

IHO Hydrographic Commission on Antarctica Meeting



The Servicio de Oceanografía, Hidrografía y Meteorología de la Armada (SOHMA) of Uruguay hosted the 12th Meeting of the IHO Hydrographic Commission on Antarctica (HCA) in Montevideo from 10 to 12 October 2012. HCA comprises 23 Member States that are also signatory nations to the Antarctic Treaty.

President Ward and Captain Gustavo Musso, director of SOHMA, welcomed the participants representing ten IHO Member States (Australia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, New Zealand, Peru, Spain, United Kingdom, United States and Uruguay), two observer organisations (The Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) and The International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO)) and one expert contributor from Fugro-Pelagos.

The Commission reviewed progress since the previous meeting and received reports from COMNAP and IAATO, as well as from the IHO Member States in the Commission. Discussion at the meeting centred on the need to increase surveying activity in the region noting that the waters surrounding Antarctica are over 95% unsurveyed. To this end, better coordination of surveys is required as well as the introduction of programmes using ships of opportunity. Representatives of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO) reported that the UKHO had successfully conducted trials using cruise ships fitted with relatively inexpensive equipment that automatically records depth soundings during voyages. Plans are now underway to extend this programme and to find ways to ensure that the data from the ships is quickly reflected in charts available to mariners.

The meeting agreed that continuing campaign to raise awareness at the ATCM was important. It was also agreed that establishing a liaison protocol with COMNAP would be beneficial, since COMNAP is an implementing body of the ATCM. In this way, the HCA and IHO could act as the competent authority to ATCM for hydrography and nautical charting. This would then be a similar arrangement to the agreement already in place between the IHO and the UN and the IMO.

The Commission decided to task the coordination of the INT paper chart scheme and ENC scheming to the Hydrography Priorities Working Group (HPWG), chaired by the UK. The HPWG was tasked to develop a schema for ENC production at the larger scales and for a maritime shipping route scheme for the South Orkney Islands. Inclusion of two new INT charts in the scheme, in the Antarctic Peninsula, was also agreed following a proposal by UK.

An Antarctic GIS database, now under development by the IHO secretariat in Monaco, was demonstrated. It was agreed that information from members of HCA on their planned surveys in Antarctic waters should be included in this database, together with details of existing surveys, and planned and completed chart coverage.

Two working groups were tasked to work intersessionally; one to develop a set of guidelines for Ships of Opportunity collecting hydrographic data and the other to coordinate surveys planned for the forthcoming summer season (2013-14).

The 13th meeting of the HCA will be hosted by the Spanish Instituto Hidrográfico de la Marina in Cadiz, Spain, from 5 to 7 December 2013.

The HCA seeks to improve the quality, coverage and availability of nautical charting and other hydrographic information and services covering the region. The meeting was chaired by IHO President Robert WARD. IHB Assistant Director Michel HUET attended as HCA Secretary.