

ECDIS STAKEHOLDERS'™ FORUM

We Visited for You

In succession to the previous Days of the Industry, the occasion was this year renamed ECDIS Stakeholders'™ Forum and took place in conjunction with the annual meeting of the IHO Committee on Hydrographic Requirements for Information Systems (CHRIS) with representatives from 24 IHO member states, in Rostock Germany, on 6 and 7 September.

The meeting was chaired by Captain Robert Ward (Royal Australian Navy), chairman of CHRIS. The agenda of the meeting showed two major items for which the input, co-operation and support of the stakeholders were essential to arrive at a successful solution. The first issue was the proposal for a new edition of IHO Special Publication 57 (IHO S-57), which is the Transfer Standard for Digital Hydrographic Data, and the second issue was the implementation of new editions of the IHO ECDIS Standard S-52, Appendix 2, Colour and Symbol Specifications and its Annex A, the IHO Presentation Library for ECDIS, both released in March 2004.

S-57 Edition 4 – A New Standard for Hydrographic Data

Barrie Greenslade (UKHO), member of the Transfer Standard Maintenance and Applications Development (TSMAD) workgroup, explained the necessity to revise S-57 edition 3.1. The present standard and its associated ENC Product Specification have been –frozen–™ since 2001. Since then, numerous deficiencies have come to light and it appears that several features were overlooked when the standard was written. Edition 4 will be a complete new standard.

The Stakeholders'

Understandably the proposed revision of the standard triggered an animated discussion that almost carried on until the closing of the meeting.

Generally, all stakeholders mentioned that the proposed far-reaching change of the standard and the inherent Product Specification would necessitate a requirement to amend the system software and because the old standard still had to be supported for probably a number of years it would require yet another type of –dual–™ fuel provision. This would require considerable investment of the ECDIS manufacturer and, most likely, a renewal of the type of approval certificate with, once again, financial consequences.

ENC Data Consistency

Graham Reek, technical manager of IC-ENC (International Centre for ENCs), provided an overview of major problems with ENCs. Neighbouring cells at international boundaries in particular showed unacceptable discrepancies in some cases, such as holes in between cells, broken off contour lines, cables that abruptly stopped at the boundaries, wrecks being depicted twice, etc.

The Stakeholders'

One of the participants felt that Graham Reek's™ presentation was a useful –pep talk–™ for the HOs. Ugly ENCs are hard to sell and damage the ECDIS concept.

Classifying data as –Unassessed–™ may not always be so useful and causes more problems than it solves. If the data is unsafe for navigation, just don't™ sell it.

S-52 ECDIS Symbolology: Where to Next?

Mathias Jonas (BSH), chairman of the IHO Colours and Symbols Maintenance Working Group presented a status report and discussed future challenges for the Presentation Library. The Colours and Symbol Specifications have been replaced by a new edition 4.2 and the presentation library by a new edition 3.3. The latter marks a considerable change in format, now being available also as a printable document. This unique hard copy of the library has about 600 pages, i.e. one symbol description per page. So we can now see how an ECDIS should look.

The Stakeholders'

An interesting discussion followed this presentation. It was mentioned that the original intention of type approval was that if the symbols looked similar enough to the printed version, then this was acceptable. The IHO Colours and Symbols should be a minimum specification, not the only or best way. Freezing of a standardised solution has disadvantages: it restricts the fast introduction of new advanced hardware and monitor technology. It will also restrict the competition between ECDIS manufacturers merely due to layout. On the other hand, an identical look and feel of chart displays of different makes has definite advantages for the safety of navigation. It eases ECDIS development and operation, it allows certification, it facilitates standardisation of education and it avoids ambiguity. It is also unlikely that the IHO would release control of the electronic chart display in full because it is unlikely that the IMO would accept a diversity of chart displays.

Wrapping Up the S-57 Update Issue

The chairman put forward to the attendees the question whether it was acceptable to live with an ECDIS screen full of asterisks and question marks until the introduction of edition 4 probably between 2010 and 2012. All agreed that this was not acceptable and that a minor interim solution was needed. The audience in general agreed that an interim solution in the form of S57.3.1.1 was necessary. This could be introduced in 2007/2008. For ECDIS systems, only a minor software update would be required to display 3.1.1 features. In ECDIS

that is not updated, the new feature will show as a question mark. In this case further information could be obtained using the "Information" attribute and the "Pick Report" functionality.

Many Stakeholders expressed their concern about the implication on the market of the announcement of S-57 edition 4, particularly as many people consider the S-57 standard to be the same as the ENC Product Specification. It was therefore proposed by TSMAD to change the name to S-100.

Concluding Remarks

The majority of the stakeholders expressed their wish for the next meeting to be in conjunction with a meeting of the World Electronic Navigation Database (WEND) Committee. This would enable them to voice their concerns about the quality and quantity of ENC and other pressing issues from the user perspective, such as licensing and pricing, distribution, and a proper loading strategy, and to discuss ways to improve the present situation.

The chairman concluded that he considered the meeting extremely useful. He expressed his thanks in particular for the input of the non-IHO representatives and confirmed that, although no decisions from the outcome of the meeting were yet taken, all that had been said would be taken into consideration.

Author's Note

Just before these notes were forwarded to Hydro International and the IHB, the IHO very kindly sent copies of 2 letters they had distributed to their members. The first one announces that the new Data Transfer Standard revision would not take place before 2012 and that a minor revision (S-57.3.1.1) would be introduced to accommodate new requirements. This revision will also add "placeholders" that can be used to accommodate any other new features the IMO may require in the future. The second letter informs the member states that CHRIS has decided that the S-57 edition 4 (currently still under development) will henceforth be known as S-100. The ENC Product Specification based on S-100 will be known as S-101.

Editor's Note

This report has been significantly shortened by the Editor. A full version of the submitted We Visited for You can be found both on the website of the IHB (www.iho.shom.fr) and on the website of Chartworx (www.chartworx.com).

<https://www.hydro-international.com/content/article/we-visited-for-you-35>
