

e-Navigation

It seems like the concept of e-Navigation is sailing onto the rocks of bureaucracy, unwilling flag states within IMO and the economic crisis. If so, I dare to challenge that there is a chance for hydrography to save e-Navigation from its fate. e-Navigation, as a concept of integral electronic navigation, originated with the International Maritime Organization, backed by many of the other maritime organisations around, such as the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) and the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO). The strategy of e-Navigation, developed in 1985, has always aimed at more safety at sea and been carried mainly by IMO flag states including Norway, United States, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Singapore. Better organisation and exchange of data, better communication between ships and ship and shore would increase the safety of navigation in commercial shipping and prevent ships from collisions and other accidents. While commercial shipping is growing and becoming more important in globalisation, and is one of the greenest forms of transport, the efforts to take e-Navigation to a higher plane are seemingly being halted.

Progress is not easy. This is partly due to the crisis diminishing margins of shipping companies, flag states being unwilling to implement new rules and regulations for their vessel fleet and bureaucracy on the one hand, and many manufacturers in the different fields of navigation that need to be linked on the other. It looks like the combination of these factors is currently slowing down the progress of e-Navigation. It is to a certain extent understandable; the challenge is huge. But the benefits would be even greater!

The way forward would be for an array of manufacturers in the field to take the lead – as they have already shown to be capable of – and convince shipping companies to make use of new bridge equipment, charts and ECDIS systems - even without this being mandatory - because the new e-Navigational tools make business more profitable, efficient, safe and resilient. I foresee a leading role for hydrography, manufacturers of hydrographic equipment, thus not just for the chart makers or ECDIS manufacturers, institutes and organisations. Safe navigation has been the core task of hydrography for centuries; in fact it was how it originated. If it means that safe, efficient and resilient navigation depends on more than just bathymetry nowadays, it's a logical step to incorporate the other factors and data that play a role on the bridge to ensure safe navigation into the products that hydrography delivers. The International Hydrographic Organization has done more than its fair share in the wider combination of institutes and should be capable of taking the leading role on the institutional side of development.

I started by saying that the concept of e-Navigation is sailing onto the rocks. Of course, that is just a figure of speech. e-Navigation will go on; technological progress has never been stopped by an institute, bureaucracy or economic crisis and it will be a major step forward. e-Navigation will grow and hydrography will play a major and increasing role in this!

Durk Haarsma durk.haarsma@geomares.nl

<https://www.hydro-international.com/content/article/e-navigation>
