

Report on Extraordinary Meeting of the Southern Africa & Islands Hydrographic Commission

On 20 March 2003, the Southern Africa and Islands Hydrographic Commission met in an extraordinary session to discuss the work of the Strategic Planning Working Group (SPWG). The meeting was chaired by Albano Gove, the Chairman of the Commission. Mrs. Du Plessis of the South African Hydrographic Office acted as Secretary. The meeting was hosted by CAPT Leon Reeder at the South African Navy complex in Pretoria. Present were Admiral M. Smit, recently appointed Director of the South African Navy Hydrographic Office; Capt M. Van Der Meer, Director of Namibia Port Authority; Terse Langvik, Norwegian Hydrographic Office; and Rear Admiral Kenneth Barbor, Director of the International Hydrographic Bureau.

Mr. Gove welcomed the participants noting that the commission consists of 5 members and 9 associate members.

RADM Barbor provided a presentation that covered the history of the SPWG, its mandate as defined by the Terms of Reference laid down by the XVI IHC, its methods of work, its progress, its current status, its future efforts and its ultimate goals. Particular emphasis was placed on those issues confronting the SPWG in which the input from commission members would most benefit Mr. Gove's representation at future SPWG meetings. An in-depth discussion of many aspects of the SPWG's work followed the presentation.

An initial and repeated comment dealt with the necessity that the IHO prominently figure capacity building in its future structure. Capacity building is clearly a central issue for this commission. The meeting noted that capacity building was explicitly mentioned in the new set of objectives agreed to by the SPWG and a strawman proposal of the future structure of the IHO provided for a sub-committee focusing on capacity building. Note was also made of the allowance for a trust fund for capacity building. Such a fund was deemed very important for meaningful capacity building but difficulties in realizing such a fund was acknowledged. It was pointed out that not developing hydrographic capacity in all coastal nations was a threat to the world's shipping and environment. It was also expressed that the IHO needs to develop a better mechanism for matching training needs of developing countries with free education opportunities.

Additionally addressed in the discussions were:

- Burden sharing - review of dues based on tonnage - would dues based on tonnage of maritime commerce overcome the issue of Flag of Convenience States' hesitancy in joining IHO?
- Selection of Secretary-General and Directors. Is an age limitation necessary? Are term limits necessary? A mechanism to ensure that the S-G and directors are not all replaced simultaneously is needed.
- Selection of Assistant Directors by only the S-G was a topic of concern without additional guidance and regulations.
- Empowerment of committees - concern that recommendations of a broadly representative and competent committee could be defeated by less representative and less competent council. Perhaps council could confirm recommendations unless majority explicitly disapprove for financial or policy reasons not technical reasons.
- Frequency of meetings was discussed. Issue of division of decision making authority between assembly and council was discussed.

The timeline for the remaining work of the SPWG was discussed and the importance of every

member state taking ownership of the process was emphasized. From now until the extraordinary conference individual member state input is important to obtain the two thirds majority necessary for adoption of the proposed changes. More importantly, the need for each hydrographer to usher the amended convention through their Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Parliament or similar bodies was emphasized.

The members were appreciative of the preservation and discussion as it added clarity to several recent pieces of information distributed from the SPWG. It was noted that the efforts to keep all informed either through the SPWG Secretary or through the Regional Commission are commendable.

As a final action, the ordinary meeting of the SA&IHC was set for 24-25 September 2003 in Windhoek, Namibia.