



Editorial

Apart from a review of the useful book, 'The Electronic Chart', this issue is unusually devoid of articles on the subject of ECDIS. Nevertheless a small group of persons has been voicing its growing concern on the Internet for the very slow progress of developing global coverage of Electronic Navigational Charts (ENCs). Three problems are identified, the slowness of production, the lack of an internationally agreed system of quality assurance and the lack of a unified system of international distribution. These three, result in a lack of availability of ENCs and the consequent failure of the shipping community to show interest in purchasing the charts and accordingly, of not using ECDIS. Instead it appears that such ships that are interested in digital charts, are increasingly moving towards Electronic Chart Systems (ECS), with their commercially produced 'non-official' digital charts. There can be no question that ECS contribute substantially to the safety of navigation. There is global coverage of the data and they provide a convenient display system for the, now mandatory Automatic Identification Systems (AIS). However it is ironic that the ECDIS, the only system fully considered by IMO as equivalent to the paper chart, is not satisfying the market, largely due to the shortage of 'fuel', namely global coverage of ENCs.

What are the solutions? Clearly unless this trend from ECDIS to ECS is reversed the entire justification for this high quality and reliable new navigation system will be lost in the face of pragmatism and market pressure. Much greater cooperation is needed between Hydrographic Offices to share the technology and ability. An organisation must be developed that recognises the authority of HOs as chart producers, including their quality assurance and the need for service provision that satisfies the customers' need for 'one-stop shopping'. This service, including maintenance and distribution, requires close cooperation between the Government HOs and Industry. Above all else is the requirement for an internationally agreed plan that identifies priorities of need and how this may be satisfied.

Moving to less contentious subjects we can note in this issue the high level of contributions from North American universities. At present, much cutting edge hydrographic technology is coming from these sources. The development of these institutions will contribute to the technical excellence of the profession and hopefully the pages of this journal will help to disseminate some of this knowledge. In order to attract these contributions it is necessary that the publication itself maintains a high quality and that all articles are peer reviewed. This drive for a 'scholarly' publication may be questioned by those who argue that it takes it away from the practising hydrographer. To this it may be noted that the publication also contains Notes and other contributions that may be found more easily readable. Furthermore, the present I.H.Review is designed to complement Hydro INTERNATIONAL, produced by the same publishers, that provides more practical and immediate information.

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