The National Hydrographic Service of the Royal Navy of Oman

Hydrographic activities today involve various fields, including nautical charting, environmental issues, coastal-zone management etc. Does this mean hydrographers are fully included in facing the challenges emerging with world development? I think so. Oman Hydrographic department has experienced considerable improvement in technology and finds its professional competence unaffected by the challenges it faces.

The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) has progressively conducted hydrographic surveying and charting of Oman's waters to full international standards. Responsibility for management and administration of the National Hydrographic Office (NHO) is a task that since 1992 has been delegated to the Ministry of Defence from the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Initially, all hydrographic activities were carried out by traditional methods because, in common with many Hydrographic Offices around the world, there was a lack of advanced technology in Oman. Hydrographic technology has developed significantly, which requires the personnel of the Hydrographic Service to accustom themselves to making the best use of the assets available to them. In Oman they have worked hard and with great dedication to further the safety of shipping in Omani waters. As a result, there have been significant achievements despite many challenges.

With the general current rapid pace of development in Oman in various fields, hydrographic activities have improved considerably to meet increasing demands. As modern technology advances hydrography becomes ever more sophisticated and complicated. The ship, equipment, acquisition, data storage, processing, compilation of nautical charts and other types of publications are all changing faster than at any time in history, yet the quality required, together with professional competence, remain today as important as they ever were. A small and young department such as Oman's NHO needs to invest more effort in the move towards modern technology so that it can effectively demonstrate commitment to this vital area of international development and deal efficiently with all the challenges.

Therefore since the beginning of 2000 the hydrographic department has begun converting towards the use of advanced technology. Currently, hydrographic surveying in the field is achieved through the integrated efforts of the Hydrographic Survey Unit (HSU) and two vessels: the Royal Navy of Oman Vessel Al Mabrukah (C30) and RNOV Al Seeb (B20), with a third new vessel on the way. The vessels are fitted with multi-beam echo-sounder systems and other sophisticated hydrographic equipment with the capability of surveying to full modern standards, from shore to 400metre-depth contour. The current status of Oman survey coverage is focused on the northern area of Omani waters. There have been considerable achievements so far; however, small areas remain as yet unsurveyed.

Oman NHO is a small, highly effective organisation, responsible for the production and maintenance of national chart coverage of Oman, supporting nautical publications, and Maritime Safety Information (MSI), including radio navigational warnings and promulgating notices to mariners. There are more than 52 charts planned to cover the whole of the Sultanate waters. So far, seventeen charts have been published, with six planned for publication annually. At present, the main thrust of work is the production of new charts to complete the national charting programme, with more efforts to produce Electronic Navigation Charts (ENC), of which two have already been completed and tested successfully. The Oman NHO is well equipped with advanced equipment. All chart production processes are digital, which reduces chart production time, allows for print on demand and at the same time immediate corrections to published charts.

Oman is justly proud to have such an NHO, the development of which is in line with other modern national hydrographic
organisations. However, rapid changes in technology are leading the NHO in putting in place systematic steps to maintain this achievement. As a member of the International Hydrographic Organization, Oman's NHO will continue to co-operate and assist closely with other regional and international organisations to share hydrographic knowledge and experience.

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