THE HYDROGRAPHY COMMISSION OF THE SURVEYING AND SPATIAL SCIENCES INSTITUTE

Setting Professional Standards in Australasia

The SSSI is the governing professional body for the spatial industry in Australia. The body was formed in July 2009 from the merger of the Institution of Surveyors Australia (ISA) and the Spatial Sciences Institute (SSI). In an effort to widen its membership to include all aspects of surveying, the ISA formed the Hydrographic Commission in 1993, with the initial task of establishing a means of hydrographic surveyor certification. What is now the Australasian Hydrographic Surveyors Certification Panel (AHSCP) was formed as a result and began the task of accrediting (now known as certifying) hydrographic surveyors in 1994, in accordance with FIG/IHO guidelines. The SSSI Hydrography Commission is the direct descendant of the ISA Hydrographic Commission, evolving over the years with the involvement of the New Zealand Institute of Surveyors (NZIS), the SSI and now the SSSI.

Although initially tasked with hydrographic surveyor certification, the commission has grown and now encompasses a much broader set of objectives. In accordance with SSSI constitution and the needs of the hydrographic surveying community, some of the Commission's objectives are:
- Promoting the discipline of hydrography
- Encouraging appropriate standards and practice
- Providing professional certification assessment
- Facilitating communication amongst members
- Providing continuing professional development (CPD) for hydrographic surveys
- Developing Hydrography within Academic institutions
- Maintaining links with national and international hydrographic societies
- Influencing government policy/legislation with respect to the profession

The Hydrography Commission National Committee (HCNC) is made up of members from Australia and New Zealand covering all sectors of the industry. Meetings are held at quarterly intervals each year (predominantly through teleconference), with at least one face-to-face meeting, usually in conjunction with a relevant SSSI, Trans Tasman or affiliated international conference. Many members of the HCNC are also members of the AHSCP, ensuring strong links are maintained between the Commission and the Panel. The Australasian Hydrographic Society (AHS) and the SSSI Hydrography Commission are both co-operating associations. As such, the president (or nominated representative) of the AHS is invited to attend face-to-face committee meetings as an observer.

Professional assessment and certification of hydrographic surveyors for the Commission is undertaken through the AHSCP, which is jointly sponsored by the NZIS. The composition of the Panel and the Guidelines for the Certification of Hydrographic
Surveyors under which it operates has been formulated to meet the current requirements of FIG/IHO/ICA Publication S-6, Standards of Competence for Hydrographic Surveyors. All IHO nominated hydrographic surveying specialisms are represented on the Panel:

- Nautical Charting
- Coastal Zone Management
- Industrial Offshore Surveying/Offshore Construction Surveying
- Education
- Private Practice

Individuals are certified at Level 1 or Level 2 and permitted to use the post nominals CPHS1 and CPHS2 respectively. Applications are not limited to the Australasian region, with the Panel certifying applicants from countries such as Singapore, Italy, South Africa, Bangladesh and Finland. As of the 31 January 2011, a total of 191 applicants have been assessed (or are undergoing assessment).

Membership of the Hydrography Commission is open to all members of the SSSI who have an interest in hydrography and those NZIS members who are accredited or certified hydrographic surveyors. All successful applicants certified by the ASHCP are encouraged to undertake membership and if they elect to do so, are automatically included on the Hydrography Commission Role. The Commission currently boasts over 120 members, with approximately 90 of these being certified at Level 1 or 2.

One of the Commission’s recent activities involved producing a DVD entitled Offshore Construction Hydrography - Certification of Hydrographic Surveyors in Australasia promoting the benefits of SSSI membership and AHSCP Certification to hydrographic surveyors, their employers and clients within the Australasian offshore oil & gas industry. Since the advent of hydrographic surveyor certification in 1994, it has become the de-facto standard for the assessment of hydrographic surveyor competency in the port and coastal zone management sectors of the maritime industry in Australia and New Zealand. It has long been a goal of the Hydrography Commission, under which the AHSCP operates, for the offshore oil and gas industry (regulators, operators and survey contractors) to also adopt AHSCP Certification as the fundamental competency standard for hydrographic surveyors working in that environment.

The DVD has been showcased at a series of AHS seminars in Australia throughout February and March (2011). A delegation of members from the HCNC visited Perth in March to formally launch the DVD at a West Australian Region seminar and to discuss certification with regulators, operators and survey companies. In addition to the seminar, a number of individual meetings (both formally and informally) were held with representatives of many of the key organisations within the industry. Further pursuits for the DVD include promotion at conferences and offshore oil & gas exhibitions, as well as making the video available online.

Future plans for the Hydrographic Commission include the promotion of careers in hydrography, possibly as a joint venture with FIG Commission 4 (which the Commission also has strong links with, assisting with the Hydrographic Surveys in Ports and Harbours publication in November 2010) and the AHS. This would likely be in the form of another DVD, as well as promotional handouts for prospective newcomers into the industry. Another initiative is in place to set up a civilian Category A and B course within Australia, in conjunction with local academic institutions. The next face-to-face meeting of the HCNC will be at the Hydro2011 (Down Under) Conference in Fremantle, Western Australia this November.

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