

BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE ITALIAN HYDROGRAPHIC OFFICE

As It Is

The Italian Hydrographic Institute (IIM), perched high above the city of Genoa in Forte San Giorgio, has been the official nautical charting agency of the Italian Navy since being founded in 1872.

The primary mission of the IIM is ensuring the safety of navigation, thus preserving both human life and the greater marine environment. The IIM also participates in extensive marine research and advanced training. Three hydro-oceanographic ships are employed for surveying the Italian waters, as well as two types of expedition: geodetic and hydrographic. Ships and expeditions are equipped with state-of-the-art instrumentation, ensuring the real-time collection and elaboration of quality hydro-oceanographic data with Pangea tools. With a combined military and civilian staff of 250, the IIM also publishes some 100,000 charts and 50,000 nautical publications each year. The IIM contributes to the production of INT paper charts of the Mediterranean and has long supported technical and scientific co-operation with the Hydrographic Services of other countries, many of whose staff attend IIM specialised courses in hydrography. In this context, IIM has just signed an agreement with Genoa University arranging a Master in Marine Geomatics course that will extend participation in these specialised courses to civilians.

The Hydrographic Office is currently concluding its two-year mandate as Chairman of the MBSHC. During this term of office it has promoted and participated in numerous international initiatives, such as TEN-T projects and the implementation of an ENC Pilot Project in the North Adriatic Sea (the latter pursued in close co-operation with the IMO-IMA of Trieste and the Hydrographic Services of Slovenia and Croatia). Also worthy of note is the recent constitution of the MBSVRENC (Mediterranean Black Sea Virtual RENC), an offshoot of the MBSHC (Mediterranean Black Sea Hydrographic Commission), dedicated to enabling and co-ordinating the collective Mediterranean nations in their pursuit and dissemination of quality information for regional navigation. The MBSVRENC has also led to activities such as the ambitious MEDChartNet project, devoted to linking Mediterranean Hydrographic Services for the synchronised development of ENCs. MEDChartNet has again been pursued in co-operation with the IMO-IMA of Trieste and with the participation of most Mediterranean neighbours.

A strong dedication to streamlining the flow of navigation information within the Institute, combined with close collaboration between the IIM and private industry, continues to bear important fruits in the establishment of its own ENC portfolio. The IIM has been systematically compiling ENC coverage for its waters and preparing for the imminent distribution of this amongst navigators. It has also been building a solid infrastructure whereby such digital charting products may be maintained in real-time, easily upgraded as new survey data becomes available and used in the generation of other navigation products.

Thanks to the integrated dKart Office system from Hydroservice A/S, effective and efficient cartographic data management has been achieved within the IIM. Efforts on the part of IIM together with the Italian Coast Guard and RINA (Italy's main marine certification body) to maximise the benefits of modern navigation tools for the broadest possible range of mariners and ensure their safe application has led to a remarkable standardisation effort within Italy. The result is the world's first Electronic Chart System (ECS) standard, whereby compliant equipment and electronic cartography from the private sector meet carriage requirements for certain classes of non-SOLAS vessels. The Italian ECS standard was written into law in 2002. This groundbreaking achievement in Italy has helped in the establishment of an ISO standard for ECS databases and it is setting a target for other nations to implement their own ECS standards. Finally, the IIM is very proud to be one of the first Hydrographic Offices in the world to achieve ISO 9000:2000 Quality System Certification. There is no doubt; this is a busy and exciting time for the IIM and a harbinger of yet more interesting times to come!