

Centre of Gravity

Convincing colleagues in adjacent fields of the importance of hydrographic data is one of the hot topics that comes up every time I talk to policy and decision makers in hydrography: 'We need to make ourselves visible and show the world that everything we do underpins the work at sea in many different aspects: safe navigation at sea, building of offshore wind farms, search and exploration of oil & gas, development of ports & harbours, and coastal zone management.' One of the main reasons behind this is that hydrography as a field wants (and maybe needs) to prove its right of existence, with the occasional fear that the work of hydrographers is being taken over by professionals that are less or differently skilled – ending up in the one-button-hydrography. This would make highly educated professionals obsolete. Another and more justified fear is that the world around us is making mistakes in obtaining, analysing and interpreting bathymetric data, and trained hydrographers do not point out these mistakes, which leads to, among others, accidents at sea, wrongly placed infrastructural projects, and way too much or way too little dredging.

There is another way of convincing the world and establishing hydrography as a profession that will count in many more countries across the globe for decades to come: capacity building. Going to conferences and tradeshow all over the world, it needs to be said that hydrography has a few geographical centres of gravity: in all countries bordering the North Sea, the United States and Australia hydrography and hydrographers are well represented and to be honest the majority of delegates at shows all over the world come from these countries. It would be good for capacity building to once again become more prominent on the agenda. Because there is a lot of room for growth – not just vertically in all the topics I mentioned: coastal zone management, offshore energy and tourism, but also horizontally in areas that are developing fast – South East Asia, China, Africa and Latin America. Imagine if hydrography was to be as well established in all these regions, in the public and private sector, at educational institutes and in local or regional hydrographic societies as in the centres of gravity. It would certainly help hydrography as a whole grow, with benefits for all those other sectors in the Blue Economy. There are two major events this month. One in that other centre of gravity Monaco where the IHO will meet at the 5th Extraordinary International Hydrographic Conference from 6-10 October and the other in Aberdeen, UK, where the International Federation of Hydrographic Societies holds its 22nd Hydro conference from 28-30 October. Capacity building should be on the official and unofficial agenda at both conferences to ensure a career in hydrography and the future of the profession of the hydrographer and the field of hydrography across the world.

PS We are introducing a refreshed layout in this edition of Hydro International: one of the most important features of this new design is that it will enable us to provide you with even more information in every issue from now on! I look forward to hearing what you think of it.

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