

A Decade of Outreach, Influence and Awareness at the IHO



Having served in the IHO Secretariat for ten years, Robert Ward recently handed over the Secretary-General baton to his long-standing friend and colleague Dr Mathias Jonas. In this column, he looks back on a decade in which he regards improved outreach, influence and awareness as the major achievements.

By the time you read this, my long-standing friend and colleague Dr Mathias Jonas will be the new Secretary-General of the IHO. Having served in the IHO Secretariat for a decade, what do I think has been achieved in my time - particularly in my last five years as the President and latterly as the first Secretary-General.

Outreach, influence and awareness would summarise what I think are the major improvements that have taken place since I took office, together with tighter governance and clearer documentation.

The recent IHO Assembly was the embodiment of all that has changed. In addition to meeting as an Assembly under the terms of a revised Convention on the IHO, we had more Member States, more Observer Organizations and more Industry Exhibitors than ever before. We had the Secretaries-General of three of our most relevant sister Intergovernmental Organizations - all speaking enthusiastically about the role that the IHO plays in their activities and vice versa.

We also had the IHO Member States considering the part that they should play in national Spatial Data Infrastructures as the providers and the servers of the authoritative national hydrographic dataset, rather than simply as the providers of official nautical charts. They also considered their role in the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – particularly its Goal 14 about the oceans. They considered ways to improve our currently less than satisfactory hydrographic knowledge of the seas and oceans from the deepest submarine trenches to the high water line. They considered how to better harness crowd-sourcing and the use of satellite derived bathymetry. They considered the ever-expanding take-up of the IHO standard S-100 as the baseline standard for exchanging maritime data and information - especially under the eNav framework. They considered how to continue to build upon the ever-expanding IHO capacity building programme that aims to assist developing hydrographic countries to become more self-sufficient in meeting their hydrographic requirements and obligations.

And much of this is, in my opinion, a direct result of our focus on reaching out to other organizations and stakeholders beyond ships' navigators, to those other organizations and individuals that share a common interest and increasing dependence on knowing the depth and shape of the seafloor and identifying the hazards that may exist there.

But, none of this would have happened without the dedication and the hard work of my colleagues in the Secretariat - and in particular Director Gilles Bessero, who, like me, has just handed over his responsibilities to a successor. I know already, but many of you have yet to realise, the immense and lasting contribution that he has made in the last five years, in improving the effectiveness and the reputation of the IHO as an organization.

And what about my future? Well a holiday will be a good start! But I hope that I can find opportunities to continue to raise awareness of the fundamental part that hydrography plays in everything that happens in, on or under the sea – and the important role that all of us play in making the best use of the sea and its resources. I still want to try and make a difference.