

Safe Navigation

Your *Hydro international* this month carries the theme 'safe navigation' - obvious, maybe, since Monaco is preparing for the 4th Extraordinary Hydrographic Conference (2nd to 4th June). The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) was established in 1921 to support safety in navigation and protection of the marine environment. Although a walk around the local harbour brings to mind another good reason for our theme. Seeing all busy activity in the boatsheds where recreational boat owners are nearly ready for a new season, I assume springtime poses new challenges for safety at sea around the world.

The IHO was established 88 years ago, but international co-operation in the field of hydrography began with a conference held in Washington in 1899, followed by two others in Saint Petersburg in 1908 and 1912. In 1919, twenty-four nations met in London for a hydrographic conference during which it was decided to create a permanent body. The resulting International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB) was born in 1921, with nineteen member states. At the invitation of H.S.H. Prince Albert I of Monaco, a noted marine scientist, the Bureau was provided with headquarters in the Principality of Monaco. In 1970 an intergovernmental convention came into force which changed the name and legal status, creating the IHO as we know it today.

It is with pride and great enthusiasm that I introduce this month's interviewee, His Serene Highness the Sovereign Prince of Monaco Albert II, who in 2000 accepted the invitation of the IHB president to become ambassador for hydrography on his visits to coastal states, and who is also president of the International Commission for the Scientific Exploration of the Mediterranean. The interview appears on page 10.

During my harbour stroll someone told me he had met a couple who had only recently bought themselves a boat; they had had to be piloted ashore by the national sea rescue institution having run aground on a huge sandbank. It appeared they had been using a motoring map. And on that the water body upon which they had embarked showed 'just one beautiful blue area of water [...]' Statistics demonstrate a significant reduction in accidents and deaths commensurate with rising levels of boating education. Everyone who goes out on the water should be encouraged to take a recognised safety course. I hear ship insurance companies actually provide discounts for completion of these courses. But, of course, it would be a gross misjudgement to think that completing such a course teaches you all there is to know about safe navigation.

Hopefully all these spring-activated boating enthusiasts will continue to keep themselves informed regarding new safety and navigational equipment entering the market every year, as well as the regular changes and improvements to ship safety regulations. However, it's sad but true that accidents also befall professional mariners and their vessels. This month we bring you the grounding of the famous Cunard cruise liner *Queen Elizabeth II*.

I ended last month's editorial with the hope that this issue would contain news of the verdict on the grounding of the *M/V Rocknes*. The only news I can bring you at this stage is that the Oslo court hearing the case against Norway's hydrographic office over its role in the incident is still considering its verdict after nearly two months of evidence. To be continued...