

'As it Is'

In 1943, given the need to further hydrography in Spain, the hydrographic service was detached from the Observatorio de la Armada, and the Instituto Hidrográfico de la Marina was born by law. It is sited in Cádiz and as an organisation under Navy Staff promotes cartography and achieves wider action in all functions related to hydrography and navigation. Its historic roots date back to the sixteenth-century Casa de Contratación at Seville.

In 1970 the Instituto Hidrográfico de la Marina was reorganised and updated, with the task of 'Ensuring the safety of navigation regarding the capture and dissemination of information on the sea and coasts, and to further the development of Nautical Sciences'. The 1986 Spanish Law of Cartographic Organization tasks the IHM with the compilation of all basic nautical cartography. Consequently, it has the same competence level as the Instituto Geográfico Nacional (National Geographic Institute) with regards to the production of official basic cartography of compulsory use for mariners.

To fulfil its mission as a scientific and technical organisation the IHM has several central responsibilities. It carries out hydrographic surveys and studies of submarine relief on national shores and seas. It produces nautical charts and publications, and editions of books and documents as aids to navigation, as well as carrying out printing and distribution. It is responsible for updating nautical charts and publications by means of Notices to Mariners. It is the IHM that determines minimum features and specifications of nautical instruments to be used onboard Navy vessels. It also carries out systematic observation and study of tides and currents, temperatures and acoustic and electromagnetic propagation in seawater, and promulgates and co-ordinates National Coastal Radio Navigational Warnings. To fulfil these tasks the IHM has a staff of 264 people, both military and civilian members working jointly together.

The Instituto Hidrográfico de la Marina represents Spain at the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). Spain is a founder member of the IHO and a participant in the Mediterranean and Black Seas Hydrographic Commission (MBSHC) and the Eastern Atlantic Hydrographic Commission (EAtHC). IHM is also NAVAREA co-ordinator of Radio Navigational Warnings for the NAVAREA III Area.

Also of note are efforts on the part of the IHM to keep up Cartographic Production covering 327 Nautical Paper Charts, as well as development of the Cartographic Project for Electronic Nautical Charts, listing 118 ENC's. The IHM includes the School of Hydrography, with training and proficiency courses such as a course to qualify as a Hydrographic Surveyor and "Specialization in Hydrography for Navy Officers".

The Institute is subdivided into several divisions: Hydrography, Chartography, Oceanography, Navigation, Computing Centre, Geodesy and Photogrammetry, and an Industrial Division. This latter comprises a Nautical Instrumentation Calibration and Repair Laboratory and the charts and publications printing shop. There is also a Historic Service, where ancient charts and documents are kept and displayed by a dedicated curator and historian.

The Instituto Hidrográfico de la Marina currently has four scientific vessels: the Malaspina, the Tofiño, the Antares and the Rigel, and two hydrographic launches, the Astrolabio and the Escandallo, both fitted with multi-beam echo sounders.