BY THE HYDROGRAPHER OF VENEZUELA

'As it Is'

The Venezuelan Hydrographic Office is part of the National Navy under the denomination of Dirección de Hidrografía y Navegación (DHN). Created in April 1947, DHN is located in Caracas, the capital city of Venezuela, in the facilities of the Naval Observatory 'Cagigal'.

DHN acts directly in the planning, control and execution of activities concerning hydrography, oceanography and safety of navigation in the coasts and marine, fluvial and lacustrine spaces of the republic of Venezuela. It works in co-ordination with the autonomous Coordinating Office of Hydrography and Navigation (Oficina Coordinadora de Hidrografía y Navegación OCHINA (aids to navigation), with the purpose of supporting naval operations and lending specialised services to public and private organisations.

New legislation by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the year 2000 through promulgation of the General Law of Marine and Related Activities granted DHN responsibility for the public services of hydrography, oceanography, meteorology and nautical cartography with an eye towards guaranteeing safety of shipping. To such ends, the DHN has four divisions responsible respectively for Hydrography, Navigation, Maritime Signalling and National Oceanographic Data Center (Centro Nacional de Datos Oceanográficos -CENDOC).

Here may be highlighted determination and maintenance of the Official Time of Venezuela, surveillance and operation of the system of Warnings to Navigators and the unfolding and maintenance of the National Nautical Cartographic Plan. Also of great significance are management of the Centre of Training for the development of academic programmes for the training of hydrographers in association with universities and endorsed by the OHI, and the operation of hydrographic and oceanographic ships attributed by the Venezuelan Navy.

In recent years DHN, like many of the world's HOs, has faced important changes in response to advances in technology in the field of the acquisition, processing and distribution of data through the publication of nautical editions in all their multiple forms. These transformations have advanced speedily with the execution of Strategic Plan OCHINA - DHN 2000 - 2010 and they have implied considerable investments and demanded complex programming of activities not always, due to their interrelation with other activities, amenable to delay or change.

Several new developments are underpinning national and international requirements to modernise and improve technological resources to carry out the demands of modern hydrography and to complete important advances in vital areas such as the production of Electronic Navigational Charts (ENC). The DHN has commissioned the oceanographic ship ARBV Punta Brava; this vessel (BO-11) (YWPB) is equipped with survey teams using top technology, including multi-beam echo sounder. There is also under construction a Hydrographic Catamaran. The service is further undergoing reorganisation into eight Hydrographic Stations at national level. A Strategic Lighthouses Project is underway. There is also development of a Satellite Guide and Positioning System for Monitoring and Control. Training and education activities are in full swing.

A member of the IHO and of the AISM, DHN in its 57 years of hard work for the Hydrographic Service continues to maintain a special interest in international co-operation and the continual search for opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience. Protection and maintenance of the environment, and security at sea, remain a priority along all its 4,000 kilometres of coasts. In all, it keeps annual statistical records on 14,000 movements of ships in ports and port facilities in seventeen domestic port capitains.