

XVIIth International Hydrographic Conference

The XVIIth International Hydrographic Conference (XVII IHC), held at the Auditorium Rainier III in Monaco from 7 to 11 May, was opened by HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco. A total of 71 Member States represented by 245 delegates attended. In addition to the Member States, there were 10 observing non-Member States and 11 Observing International Organisations.

As is standard practice at these conferences, several survey vessels visited Monaco. On this occasion the Italian ITS Galatea, the Dutch HNLMS Snellius and the UK's HMS Echo were berthed, in the Mediterranean way, next to each other in the centre of the old port and were available for both technical and social visits.

Associated with the conference were a Commercial Exhibition and an Exhibition of Charts by Member States. HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco showed his keen interest in hydrographic affairs by visiting all the stands of both exhibitions.

NB: At the invitation of HSH Prince Albert I of Monaco, a noted marine scientist, the Bureau was provided with headquarters in the Principality of Monaco in 1921.

During the opening ceremony, the four newest members of the organisation were welcomed and presented their national flags. These were Mauritius, Myanmar, Romania and Saudi Arabia, making the total membership 78 countries.

Work Programme Reports

Following the opening ceremony and some agreement on basic procedures, the Conference turned its attention to the 24 formal proposals. Unlike previous conferences, most of these were directed at administrative matters arising from the last Extraordinary Conference and the work of the Strategic Planning Committee.

Unfortunately, until the protocol to the Convention is ratified by two-thirds of the governments of the Member States, much of this will remain in abeyance. It was reported that, to date, only 13 Member States had ratified the protocol. Some matters, such as those dealing with the General Regulations that can be approved by the Conference were approved and can be brought into force. For most delegates, the main interest in the Conference was the consideration of the five Reports on the Work Programme. These dealt with: co-operation between Member States and with International Organisations; Capacity Building and Technical Co-operation; Techniques and Standards support; Information Management and Public Relations; and General Organisation Development. A number of important discussions took place as a result of these reports. Report No. 1 dealt with the very extensive activities of the Regional Hydrographic Commissions and of the varying levels of interaction with other international organisations. Report No. 2 outlined the increased activity in recent years of the IHO in capacity building. Much of Report No. 3 dealt with the activities of the Committee on Hydrographic Requirements for Information Systems (CHRIS). However, it also discussed such diverse subjects as the FIG/IHO/ICA International Advisory Board on Standards of Competence, the work of the Guiding Committee for the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO), and the work of the Organisation on Law of the Sea matters. Report No. 4 outlined the situation on publications, the website and other aspects of communication. Lastly, Report No. 5 outlined some of the more administrative aspects of the work, such as the activities of the Legal Committee and activities with the host country of Monaco. Amongst the more contentious matters raised by these reports was the concern, voiced by some, of the slow pace of developing worldwide Electronic Navigational Chart (ENC) coverage and publication S-23 Limits of Oceans and Seas. This last publication, which has not been updated since 1954, has faced serious delays in producing its new edition due to disagreement between some Member States on the naming of a water body.

A Work Programme for the period 2008-2012 was agreed and some time was spent on the Finance Committee's report. The latter included reaching an agreement on the IHO 5-year budget.

Directing Committee

With the main work behind it, the Conference was able to turn its attention to the matter of great interest, electing the Directing Committee for the next 5 years, which will start work in September 2007. It may be noted that although plans are in motion to change the present structure of a three-person Directing Committee to having a Secretary General, a Secretariat and a Council, the new procedure has yet to be ratified and voting on this occasion was for three Directors, one of whom is subsequently elected as the President of the Directing Committee. Six candidates were presented, from Australia, Chile, Greece, Japan, Nigeria and Norway (see also Hydro International, April 2007 for more details on the candidates - 81). The voting results were: Vice Admiral Alexandros Maratos (Greece) as President; Captain Hugo Gorziglia as Director 1 (Chile) and Captain Robert Ward as Director 2 (Australia). The first two of these candidates were re-elected.

It remained then to close the Conference with some agreement on the date and the order of seating delegates at the next Conference. It

will, as always, be held in Monaco and it was agreed that it would be an Extraordinary Conference to be held in the first week of June 2009.

Chart Exhibition

During the Conference, a Chart Exhibition had exhibits mainly from Member State Hydrographic Offices. On display were a very wide range of products from historical charts to modern digital information systems and charts. A panel decided that a prize should be awarded to the USA. Its exhibit covered the work of several agencies in that country. It was then left to various participants to make short speeches and present gifts to the IHO. The members of the newly elected Directing Committee, including Vice Admiral Maratos as the re-elected President of the Organisation, all made speeches. Finally, the President of the Conference, Dr Wynford Williams, the former CEO of the UK Hydrographic Office who had managed the discussions in a most capable and friendly way, was then able to say some words himself, thanking all those who had made the Conference such a successful event, particularly thanking the staff of the Bureau, and adjourning the Conference.

Commercial Exhibition

In addition to the discussions in the conference hall, there was considerable interest in the Commercial Exhibition. The conferences are a fine opportunity for commercial companies producing software and hardware and various systems for hydrography and oceanography to gain exposure to the leaders of the government hydrographic community, although, due to the design of the Auditorium Rainier III, not all stands had a favourable position in relation to the delegates. A total of 31 companies and organisations (more than at earlier conferences) showed off their products and services (see the IHO website - 82 - for an overview).

In summary, it may be said that this was a very successful Conference, in terms of bringing the recommendations of the hard-working Strategic Planning Working Group into effect and also in providing the very important opportunity for social interaction between hydrographic practitioners.

<https://www.hydro-international.com/content/article/xviith-international-hydrographic-conference>
