

A DIRECTOR COMMENTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC BUREAU

by

Rear Admiral C. L. NICHOLS, U.S.N. (Ret.)

The continued successful operation of the INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC BUREAU is due in a great measure to the wisdom of the Committee of Hydrographers who drew up the original Statutes of the Bureau so as to provide unceasingly close supervision of its work by the Hydrographers of its States-Members, who, best able to determine the value of the Bureau to themselves, must continuously judge the advantages of membership. This constant supervision is accentuated at intervals when, prior to the regular Conferences, Hydrographers are required to cause the tonnage figures of their country, on which the annual contributions are based, to be furnished to the Bureau and at the same time must furnish a list of subjects to be prepared for inclusion in the regular Conference Agenda.

During the life of the Bureau the Hydrographic Offices of its States-Members have had many Hydrographers in charge. Each new Hydrographer has necessarily re-examined the past policies in his office in order to determine the future policies to be pursued under his direction. This re-examination has resulted in a continued critical assessment of the work of the Bureau and value of the Bureau to the office of each State-Member.

The success of the Bureau has also been furthered by the excellent organization of its conferences, the directives for which are also included in the Bureau's Statutes.

The five-year period between Conferences set by the Statutes to be generally effective is wisely chosen as has been demonstrated by the Bureau's experiences.

While each Conference can be expected to be a step forward in coordination, each Conference requires a sacrifice in time and expense by the Hydrographic Offices of its States Members as well as by the Bureau itself, and it is unquestioned that a few Conferences well separated by time and well attended by Delegates will produce better results than more numerous Conferences too closely spaced with an inevitable drop in attendance and interest.

That the Bureau is most effectively advancing coordination in hydrographic activities is amply demonstrated by the constant and steady growth of its Membership since the close of the War, during which the operations of the Bureau had been of necessity greatly reduced.

The Bureau now has the largest Membership of its thirty years of operations.

The present Membership of twenty-six countries and the expected addition, prior to the 1952 Conference, of several additional Members, will result in almost every important Maritime Country with hydrographic interests being States-Members.

The Bureau has at times been severely criticized by certain of its States-Members, who have withdrawn from the Bureau in protest against certain of its policies, only to rejoin at a later date when re-examination convinced them of the wisdom of again becoming States-Members.

The purpose of the Bureau, to best serve all its States Members, requires that the degrees of modernization of the various Offices be fully realized. Certain Offices, although keenly interested in the most progressive techniques, are more practically concerned with the modest advancement of techniques that apply to their particular development.

The tremendous progress in the modern techniques of hydrography and chart construction, such as photogrammetric processes, the use of electronics, new methods of using plastics and photographic methods of chart production, the use of multicolored presses and similar advances, are not economically adaptable to all Offices. Many of the methods of surveying used in 1919 and production of charts by the same processes used in that year are still imposed on some countries by their limited output and by economic restrictions.

Because of this situation the Bureau continues to publicize modernization in methods of drafting, compilation, stick-up type and other advanced techniques that require little or no capital investment.

The proper studies made by the Bureau cannot always be of equal interest to all Hydrographic Offices, but, as a result of Membership in the Bureau, Hydrographers are now aware of the vast differences in the problems, the inter-departmental relationships, and the varying responsibilities of the different national Offices.

The Directing Committee in trying to make the Bureau of greatest value have, at times, undertaken work that has been considered by certain the States-Members as being outside the competence of the Bureau and we find included in such work :

SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS :

- No. 6 « Summary of Data on Uniformity in Buoyage and Buoy Lighting ».
- No. 7 « Further Summary of No. 6 ».
- No. 8 « Summary of Data in Uniformity in Storm Warning Signals ».
- No. 9 « Uniformity of Buoyage ».
- No. 11 « Summary of Data on Wind Force and the Beaufort Scale ».
- No. 15 « Summary of Data on Coastal Signals ».
- No. 16 « Summary of Data on Port Signals ».
- No. 17 « Summary of Data on Safety of Life at Sea ».
- No. 22 b « Tabulation of the Beaufort Scale ».

Delegates to the Conferences, who guide and direct the scope of the work of the Bureau, have not always prescribed studies which are of the greatest use to all Hydrographic Offices. This is illustrated by the decision of the Delegates to the Vth International Hydrographic Conference to discontinue work that earlier Conferences had ordered performed at great expense, such as : Special Publication No. 25 : « Catalogue of Original Charts, List of Sales Agents for Charts, List of Unmarked Dangers » and No. 18 : « List of Life Saving Stations ».

Constant and careful appraisal of the Bureau's work is one of the duties of the Delegates to the Conferences as well as of the Directing Committee, and the three Directors in carrying on the studies prescribed at each conference may in all sincerity have three different opinions. But these differing opinions ensure that decisions made between Conferences will be international in character, which is essential if this Bureau is to be of greatest value to its Members.

One of the studies of the Bureau on which there has been a wide divergence of opinion, is the Bureau's publication : « Coastal Geographic Positions » (Special Publication No. 24, 24 a, 24 b and 24 c). The Bureau has now published four volumes of such positions. The publication of the fourth Volume eliminating all Addenda and including many new positions and an index applying to all four volumes was carried out as directed by the Vth International Hydrographic Conference.

At the Third International Hydrographic Conference in 1932 the publication of this data by the Bureau was criticized to such an extent that in a Committee Meeting its discontinuance was voted by seven votes to zero, two abstaining. This decision was however overruled in the Plenary Session, as the publication of this data is directed by the Bureau's Statutes.

That the publication of this information by the Bureau is an efficient and economical method of providing such information has been questioned by some States-Members, and it has been suggested that the Bureau might merely design the standard form for the purpose of publishing this type of data, and that the countries themselves should use this form and produce their own list of positions, forwarding copies as required by other States Members. These, easily assembled in book-form, would adequately serve those countries who have use for this information and at an appreciable economy to the Bureau.

Another publication that should be carefully considered by the Vth I.H. Conference is the Bureau's General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans.

As now issued by the Bureau many sheets are obsolete. Its production involves a considerable outlay of the Bureau's funds. In the place of the Bureau preparing this chart, would it not be more satisfactory for the Bureau to coordinate the production of sections of this chart by the different States-Members, so that it would rapidly be brought up to date and thus be of much greater value than as now produced ?

On the other hand, the great majority of the publications of the Bureau, including the « International Hydrographic Bulletin » and the « I.H.B. Year-Book », « The Repertory of the Technical Resolutions of the Conferences » as well as the continuing issue of the « List of Harmonic Constants » and such publications as the « Limits of Oceans and Seas », « Hydrogra-

phic Dictionary » and the various vocabularies, and many other Special Publications, have been and are of unquestionable value to all the Hydrographic World, and are only available because of the existence of the I.H.B.

Because of the existence of the Bureau it is possible to publish such practical and necessary technical publications as Special Publication No. 22 : « Manual of Symbols and Glossary of Nautical Terms and Abbreviations ». The new edition of this publication includes over 819 hydrographic or nautical terms and their abbreviations as used on the charts of 22 Countries in the language of each country, giving the symbol whenever one is used by any of these countries, as is the case for 345 terms.

This very valuable publication placing at the disposal of all the States-Members this assembled technical information should result in the 1952 VIth I.H. Conference passing Resolutions giving a further appreciable increase in the number of accepted standard I.H.B. symbols. The conferences have to date passed Resolutions adopting only 104 of these 345 symbols now in use.

The publication of the Appendix to the Repertory of Technical Resolutions 1919-1947, showing the degree of compliance accorded the Resolutions by the various offices, should certainly result in a further increase in the existing coordination that is simplifying the use of foreign charts and navigational publications by Mariners.

At the Vth International Hydrographic Conference a Resolution was adopted directing the publication of this Report of Compliance after a maximum effort had been made to obtain the greatest possible degree of application of the Resolutions.

This resulting Report gives convincing evidence of the great progress that has been already made and most impressive figures of the future degree of compliance agreed to.

The preponderant degree of compliance already attained as indicated by this Report, will inevitably influence Offices in giving further serious consideration to additional compliance, for it is certain that a country will not find itself alone or almost alone in non-compliance, as is sometimes the case, without reconsidering the wisdom of remaining aloof from the adopted hydrographic procedure of the rest of the World.

States-Members cannot help but be impressed from a study of this report as to how satisfactory is the existing collaboration between the World's Hydrographic Offices. And in assessing the value of the I.H.B., it is essential to remember that this coordination, of such great value and so consistently beneficial to Hydrography and to Mariners, has been developed by thirty years of continuous effort. If it is to continue to flourish and grow, it must be nourished and strengthened by the efforts of the I.H.B. and the Conferences.

It is also essential to realize that in addition to these obvious results, the Bureau is achieving coordination in the work of many non-Member States with minor hydrographic interests, as well as in many other countries who are now developing their own Hydrographic Offices and who will, as they commence their work, adopt standardized methods and procedures already developed by the I.H. Conferences.

In reviewing the great progress that has been made, it is of interest to note that the larger Offices with World coverage are naturally reluctant to adopt certain I.H.B. symbols which require costly revisions and which are not clearly advantageous to their own mariners. There is, however, a definite advantage to these larger Offices in the existence of even those very Resolutions with which they are not complying. This advantage results from the fact that most States-Members, and many Non-Member States, including Hydrographic Offices that are now being formed, are complying with practically all the I.H.B. Resolutions ; and this resulting standardization is of definite advantage to the larger Offices, who use this original data in producing their own world coverage of charts and publications.

It is not intended that the Bureau should ever exert any pressure on its States-Members to comply with its Resolutions, but it is essential that Member and Non-Member States give full consideration to the effective Resolutions of the conferences whenever a decision is to be made on subjects that are covered by these Resolutions.

The preponderant degree of compliance with the Resolutions now attained should ensure that each Office will comply with each Resolution except in those cases where there is a demonstrable reason satisfactory to the Hydrographer concerned that prevents compliance. With such an attitude on the part of each Hydrographer, the way is clear for a further valuable increase in the effective coordination that already exists.

It is one of the Bureau's obligations to insure that all Hydrographic Offices fully appreciate the fact that most hydrographic work has an international interest, and to emphasize the importance of each Hydrographic Office assuming its full share of this international responsibility.

Much has been done and much remains to be done. The coming VIth I.H. Conference should bring together more Hydrographers than have ever before attended a Hydrographic Conference, who are certain to achieve substantial progress in the furthering of the coordination of the World's hydrographic activities.
