Ministry of Housing, Lands and Marine Affairs

Lands and Surveys Division

Country Report 2012 of the Hydrographic Unit

Summary History

The Trinidad and Tobago Hydrographic Unit was set up in the year 1982 as a joint effort between the Trinidad & Tobago and the United Nations Development Project to chart the seas of our Archipelagic State. The Unit had at its head Captain/Hydrographer Graham Holden who was at that time the United Nations co-ordinater and our local counterpart Mr. Francis L Charles, Land and Marine Surveyor.
The unit was structured as follows.

Staff:

It was envisaged that the Unit be staffed with the relevant personnel to achieve the maximum output and therefore the following positions were filled.

Technical Survey Operations Personnel:

One Hydrographic Surveyor 111
One Hydrographic Surveyor 11
Two Hydrographic Surveyors 1
Six Hydrographic Assistants
Two Electronic Technicians
Two Cartographers

Vessel Survey Operations Personnel:

One Master
One Mate
One Engineer

Two Deckhands

Equipment:

The MV Meridian (to be procured at the time):

The Unit then started its surveys with the use of the Trinidad & Tobago Port Authority vessel before acquiring our own seventy-five feet specially built survey vessel the MV Meridian in the year 1986.

Projects:

The hydrographic unit was extremely active in carrying out its mandate and has produced one colour chart of the Port of Spain harbour on its own and three other colour charts, the most recent being in 2009 having partnered with **NavOceano** with whom we have a cooperative agreement.
We have also done numerous bathymetric surveys of bays and have assisted various Government Ministries and non-government agencies in carrying out surveys.
The Unit also conducted the surveys which demarked our boundaries to define our archipelagic boundaries between our neighbouring islands.

Training:

Several of our officers both past and present were exposed to international training in the field of hydrographic surveys at various countries e.g. Mississippi, Trieste Italy, and HMS Drake England. Some members also had the opportunity of being a part of a survey to map our continental shelf which was done by World Wide Surveying Company Ltd. We currently possess two category B trained surveyors who have attained their training in the early 1990's.

Tidal monitoring:

The Hydrographic Unit recognizes the importance of collecting continuous tidal data both for surveying purposes and for the monitoring of sea-level rise and therefore has upgraded and expanded its tidal gauge network. The Unit now has six Micro COM digital units with GOES satellite transmission capability.The ultimate goal of this venture is to establish mean sea level which would in turn assist in land development planning.

Constraints:

The Unit has not been without its challenges and one has to recognize that with the retirement of some of our trained personnel and the failure to fill vacancies and continue the training of personnel it have been less productive, however there seems to be some hope as we have been able to recruit one Land surveyor to fill a Hydrographic Surveyor 1 post.

The MV Meridian is still mechanically sound but needs some repair work to its hull and as a result is currently dry docked for repairs. Our surveying equipment on board the vessel needs upgrading. The Unit has two hydrographic assistants who has formal training in hydrography and therefore with the upgrade of equipment and recruitment of other staff to fill vacant positions will be able to resume its surveying mandate.

The situation in Trinidad is fairly unique; the Marine responsibility that may be handled solely by a hydrographic unit is currently shared among varying ministries in Trinidad and Tobago. The Port authority is responsible for port maintenance, the Maritime Unit currently disseminates notices to mariners as well as charts buoys and beacons and also the Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) of Trinidad and Tobago also shares in the duties. Currently there isn't much collaboration among these ministries and unfortunately there isn't a trained Category A hydrographic surveyor on staff in Trinidad and Tobago. Thus, a fully trained hydrographic surveyor is needed to assess and address the issues that arise from this sharing of duties.

Meeting\Conferences:

Trinidad & Tobago being an up to date financial member of the IHO has not attended any of their meetings since 2004 at Biloxi Mississippi and therefore has lost some very important opportunities in participating in extremely high level hydrographic discussions and facilitations which may have redounded to our benefiting from many training programmes.