

Hydrographic Training: Why Continuity Paramount

There is at present a huge rise in the tasks and responsibilities of most national Hydrographic Offices (HOs) world-wide. Most governments require them to undertake work related to both national responsibilities and other perhaps more marginal activities. There are quite a number of tasks and aims that HOs have permanently to achieve.

Among the basic aims for HOs are setting up systems that are able to deliver data to all mariners in the area of responsibility. At the same time, HOs also hold a responsibility to ensure that the data provided meets defined standards. Present and future marine activities need involvement from the national HOs: ENC production, Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Marine Electronic Highway. In fact, most HOs (especially the navy) are also burdened with the additional task of supporting naval operations, such as with Meteorology and Oceanographic data.

In this Insider's View column I would like to emphasise how important is continuity of training for national HOs and other supporting agencies in various aspects of hydrographic activities. Taking Malaysia as an example; the country has claims to a territorial sea of 12 nautical miles and the 200 nautical miles of Exclusive Economic Zone, which covers an area of 450,233 km². This fact has attracted many demands in the past and there will surely be more to come in the future. With limited personnel and an increasing workload, the Royal Malaysian Navy Hydrographic Department (RMNHD) is struggling to achieve their aims. I believe that most HOs world-wide are also facing similar problems. Experienced hydrographers may leave the service at any time (without waiting for actual retirement) but demand will continue to rise and technology does not freeze.

Since hydrographic activities will continually import new technology, there is no doubt that complete continuity of training is important. Hydrography is such a multidisciplinary field that training and experience are important for all personnel involved. They need to acquire the necessary training and skills confidently to conduct themselves in an efficient and effective way. RMNHD and most HOs have recently made serious plans towards permanent and continuing training to ensure that they do not operate in a vacuum.

Continuity of training is also important to the other supporting agencies and private sectors. As an example, RMNHD has contracted out at least one hydrographic survey project a year consistently for the last five years. In future, ENC productions are also likely to be contracted out. The question is whether the relevant agencies and the private sectors involved in these hydrographic activities are ready and capable to support the HO? Perhaps the answer to this question depends on whom you ask. For the HO, they will insist that the personnel involved with their project must be competent, experienced and up-to-date (in touch with technology) hydrographers. For this reason, continuity in hydrographic training should be paramount not only for the HOs but also among supporting agencies and private sectors.