



## Editorial

Following discussions between the International Hydrographic Bureau and the publishers we have introduced in this issue the translation of abstracts into French and Spanish. Although we might wish to be able to provide translations of the complete papers this is economically not possible. However we hope that this will at least whet the appetite on non-English readers. Regular readers may be aware that from time to time we have the reverse process, in which selected non-English papers are translated into English.

Following our historical article this issue publishes papers on a variety of subjects, that include discussion on aspects of GPS use, technical and economic issues of electronic charts and data management. While we hope that you will find all interesting I should like to dwell on the paper concerning the interpretation of bathymetry in areas of dynamic sea floor. A question that I am sure is asked of many hydrographers is "Have you not completed the surveys of the sea floor by now?" For most parts of the oceans we can note that as technology changes so we must return to the same areas to improve our original work. Lead line surveys are no good for modern shipping and today we even question single beam echo sounders and say that only multibeam measurements are satisfactory. However there is another reason why our work has no end and that is that in some parts of the world the seafloor is continually changing, not in a long term geologic manner but in a relatively short term frame. Port surveyors are most aware of this phenomenon, as they frequently are located in estuaries where sediments and strong currents exist but rapid sea floor change exists in other critical areas, such as the Dover Straits and the Malacca Straits. Areas of mobile sea floor can generally be recognised by the presence of bed forms such as sand waves and the monitoring of the dynamics of such features is critical. The cost of repeated surveys is great and it is important to be able to predict as reliably as possible the extent and time of new surveys.

In the continual search for new material I recently attended the Canadian Hydrographic Conference. As usual, this was a feast of technical discussions but also the added benefit of historical sessions to mark the Centenary of the national Hydrographic Service. One session was devoted to Law of the Sea matters and in particular to the impact of ratifying the Convention, something that Canada has done recently. Paper after paper stressed the clever ways in which scientists and surveyors could maximise their country's gains using Article 76, which defines the outer limit of their continental shelf. The only potential adversary to their "colonialism" is the *United Nations Commission on the Continental Shelf*. Although this wise body will no doubt carefully investigate each claim, one must wonder if the odds are not on the steady expansion of national sovereignty over the sea floor at the expense of the "common heritage of all mankind."!

Adam J. Kerr, Editor