

INDUSTRY / STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP, IHB MONACO

We Visisted for You

For the fourth year in succession, the IHB (International Hydrographic Bureau) Directing Committee held a workshop from 16th to 17th June 2003. About fifty people attended, among whom hydrographic or navigational equipment manufacturers, data producers, academics, mariners, chart agents and representatives of Hydrographic offices or other national maritime organisations; all referred to as 'stakeholders'. Although one of the major subjects remained, as in previous years, ENC - or rather the lack of it - the actual goal of these gatherings, namely to establish a liaison mechanism between the 'industry' and the IHO, would seem to be coming closer. This year's conference saw, for the first time, some well-prepared proposals from both the IHO and the industry.

The President of the IHO, Vice-Admiral Alexandros Maratos, welcomed the participants. Rear Admiral Kenneth Barbor, member of the IHB Directing Committee, chaired the meeting, commenting that the scope of the workshop would be more open and flexible than in the past. The main focus would be to discuss issues and to make proposals as to how industry / stakeholders could do business with the IHO.

Strategic Planning Working Group

The Norwegian Hydrographer, Chairman of the SPWG, presented an overview of work and progress since the first meeting of the working group in April 2002. The task of the working group is to advise on improvements to the IHO structure and to the IHO Convention. In this presentation the working groups' advice to 'utilise industry relations to mutual benefit' was extra underlined. The SPWG considers IHO relations with industry of major importance and feels that some type of 'industrial advisory group' is necessary.

Based on a proposal / discussion document prepared by the IHO Committee on Hydrographic Requirements for Information Systems (CHRIS) and entitled 'Liaison mechanisms, and guidelines for accredited organisations', the SPWG proposed two possible structures for the establishment of a body to liase between the IHO and 'stakeholders'. The first would enable accredited organisations to be part of an established common Chamber / Industry advisory board to liase with the IHO.

The second is more or less similar but, in this case, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) would liase directly with IHO organs. It was stressed that the industry should be allowed observer status and should be consulted for advice on the needs of the user community, emerging technologies, required standards, data requirement and possible future requirements.

Manufacturer's View

Dr Andy Norris from Smiths Marine Systems presented a 'Manufacturer's View' of ECDIS and ECDIS-related issues. He stated that, whether we like it or not, it is all money-lead. We, the industry, need stability in ECDIS specifications. Changes may mean renewal of type approval, which is a costly exercise. End users are generally conservative and look for stability. There is as yet no common interpretation of IMO electronic chart regulations across all flag states. A poignant contrast is shown by interpretations by Norway and The Netherlands. Norway states that it does not consider raster charts to meet chart requirements: "When ECDIS is used with official raster charts, the paper charts are the main charts". The Netherlands interpretation says "use ENC's where ENC's are available, RNC's where RNC's are available and paper charts where RNC's are not available".

The availability of ENC is often very optimistically shown on coverage. Geographical coverage is very fragmented. Some ENC's shown on the diagrams may exist but are, for several reasons, not yet available. The price structure is very different and there seems to be little co-ordination outside Europe. All these issues cause great confusion with the users. The splitting up of the European RENC into Primar Stavanger and IC-ENC has created an immensely complex situation, also of little help to the user.

Dr Norris noted a trend towards increasing diversification rather than commonality. Sales presentations differ. We see some retailers bundling their products with raster charts, others with commercial data; some offer SENC distribution. All these confusing issues have resulted in small sales of ENC and ECDIS compared to sales of ECS. It seems that the users are quite happy using paper charts with ECS rather than purchasing expensive ECDIS.

The IAHI

Rear Admiral (retired) Hans van Opstal from CARIS presented a proposal prepared by four industrial companies, emphasising that the proposal was a discussion document. The objective is to provide a single point of contact for exchange of information between the industry and the IHO and other related organisations. The Association would represent the opinions of the industry on IHO committees and in workshops and would have observer status.

View from the Bridge

In a 'View from the Bridge' Captain Stephen Bligh from P&O Nedlloyd commented that in his opinion more money has been spent on ECDIS conferences than has been made from the actual product. He mentioned the commonly stated belief that electronic charts were the most significant development since the advent of radar fifty years ago and that the electronic chart systems introduce a new level of performance and major changes in maritime navigation.

Although the value of ECDIS is still recognised, we have up until now seen very little other than often misleading statements. Stephen Bligh is of the opinion that the user group is at the bottom of the food chain. There is no clear explanation of data formats, coverage

availability and service. ENC coverage is not in line with the requirement: major global shipping routes. It is true that ECDIS could contribute to safe navigation - but this has not yet been demonstrated.

Complication and Credibility

Gert B ttgenbach of SevenCs considered encryption an accident and was of the opinion that this should be stripped down to a minimum. Manufacturers were experiencing too many technical problems due to the very complex standard. It was very difficult to obtain data without bending the rules. In his opinion, ECDIS is simply killing itself. We have to simplify the standards. We have to come to terms and make data available otherwise we will lose out to the commercial data producers. In his view, HOs are on the brink of losing their credibility. He also mentioned that in several instances he had observed that commercial data was more up to date than ENCs.

Dismal State of ENC

Reacting to a comment from one of the participants that the message from the industry/stakeholders to the IHO is: 'get your act together', one representative of a member state declared "there is no solution".

This was picked up on by Ole Berg of the Danish Hydrographic Office - KMS, who put everything into perspective. National Governments are responsible for hydrography and chart production but there are not sufficient funds. Here is a task for the industry. They should start lobbying and conveying to member states the outside world's perception of the dismal state of ENC and informing them of the reasons for this state.

Conclusions

The chairman will recommend to the SPWG that Model 2 of the CHRIS (draft) proposal be put in place as soon as possible, with the suggestion to use IMO guidelines for accreditation. Stakeholders can be represented through existing or new NGOs. Already existing NGOs should send letters to the IHB to obtain accreditation.

The IHB website should provide information regarding how to obtain ENC. A letter should be sent to WEND stating industry's strong support for the proposal for small-scale ENC production and recommending that:

- The industry be used as part of the solution
- Industry participate in the task group
- Industry supports large-scale ENC production in developing countries

There should be communication of problems relating to IHO or individual member states both on general on specific issues.

Author's Note

After about four years of discussing a possible formal liaison between the IHO and industry, we finally see some light at the end of the tunnel. However, it may require some careful manoeuvring of all involved to get a 'temporarily structure' in place awaiting a final endorsement by the IHO conference in 2005.

It became (again) obvious that IHO Member States have, in general, simply insufficient means to solve the ENC problem. With all respect for the latest attempt to set up a task group to increase ENC production along the major shipping routes, this may work only with considerable (production) support from Industry.

New ways have to be discovered for the necessary funding. Maybe this can be achieved through industry lobbying their governments, maybe - and this may be difficult to digest - the HOs have to consider paying royalties on data sales to the industry in return for production. Drastic measures may prove unavoidable in order to save the ECDIS concept.

Editor's Note

This report has been subjected to editing. A full version of the submitted text for this 'We Visited for You' column is to be found both on the IHB web-site (www.ihb.org) and on the Chartworx-Holland web-site (www.chartworx.com).

<https://www.hydro-international.com/content/article/we-visisted-for-you>
