

A new portal for maritime information and reporting in the North Sea

In order to make safe and efficient decisions, a navigator requires clear, up-to-date information about the local maritime conditions, as well as a range of details that can affect the route or manoeuvre plan. Maritime and hydrographic offices play a key role in producing and distributing this detailed information. However, navigators themselves often develop more immediate and practical insight to the actual conditions at sea than the more static official information can provide. Insight into the state of repair of navigational aids or the current location of shifting sand shoals is often the province of individual mariners. By sharing their knowledge, mariners can benefit the maritime community as a whole and improve safety and efficiency across the board.

A group of North Sea countries is about to roll out a new prototype system, named Maritime Data Collection System MDCS, that will address these challenges, making it easier for mariners to actively deliver corrections and feedback on the conditions they observe. MDCS will be a single-point-of-reporting from mariners to the maritime and hydrographic agencies in each country. No longer will it be necessary for mariners to search for the correct contact information for individual agencies – behind the portal, the agencies will manage the distribution of questions and reports from mariners among themselves. By using a streamlined approach among the North Sea countries, vessels in this area will only need to become familiar with one reporting environment, consolidated reporting forms and consistent language across the region.

The MDCS portal is envisioned as a reporting forum for diverse information such as nautical chart and publication updates and inconsistencies, planned operations and exercises in the territorial seas and proposed renovations in harbour areas. The portal will also be a means for mariners to stay updated on immediate and ongoing activities that may affect their navigation, such as harbour renovations that are not yet reported or incorporated into harbour pilots or nautical charts. Through access to the individual countries' Notices to Mariners and Nautical Chart Updates, the portal is also positioned to become a critical resource for both mariners and maritime offices – as a supplement to existing resources, and not as a replacement of them.

The MDCS is being developed as part of the three-year BLAST project, which has been presented at BSHC15 already by Denmark under F-6.1. A consortium of public agencies, private companies and universities are working towards harmonising and integrating data across the regional, administrative and sectoral boundaries (<http://blast-project.eu>).

The prototype portal is planned to be launched in autumn 2011. Professional and leisure mariners, harbour officials, are encouraged to send their feedback on its ability to simplify their access to the information they need while at sea or while planning a voyage.

An explanation of the status and practical use of MDCS in more detail will be given at the meeting.
