

Heart of Hydrography

Article 76 of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the Extended Continental Shelf offered ample opportunities for coastal states to 'claim' even bigger parts of the ocean for exploration, beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone of 200 nautical miles, all under the strict regulations of the same convention of course. It also offers ample business opportunities for all hydrographic surveying companies and manufacturers.

Where large parts of the oceans are still unmapped, claims are laid down and the search for new sources to explore increases, disputes on maritime delimitation will increasingly be brought to the International Tribunal of Law of the Sea (ITLOS), says newly elected president Shunji Yanai of ITLOS in an interview in this issue of Hydro International on page 12. After the extensive and complicated case between Bangladesh and Myanmar on delimitation in the Bay of Bengal, on which the court will give a judgment in March that will end the more than 30-year quarrel between the two parties, president Yanai foresees that state parties will favor ITLOS above the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The latter is now also a port of call for parties in disagreement about matters ruled under UNCLOS.

On maritime delimitation, we are also carrying a story on the Arctic and the renewed claim that Russia wants to put forward to the United Nations. Russia was the first to submit a claim under UNCLOS on the outer limit of the continental shelf, as early as 2001. One year later the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf recommended further research on the submitted claim. Russia decided to prepare a revised submission for 2013 and after preparation a very large hydrographic survey was carried out in the Arctic to support this new submission. The survey covered 14,436 miles, over a period of 77 days, all in harsh, icy conditions. The research vessel Akademik Fedorov was assisted by the nuclear powered icebreaker Atomflot and two helicopters. Details on the outcome of the survey can be found on page 27.

The importance of new applications for the business of hydrography will grow over the coming years - think of exploration of the seabed, construction of pipelines and offshore wind parks. But hydrography for marine delimitation, if it is to underlay claims or to support courts like ITLOS in judging cases on maritime delimitation or to support submitted claims to the UN, will remain at the core, almost to the same degree as that hydrography is the heart of the profession for nautical charting.

This is the first issue of yet another new volume of Hydro International. This year we will once more report on old and new applications of hydrography, we will try to signal and identify new horizons but at the same time we will make sure we don't forget about the past, always reporting from the heart of hydrography. I wish you a healthy and successful 2012!