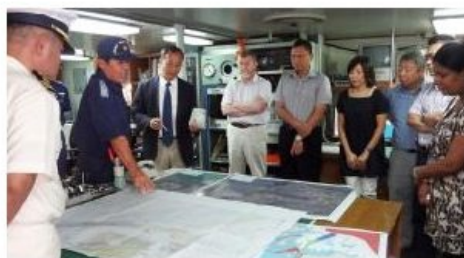


HYDRO INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS ROBERT WARD, PRESIDENT OF IHO

IHO Committed to Serve the Mariner



Robert Ward took over the presidency of the IHO from Vice Admiral Alexandros Maratos in September. President Ward was elected by the Member States of the Organisation at their five-yearly Conference earlier in the year. His fellow directors on the Directing Committee responsible for the Secretariat of the IHO, are directors Mustafa Iptes from Turkey and Gilles Bessero from France. The new

president has already served five years at the IHO headquarters in Monaco as a director where his principal responsibility was the administration of the IHO's technical programme. Hydro International interviews the president of the most influential institute in hydrography.

Congratulations on your re-election. How do you feel about being re-elected?

I was incredibly honoured and at the same time humbled by the vote of confidence that the Member States showed in not only re-electing me for a second term but also in selecting me to serve as their president. It is difficult to imagine anything that could be more professionally satisfying, yet at the same time more onerous than to be elected to such a significant position by one's peers.

Did your expectations for the first five years come true?

My work was focused primarily on the IHO technical programme together with assisting in a number of geographic regions. Against a background of diminishing resources in IHO Member States, the IHO responded to the inevitable teething troubles related to the roll-out of ECDIS, made significant advances in ENC coverage and adopted the over-arching data transfer standard for the future, namely S-100. In this way we are, in many ways, anticipating as well as actively contributing to and influencing the emerging e-Navigation concept. Equally significantly, we have strengthened the levels of co-operation and collaboration between the IHO and key industry stakeholders. Our relationships with other international organisations, and particularly the IMO, have never been better. So, looking back, I think that things are better now than they were five years ago - and better than I might have anticipated.

Can we expect shifts in the policy of the IHO as a result of the election of the new Directing Committee?

The new Directing Committee, like its predecessor, is committed to serving the best interests of the IHO Member States, who in turn are committed to ensuring that the hydrographic services that they provide best serve the mariner and the wider community. To assist in this, we will be focusing on finding ways to increase the amount of hydrographic data collected and made available. We will be looking for donor funding and assistance for regional and global surveying programmes that will then support ongoing national efforts.

As part of our travels, we will also be trying to brief more governments directly and through their diplomatic representatives. In this way, we hope to increase the profile and the priorities given to national Hydrographers and their vital work.

Do you see a threat in cutbacks by governments all over the globe, impacting the possibility to work for IHO?

My fellow directors and I certainly do. So do the IHO Member States. At the IHO Conference where we were elected, the Member States agreed that the Secretariat may need an increase in technical capacity to meet growing and changing demands. We are already looking at other ways to lessen our dependence on the good will and limited time of the relatively small band of Member State experts that are contributing directly to the IHO work programme. We are looking at contracting out some aspects of development work as well as improving remote working arrangements. Over the last few years, more and more work is being done via the internet, through wikis and with some teleconferencing. We need to expand on this. At the same time, there are some Member States that do not participate as actively as we would like. Both they and the IHO are missing out. Our programme of raising the in-country profile of an HO might enable

extra participation.

Commercial hydrographic software and service providers play an important role in the development of hydrographic innovations. Are they sufficiently represented in the structure of the IHO?

The involvement of the hydrographic industry is a real success story in the IHO. Over the last few years we have seen more and more participation - in the working groups as 'expert contributors', in co-operative capacity building initiatives as well as through organisations with international observer status in our committees and Conference. We will do our best to develop a win-win environment where the IHO benefits from the expertise and the experience of industry, while industry gets the benefit of workable standards and participates in programmes that enable them to carry out their jobs and grow ever more successful businesses.

Do the same considerations apply to academic institutions? Are they sufficiently represented in the structure of IHO?

The IHO has been interacting with academic institutions since the early 1970s through the establishment and implementation of standards for training hydrographic surveyors and nautical cartographers. Academic institutions have exactly the same opportunities to participate in the IHO work programme as industry even though there seems to be fewer areas where interests overlap. That said, the Directing Committee is in contact with a number of universities that are engaged in research that may well benefit Member States and the wider hydrographic community, including satellite derived Bathymetry - an exciting and revitalised area of research, the development of distance learning for hydrographic surveyors, systematic analysis methods to identify high priority charting requirements around the world, and economic assessment of the benefits of hydrographic services.

Nowadays, there is a strong focus on digital products and the development of their data models. This requires a strong understanding of information science, which the hydrographic community should build up along with the more traditional skills of hydrographic acquisition techniques and marine cartography. Is it realistic to expect that developing countries could keep up with this? What is the best way to ensure that high-quality modern products are available worldwide?

Our experience is that enthusiastic and appropriately educated personnel exist in the countries that we visit. The problem is that national hydrographic programmes are often not in place or have limited top-level government priority. We see it as one of our key roles as Directing Committee to raise the profile of hydrography so that the necessary level of support is there. Then, the personnel can do what they are very keen on and long to do - and that is to work in hydrography and nautical charting.

Meeting international hydrographic obligations does not necessarily mean the establishment of a full hydrographic service. The IHO capacity building strategy recognises that States can work with another State partner. In this way, a country can limit its direct role to providing hydrographic information to another State that will publish and maintain charts and publications on its behalf. This happens in many countries in the world already.

Where do you see the biggest growth in the near future? What is your view on emerging regions in the world? China, Brazil, Russia, Arctic?

For us it is very encouraging to see the increased involvement of countries such as China, and others in South America and East Asia. Delegates from these regions now regularly participate in IHO activities in a way that did not take place earlier. This provides new perspectives and ensures that we continue to take a truly global view of the work of the IHO - particularly in terms of standards and the inter-regional co-operation and co-ordination that is required to ensure that hydrography and charting is carried out consistently in all parts of the globe. I am taking a personal interest in the polar regions, chairing the IHO Hydrographic Commission on Antarctica and being the Directing Committee observer at the recently established Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission.

How do you want to reach out to worlds beyond hydrography to show them the importance of the field, for instance in supporting the blue economy?

Ensuring that everyone appreciates the fundamental role that hydrography plays in underpinning, as such enabling the blue economy, is a very important goal of the new Directing Committee. You will know that next year's theme for World Hydrography day is: Hydrography - underpinning the blue economy.

The total number of government survey vessels has decreased, what are your thoughts on this trend?

It is true that the number of survey ships and boats has reduced - and this has not been matched by improvements in technology or the use of contract support operations. Addressing this is another aspect of the Directing Committee's government awareness raising campaign. But we also need to look at technical solutions. Advances in satellite derived bathymetry - even if it only provides reconnaissance -level data is a big step forward. The use of donor funding, perhaps through global or regional programmes is another initiative that the Directing Committee will be pursuing on behalf of our Member States.

A development that has surprised many in the geoinformation community is the participation of volunteers in digital cartography, like OpenStreetMap. Such initiatives are visible on water as well. Will they have a significant impact on hydrography?

Well, HOs have been using volunteer data from Day 1. It has traditionally been provided in the form of 'hydrographic notes'. From its inception in the early 1900s, GEBCO was based on so-called 'crowdsourcing' albeit with only a small crowd to start with! Advances in technology now mean that we can potentially have more 'volunteers', but at the same time, they may not be mariners in the traditional sense and validating their data may sometimes be problematic. Nevertheless, any data that indicates that an existing chart requires updating is a very good thing. We know that a number of IHO Members are referring to 'crowd sourced' data as part of reviewing and maintaining their charts. I expect that we will also see much more user-friendly data input portals provided on HO websites in the not too distant future. However, HOs will need to be careful - data that mariners rely on needs to be carefully validated - otherwise the credibility and reliance that they place in a chart could be jeopardised and the chart actually becomes less rather than more useful. HOs and the IHO should also take a more active part in training the mariners and educating the public in general on chart quality issues!

Is there a message you want to share with the readers of Hydro International?

All I can say is that over the next five years I will continue to try to do my best in the interests of the mariner, the Member States and all those that depend on hydrography in some form or other - and that means just about everybody!

<https://www.hydro-international.com/content/article/iho-committed-to-serve-the-mariner>
