

## Third Extraordinary International Hydrographic Conference

Held at Auditorium Rainier III, Monaco 11-15 April 2005

The above conference was opened by the Prime Minister of Monaco, M. Patrick LeClerc. Professor Dr Peter Ehlers (Germany) was elected as the president and Captain Robert Ward (Australia) elected as the vice-president. A key figure in preparing this Conference was Mr Froede Klepsvik (Norway), the chairman of the Strategic Planning Working Group, the body which had prepared much of the documentation. A total of 62 Member States represented by 203 delegates attended. In addition to the Member States there were 6 observing non-Member States, 11 Observing International Organisations and 17 observers from other international organisations. Due to the sad demise of His Serene Highness Prince Rainier III all events were kept at a low key level.

During the Opening Ceremony the three latest members of the organisation to join were welcomed and presented their national flags. These were Slovenia, Kuwait and Ukraine, making the total membership 75 countries.

The prime aim of this conference was to discuss and agree on the recommendations of the Strategic Planning Working Group and from these to agree on amendments to the thirty five year old convention and some of the associated agreements. The idea behind this was to develop a more modern constitution

to satisfy the needs of a growing and dynamic body. The key amendments were to change the administrative structure by changing from a three person Directing Committee, the International Hydrographic Bureau and a Conference held once every five years to a more dynamic structure. This will replace the above with a Secretary General, supported by two Directors and a Secretariat, a Council and an Assembly. The Council will meet annually and the Assembly every three years. There was strong support to move to this organisation that will more resemble other international organisations, particularly the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Discussion particularly focussed on the constitution of the Council. While general support was given to a strong regional element, which was agreed to take two thirds of the membership, there was much contention on how the remaining one third would be selected. The SPWG had recommended that it should be taken from those member states which have the greatest interest in hydrographic matters. The problem was defining just how that should be measured. Suggestions of tonnage, area of economic zone, density of traffic etc. were raised. However in the end it was decided that the Convention should not address the matter specifically but that would be the subject of further debate and contained in the General Regulations.

The President skilfully steered the Conference, which reached agreement on a Protocol of Proposed Amendments to the Convention and a new proposed Consolidated text. Decisions on these and all other matters of the Conference were reached following a consensus, although three South American countries registered reservations to the actions. The documentation will now pass to the Government of Monaco, which is the Depository of the Convention. It will now seek agreement on the amendments from all Member States and the amendments will not come into force until they have been approved by two thirds of their number. This is anticipated to be a slow and difficult process and will no doubt delay the implementation of these changes. In the meanwhile the IHO will continue under the existing Convention and regulations which flow from the Convention. It may be noted that unless the process of ratification by Member States occurs with unexpected rapidity the next Directing Committee will be elected in 2007 under the present rules and will be given a mandate for a further five years, also presumably under the existing rules. On a more immediate note, the SPWG had proposed guidelines for the accreditation of NGIOS (Non Government International Organisations) but following a proposal by Chile, the Conference went much further by granting them observer status with immediate effect. That decision will greatly benefit the relationship between the IHO and NGIOS that are able to make a substantial contribution to the Organisation.

There remains much to be done in developing regulations and maintaining a Strategic Planning

process and a further item of business for the Conference was to agree on amended Terms of Reference for the SPWG. Its Chairman will remain in place until the next Ordinary Conference in 2007.

In addition to the discussions going on in the Conference hall there was considerable interest in the commercial exhibition. A total of 25 companies and organisations showed off their products and services. These included the following: Applanix, Atlas Hydrographic, CARIS, C-Map Norway, DCI, NAVCO, EIVA, ESRI, Gardline, GeoAcoustics, GITC, HydroService, HYPACK, IC-ENC, Innerspace Technology, IVS 3D Fledermaus, IXSEA, Knudsen, Kongsberg Maritime, L-3 Communications ELAC, PRIMAR, RDInstruments, RESON, 7 Cs, Tenbix LADS, T-Kartor.

Three survey vessels also visited the port during the Conference. These were *HMS Enterprise*, *USNS Henson* and *Galatea*.

In summary, it may be said that this was a very successful Conference, in terms of bringing the recommendations of the hard working SPWG into effect and also of providing the very important opportunity for social interaction amongst hydrographic practitioners. However the actual bringing of the recommendations into practical reality will be disappointingly slow due to the realities of amending international Conventions. The Ordinary Conference of 2007 may well look for means by which greater efficiency can be reached by making changes outside of the Convention, such as in the General Regulations, over which the Conference itself can bring about change.