

**15<sup>th</sup> CHRIS MEETING  
IHB, Monaco, 10-13 June 2003**

**STATUS REPORT  
of the  
MesoAmerican – Caribbean Sea Hydrographic Commission  
Electronic Chart Working Group**

At the November 2002 meeting of the Commission, the limits of the Caribbean Sea-Gulf of Mexico Hydrographic Commission (CGMHC) were extended to encompass the Pacific Coast of Central America and include El Salvador, the only regional country that until that point had not been part of the Commission. To reflect this expanded area of coverage, the Commission was renamed the MesoAmerican-Caribbean Sea Hydrographic Commission (MACHC).

The MACHC Electronic Chart Working Group (ECWG) is currently chaired by the U.S., as it has been since its inception. However, in 2002 a new position of Vice Chair was established and filled with a representative from Mexico. This new important position has proven very beneficial to the success of the working group as it provides a much stronger regional presence in the group's activities as well as facilitates communication with the non-English speaking members. To the extent possible, ECWG documents are now provided in English and in Spanish. Also, while English remains the official language of the Commission, Spanish translation is provided as needed during meetings to enhance discussions and ensure a better understanding by attendees, thus encouraging more active participation by everyone.

At the April 2000 meeting of the Caribbean Sea – Gulf of Mexico Hydrographic Commission (now the MACHC) in Kingston, Jamaica, it was agreed that it would be useful if the SHARED Project, originally initiated by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) and the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO), were extended into the MesoAmerica and Caribbean Sea region in order to address the regional lack of ENCs. During 2001, a Project Plan and Terms of Reference were developed, and an attempt was made to identify participants. However, at the April 2002 meeting of the MACHC Electronic Chart Working Group it was agreed that the ECWG Project should refocus on the production of ENCs and support the regional production and use of electronic chart-related navigational information.

While the focus remains the production of ENCs, it was realized that many of the coastal states have a more primary need for assistance in order to first establish a chart production capacity.

Thus at the November 2002 of the Electronic Chart Working Group, two closely related needs were identified:

1. Build national capacity for chart production in regional coastal states that have need of assistance.
2. Increase ENC coverage of the region, particularly for major ports and shipping routes.

Due to varying needs and capacity throughout the region, it was decided that the ECWG should establish two task groups proceeding on parallel tracks. The objective of this approach is to effectively build regional hydrographic and chart production capacity as needed, as well as to encourage ENC production

to support major ports and shipping routes in areas where there is a greater opportunity to produce ENCs in the near time.

The two task groups are:

- Task Group 1 – MesoAmerican Pilot Project Task Group, chaired by Panama, seeks to improve capacity building of coastal states within a pilot area, towards the medium to long-term goal of producing ENCs. A pilot project is being developed that will demonstrate the benefits of nautical chart production as a means to improve safety of navigation, efficient inter-modal transportation, natural resource management, and growth in core economic sectors of the region, such as tourism.

This Pilot Project involves several stages from conducting hydrographic surveys, to data acquisition/management, to paper nautical chart/RNC/ENC production. It is intended that this project will demonstrate that hydrography can be used for purposes that extend well beyond navigation. It is also expected that this pilot project will build partnerships and establish collaborative arrangements under regional development and environmental projects that are being funded by organizations such as the World Bank, Global Environment Facility (GEF), InterAmerican Development Bank (IADB). The initial focus has been the IADB-administered, GEF-funded Gulf of Honduras Project that is presently under preparation. In particular, this task group is working with the project organizers to ensure the inclusion of a hydrographic component, and to demonstrate the value of hydrographic data for meeting the overall Gulf of Honduras Project goals.

- Task Group 2 – ENC Production and Distribution Task Group, chaired by Mexico, is developing a plan to facilitate the production and distribution of ENC data for major ports and shipping routes within the MACHC region. In addition, the use of ENC data by major shipping companies and cruise lines will be actively promoted, thereby contributing to safety of navigation, improved efficiency of maritime transportation, and marine environmental protection.

To accomplish this goal, the following steps have been proposed:

1. Recommend a process for selecting ports and routes for priority ENC coverage. Specify appropriate selection criteria and weighting parameters.
2. Identify ENC production responsibilities for the selected ports and routes.
3. Prepare an action plan and milestones.
4. Recommend options for distribution of ENCs to the shipping market.
5. Recommend and, where appropriate, establish cooperative arrangements for ENC production, quality assurance and maintenance.
6. Provide a progress report at each meeting of the MACHC ECWG.

Three initial steps were identified at the March 2003 ECWG meeting as a practical approach toward improving ENC coverage and services in the region.

1. Identify areas where ENCs would be of most benefit (e.g., ports and routes)
2. Determine how to accomplish ENC production (e.g., digitize existing paper charts)
3. Decide who will be responsible for specific areas

The task group has divided the Caribbean Sea – Gulf of Mexico region into two main areas, consisting of four major routes, and identified and prioritized 20 key ports. For each of the routes and ports, a Hydrographic Office (HO) was designated in terms of assuming responsibility for ENC production. To facilitate planning and tracking of ENC production, a database showing current National HO chart coverage will be produced using GIS tools.

Unless it is deemed necessary to have a meeting sooner in order to facilitate the activities and coordination of these task groups, the next meeting of the ECWG will be held in Cartagena, Colombia in 2004 in conjunction with the next MACHC Conference.

---