

URUGUAY

The Republic of Uruguay

The Republic of Uruguay is located on the east coast of the South American continent. It is bordered on the north by Brazil and on the west by the River Uruguay, which is the boundary with Argentina. The south coast borders the Atlantic Ocean and the total land surface of the country is 176,215 km².

Due to its geographical situation in the South Atlantic, facing the area of confluence of the currents of Brazil and the Falkland Islands, the necessary conditions exist for the development of a large variety of fish.

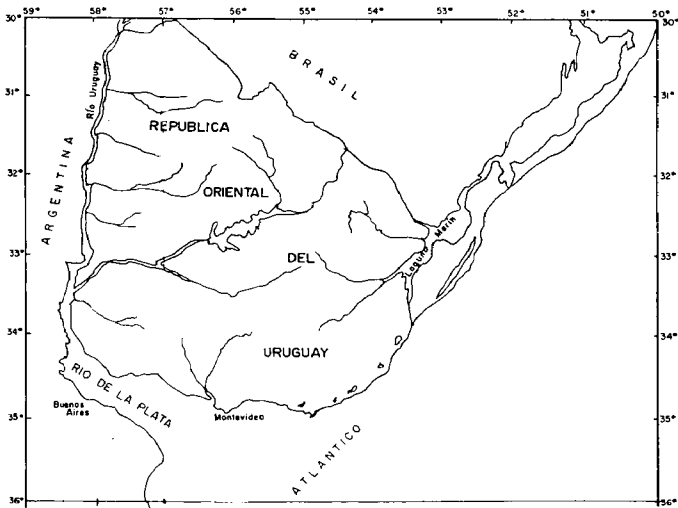


FIG. 1.- Uruguay.

The first Constitution was established in 1830 and a democratic-republican system was created, the basis of which still exists today.

Uruguay has a population of 3,100,000, almost half of which is concentrated in Montevideo, the capital, which is the political, commercial and cultural centre of the country.

The economy of Uruguay is based on the export of agricultural products (meat, milk, wool, leather, rice). The Exclusive Economic Zone, at present fixed at 200 miles, has a surface of 126,684 km², to which 15,219 km² may be added for the River Plate, shared with the Republic of Argentina. Since the founding of Montevideo by Spain in 1724, port activity has historically been an important factor within the development of the nation, for the control of shipping in the waters of the River Plate.

The Hydrographic Service

As a consequence of the increasing importance of the River Plate (known as "the hell of mariners" in the past century) as a passage to the Rivers Paraná and Paraguay towards regions rich in minerals, the first nautical charts of the zone were produced at the beginning of the 17th century. In 1685, some nautical charts including banks, rocks, sea-bottom and magnetic variations of the Atlantic coast were already held in the "Archivo de Indias" (Collection of nautical documents of America kept in Sevilla, Spain).

The "Hydrographic Service of the Navy" was created in 1916 to organize the hydrographic survey of the bordering rivers, the coastal zone and the Merín Lagoon. This organization also provided services of safety to navigation. In 1917, the earliest hydrographic survey was carried out, resulting in the first national nautical chart, at scale 1:25,000 (Bay of Montevideo and Approaches to the National Dock). In 1930, following the commissioning of the survey vessel "CAPITÁN MIRANDA", systematic hydrographic surveys of the coasts of the River Plate and the Atlantic Ocean began to be carried out, originating the development of the first cartographic scheme, as well as of the national Sailing Directions. Some years later, the Hydrographic Service changed its name to "Oceanographic, Hydrographic and Meteorologic Service of the Navy (SOHMA)", as it also provided marine meteorological forecasts and carried out oceanographic research (tides, currents, sedimentology).

Surveys have been carried out, even after the survey vessel was out of commission, adapting for that purpose equipment or the different means available from the Navy. In this way, in 1990/91 the first operations in Antarctic waters were carried out, resulting in the production of the first fair sheet of Maxwell Bay (King George Island).

At present, SOHMA is responsible for the production and updating of charts and nautical publications published to maintain the safety in waters of national interest. It is also responsible for hydrographic research, the issuance of Notices to Mariners, maritime meteorological forecasts, as well as the provision of documents and information which may be of interest to the Navy for naval operations.