

Marine Electronic Highway (MEH) Project

The MEH Project in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore will serve as a global information infrastructure prototype, enabling precision navigation, enhanced environmental information management and transfer of regional knowledge.

The Straits of Malacca and Singapore form the main seaway connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea. Approximately 150,000 vessels transited the straits in 2003. The transit through the Straits of Malacca is 1,000 miles shorter than other possible routes and the three littoral states of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have had and continue to show a strong commitment to navigational safety and environmental management of the straits. Discussions have been going on for many years regarding an MEH Project based on a new approach towards improving safety of navigation; management of maritime traffic and marine environmental protection in the Straits. The project is now planned to start in July. An innovative marine information and infrastructure system that integrates environmental management and protection systems and maritime safety technologies for enhanced maritime services, higher navigational safety standards, integrated marine environment protection and sustainable development of coastal and marine resources will be studied and included in the project.

From a technical standpoint the MEH will have two components, namely maritime safety and environmental protection and management. Three categories are recognised in the maritime safety component: safety of navigation, precision navigation and emergency response.

The IHO should note that it has been recognised and accepted that the “backbone of the MEH”™ is precision navigation using a network of Electronic Navigational Charts (ENCs) in conjunction with ECDIS, DGPS, AIS, ARPA and VTS. New hydrographic surveys will be conducted using multi-beam systems and based on the specification and standards of the IHO, to be used for the production of ENCs. Information and data concerning weather, tides and currents will be collected and made available to users along with ENCs.

The MEH in the Straits has two stages: a demonstration and the full-scale development stage. It is expected that the output of the demonstration stage will be used to refine activities aimed at developing the full-scale MEH system and the necessary mechanisms to operate, manage and administer the system on a sustainable basis.

A Project Steering Committee (PSC) has been established with overall responsibility for planning, co-ordinating and implementing the project. The PSC consists of representatives from the three littoral states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the World Bank, IMO, IHO and INTERTANKO. The IHO will provide technical support through co-operation and collaboration among its member states in capacity building and the provision of expert advice during project implementation. The INTERTANKO will provide seventy fully operational tankers that regularly ply the Straits, equipped with type-approved ECDIS with ENCs, AIS and Internet connectivity. The World Bank will co-finance the project, a decision to be made known in May.

We have to monitor developments and progress in this very interesting and important project and I am sure that in the future we will have more to report.

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