

IHO-IAIG Advisory Board on the Law of the Sea



The Advisory Board on the Law of the Sea (ABLOS) is an inter-organisational group of experts in geodesy, hydrography, law of the sea and related disciplines. It was formed as a result of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which was signed at Montego Bay, Jamaica, on 10 December 1982 and entered into force on 16 November 1994. The signing of UNCLOS marked the conclusion of the Third United Nations Conference on Law of the Sea, which had lasted from 1973 to 1982.

In 1984, an IHO Working Group was formed to prepare a special publication on the technical aspects of UNCLOS. In 1988, the first edition of the Manual on Technical Aspects of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (the TALOS manual) was published. It was, in effect, little more than a glossary of the technical terms

contained in UNCLOS. In 1990, the Special Study Group on the Geodetic Aspects of the Law of the Sea (GALOS), established by the International Association of Geodesy, joined the IHO TALOS Working Group to strengthen the geodetic aspects of the manual. The second and third editions of the TALOS manual were then published in 1990 and 1993.

In 1994, the combined group adopted the name ABLOS with the tasks of reviewing State practice and jurisprudence on law of the sea matters and providing guidance on the hydrographic, geodetic and marine geo-scientific aspects of the law of the sea. It was also tasked to study, promote and encourage the development of appropriate techniques in geodetic and hydrographic aspects of the law of the sea.

The expertise available to the ABLOS was boosted in 1997 and 1998 when representatives from the UN Department of Administration of the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO joined the group. The IOC remained in the ABLOS from April 1997 until December 2006.

In late 2002, the ABLOS set up an editorial group to prepare a fourth edition of its TALOS manual. It was agreed that the fourth edition would be a digital publication and would be aimed at a non-specialist audience.

The successful fourth edition has recently been revised and the fifth edition of the manual is now undergoing its final stages of editorial review. It is expected to be released in early 2014. The revised edition contains significant revisions and incorporates diagrammatic animations for the first time. It continues to provide guidance on the technical aspects of the law of the sea with respect to geodesy, hydrography and geoscience. The TALOS manual is a key information resource for practitioners not trained in core subjects; for lawyers, diplomats, teachers and students. At the same time, it is an authoritative reference source providing specialist practitioners with definitive explanations in relation to UNCLOS rather than just in terms of abstract academic meanings.

In addition to the publication of the TALOS manual, the ABLOS conducts training courses and seminars as part of the IHO Capacity Building strategy. The most recent training was a two-day seminar held in conjunction with the 20th ABLOS meeting held in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman in late October 2013. The ABLOS is currently chaired by Professor Sunil Bisnath from the Geomatics Engineering Department of Earth and Space Science and Engineering of the University of York, Canada - sbisnath@yorku.ca

Copies of the TALOS manual and details of the ABLOS can be obtained from the IHO website.