, such a system to recognise excellence and achievement within the hydrographic and maritime communities.

And yes, new ways and means of getting the message out, delivering more tangible services, etc naturally flow from this back-to-basics approach.

A trend can be observed, that non-commercial organisations like foundations, societies, etc. need to be managed like commercial entities, i.e. tight, efficient and on a sound financial base. What are your plans for the IFHS?

Again, completely agree. Being charitable should not equate to being unprofessional. People have busy lives these days, and while they might entirely share the values of a particular charity, their money and time are precious. They expect services that are efficient and to the point in promoting the values and learning to which they subscribe. For example, in Australasia we rarely use the word "charity";

rather the official term is a "not-for-profit corporation". That does not mean you operate in deficit, it means that while a group's aims may be altruistic, how these are achieved must be fiscally accountable. As such, the other national representatives and I have agreed some pragmatic business procedures to ensure the Federation is run on an efficient basis. This includes quarterly phased budgets, documenting functions to cost, etc. We'll be briefing our respective societies accordingly.

Every organisation, whether commercial or non-commercial, is looking for growth. How do you intend to enlarge the IFHS, either by increasing the number of participating societies and hence the total number of individuals affected by the IFHS or find a way to encourage societies to increase their individual members, possibly taking on a more multi-disciplinary role, or both?

The short answer is both. We are aware that a number of prospective national groups have been holding back until the Federation was properly established. Now that that's been achieved, the existing national members have agreed a framework for sponsoring prospective Societies in most parts of the world. However, we're very cognisant that encouraging new groups and expanding existing ones will directly relate to the services that the Federation can provide directly or facilitate. It is very important then that people understand what will distinguish membership of the Federation from any other group. And the answer to this relates directly to who the Federation expects to represent. That distinction is that the Federation represents the broadest range of interests in hydrography, which uniquely encompasses the users, the customers and indeed the general public. This translates directly into what sort of services and activities the Federation will support. For example, I think private members like myself want to belong to an independent and impartial organisation that represents the interests of the individual. Concurrently, small to medium size operations expect things like low cost media; while large business wants a means for getting the industry's voice heard (say by use of the new protocol system). Very large operations on the other hand are looking for a forum in which they can exchange ideas with comparable industries about best business practices in the maritime environment. Indicative of this is that progressive Navies these days expend a lot of resources getting their structure, planning and strategic processes fine-tuned. Many now see the benefits that professional societies can provide in this regard - and hydrographic societies in particular, as the common link to all maritime activity.

Is membership of a National Hydrographic Society attractive for hydrographic surveyors in general and for junior ones in particular? If not, what can be done to improve the situation?

It will be, but it's an issue I want our societies and their members to tackle collaboratively. Clearly, we live in an era where the sort of young professionals we want to attract can view their work-life in terms of many "careers" - based largely on how much professional mentorship they get. Conversely, we work in an environment that requires a long period of commitment in order to be proficient. Retention of a skilled work force is a big cost issue to maritime organisations. The task then is two-fold; we must capture the imagination of a far broader demographic, and having done that, provide the sort of independent mentorship that only a professional institute (in lieu of an individual employer) can provide. The professional associations that support the medical and legal fraternities have been successful stalwarts at this for centuries. For established hydrographers, however, membership offers that rare commodity of being able contribute one's voice (in an independent forum) to the very direction of the science.

In recent years "hydrography" became more and more important for adjacent scientific disciplines like Oceanography, Underwater-archaeology, Environmental investigations, etc. Will membership of the IFHS be promoted in such disciplines?

From an outsider's view, hydrography is genuinely the great common denominator to all maritime endeavours. Due to its geographically benign and egalitarian nature it is perhaps the only common factor to sea-going enterprise. This central role should be extolled by embracing other disciplines (including those not so adjacent) - and emphasising their interdependence on and with hydrography.

There is an on-going discussion on certification and standards of competence for individual hydrographic surveyors. What are your views and do you see a role for the IFHS?

From the customer's perspective it's simple, the ongoing role of hydrography is to facilitate greater "freedom of manoeuvre". Translation: the pursuit of hydrographic excellence should continually result in greater size, greater speed, more direct passage, faster turn around, greater automation - and greater safety. If you recognise this, then the adherence by hydrographic professionals to internationally developed, consistent and accepted standards is axiomatic. This naturally must include technical, procedural and product standards - and very importantly, standards of competence for accredited individuals. I think we're well served by education program standards (e.g. the work of the FIG / IHO / ICA via the International Advisory Board), and by technical surveying and charting specifications (e.g. the IHO and others pursuing international standards). However, I suspect there is a lot of work to be done at the international level when it comes to certification of individual practitioners. There is a potential role here for the IFHS, working perhaps with Commission 4, to bring together the strands of what presently exists (in places like Australasia, where the hydrographic community is strongly bound by its Society).

In the October 2004 issue of Hydro international (HI) in the Insider's View column, Adam Greenland (Chairman Comm. 4 FIG) is promoting "Joined-up Hydrography". What is your view on closer co-operation between IHO, FIG and IFHS?

I'm pleased to say I had very beneficial discussions with Adam and others at Hydro4; one of the distinctions of our conferences being that it does bring members who are users and customers into the debate. In short, I see the IHO naturally representing government interests, Commission 4 representing practitioners, and the Federation representing the users, customers and beyond. In this context, society members are all users and customers of hydrographic knowledge, from the individual with an expressed interest, though to industry, through to those pursuing the highest levels of research in the subject. Accordingly I would welcome an MoU with FIG (and the IHO) to reflect this and ensure our processes are mutually supportive.

What are your plans with regard to PR to the world outside hydrography, internal communications between the IFHS and her members and international contacts between the members?

I've always found it interesting how the aerospace fraternity captured the imagination of an entire generation in the 50's, 60's and beyond. Rocket science was a subject that was drier and almost as complex as sonar propagation. The chances of actually working in the industry, let alone becoming an astronautical "surveyor", were infinitesimal. The direct commercial benefits of space exploration

were academic at best and concurrently two thirds of the earth's surface remained inadequately surveyed. Yet the fact that the imagination of so many was focused on the skies rather than oceans spun off numerous indirect benefits, particularly in unrelated technologies.

Right now, however, the public's imagination has been drawn to both modern and early maritime exploration, by way of books, documentaries and popular cinema. Clearly it is incumbent on us to make the link between the technical science and the public's interest. Additionally, there is a profound public shift in awareness of environmental and climate change issues - and these are irrevocably linked to hydrography.

To that end I've openly sought the advice of members with experience in publishing and similar disciplines to achieve collaboration on a number of things. This includes the ongoing production of a professional journal and similar media that will retain the non-commercial and independent views of all affiliated members. The distribution of these will grow proportional to membership. Of much greater importance, however, is that the Federation gives its full support to helping commercial publications and media get the message to a far wider distribution. This requires a pragmatic look at non-traditional areas that would have an interest in the subject. As a start, I've proposed to quality publications such as this that what really large maritime operations would like to see (and pay for) is how others do business better. Why through hydrographic media instead of say the Harvard Business Review? Answer: because hydrography is the common factor to all maritime industry.

Do you have a message for the hydrographic community?

One of the collective strengths of those working in hydrography is that they have and attract huge intellectual horsepower and determination; which having been applied to one of the most enigmatic sciences of all has produced enormous technical breakthroughs in recent years. The great weakness, however, is that much of that problem solving capability has been inwardly focused. If more of it were to be channelled externally then the clear beneficiary would be the hydrographic and maritime communities themselves.

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