

14th CHRIS MEETING
Shanghai, China, 15-17 August 2002

IC-ENC REPORT

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Introduction:

The International Centre for ENC's (IC-ENC) is an ENC coordination centre (RENC) that was created as a result of the break-up of Primar. It is operated by the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office on a not-for-profit basis on behalf of the national hydrographic authorities of Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. The IC-ENC became operational on 1 July 2002.

The cooperating hydrographic offices (CHOs) wish to secure the future of the RENC concept by creating a solution that is simple, safe, reliable, affordable and well supported.

IC-ENC Membership and Management

The CHOs agree a Bilateral Arrangement with the UKHO, as the Operator of IC-ENC, that sets out the principles and policies of IC-ENC; a definition of the services it provides; its operating procedures, and the financial arrangements between the CHOs and the IC-ENC operator. The Bilateral can either be a standalone document or an extension to an existing arrangement that the CHO may already have with the UKHO.

IC-ENC recognises the importance of multilateral co-operation between its members to address issues of common concern related to the harmonisation of ENC production and distribution. This includes the provision by IC-ENC members of support and advice to the IC-ENC operator using a steering Committee and specialist Working Groups. This cooperation is being set out in a Co-operation Arrangement (COA) to be agreed between CHOs.

IC-ENC is seeking to make its service more attractive and effective for the end-user by widening its membership to both European and non-European CHOs. Additionally, IC-ENC will seek to work closely with other RENCs to facilitate efficient and open distribution of ENC's for the benefit of the mariner.

Data Validation

IC-ENC members consider it essential to apply final data validation processes and ECDIS checks prior to ENC release, in order to ensure a supply of high quality consistent data to end users. The IC-ENC validation team is also working to ensure consistency and uniformity between adjacent national data sets in order to promote confidence in the use of ENC's and enhance the total credibility of any ENC service using its data. Validation procedures will be reviewed regularly to ensure that the effort expended is minimised consistent with the provision of an error-free, fit-for-purpose ENC service.

IC-ENC staff will continue to work closely with industry to develop simple but comprehensive validation tools, and will play an active part, on behalf of their CHOs, in relevant IHO Committees and working groups such as WEND and TSMAD.

Distribution

Unlike Primar, IC-ENC does not operate an end-user service. Instead, IC-ENC takes advantage of the expertise and experience of existing service providers, allowing these companies to develop their own tailored services based on the ENC data. IC-ENC therefore delivers ENC's to the market through specialist distributors, known as Value Added Resellers (VARs). This significantly reduces the cost and technical complexities of IC-ENC, whilst at the same time maximising the availability of the ENC's to both ECDIS and ECS users.

VARs are not allowed to modify the ENC's in any way, and are required to use IC-ENC tested and approved data security measures before releasing the data either to their distributors or directly to end-users. This is a fundamental requirement within the selection procedure and forms an important part of all VAR Contracts. IC-ENC will support the work of the IHO data protection Scheme Advisory Group to develop a single standard data security scheme, and VARs will be encouraged to adopt this standard if and when it is adopted by the IHO.

VARs will be allowed to offer SENC distributed services for those CHOs who confirm to IC-ENC that they wish their ENC data to be distributed in this way, and subject to the necessary independent technical assurance or type approval being obtained.

The CHOs, through a Commercial Working Group, exercise control over the criteria that potential VARs have to meet before they can be appointed; over the selection process itself, and how IC-ENC subsequently monitors and regulates the activities of VARs on their behalf.

The first VAR to be appointed was the UKHO, and their "Admiralty ENC Service" was launched through its worldwide network of agents on 11 July 2002. Other VAR applications are currently being processed.

Sales

IC-ENC will release ENC's to VARs on a unit basis where each unit contains ENC cells roughly equivalent to a paper chart in terms of geographical coverage. Each CHO will be free to define the wholesale price for its ENC units; this price will be reviewed on an annual basis. The VARs can then determine the retail price for their services that incorporate these ENC units.

Revenues and Costs

IC-ENC uses a deferred payment system to recover its costs, avoiding the need for its members to invest new money in IC-ENC. To cover its operating costs, IC-ENC will charge its members a nominal fixed fee for each of the ENC units that appointed VARs sell.

IC-ENC is run as a separate business unit within the UKHO to ensure that the operational costs and sales revenues are clearly visible to IC-ENC members, and can be audited if requested.

IC-ENC uses commercial off the shelf software and hardware as far as this is possible thereby reducing the cost of the infrastructure and resulting in better reliability and support.

Conclusion

The IC-ENC has focussed on delivering the following key benefits to its CHOs:

- A cost-effective but secure means of distributing ENC data to the market via existing specialist distributors.
- Using a small not-for-profit organisation which avoids the need for CHOs to invest new money.
- The services of a very experienced validation team working to ISO 9001 accredited procedures.
- The use of commercial off-the-shelf software to reduce costs and increase reliability.
- Support for the RENC / WEND concept, including inter-RENC cooperation.
- Helping to encourage take up of ENC's by offering more flexible product and service options through VARs.
- Supporting SENC Distribution where specifically approved by each CHO.

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