

The liberated organisation

An article by MATHIAS JONAS

The IHO has been working on organisational changes for several years. During the 3rd Extraordinary International Hydrographic Conference (EIHC) in 2005 and the International Hydrographic Conference (IHC) in 2007, the constitutional documents were approved in the meeting but they needed support by 48 member countries. As this now has been reached, changes will be made, entering into force on 8 November 2016.

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The International Hydrographic Organization IHO is surrounded by the aura of its extraordinary founding history and residence. In 1921 Prince Albert I. of Monaco, a passionate marine researcher, established the IHO predecessor, the International Hydrographic Bureau IHB at the foothills of the Monte Carlo, from which today you still have a remarkable view onto the famous marina and the Mediterranean Sea.

The prospects of this international technical organisation for welcoming a growing number of new member states with national hydrographic tasks and a corresponding modern organisational structure improved drastically with the international entry into force of the revised IHO Convention, which will take effect as of November 2016. The IHO deals with many hydrographic topics in an up-to-date manner and has gained considerable reputation in the IMO, the International Maritime Organization of the United Nations, with the digital flagship electronic sea chart ECDIS. However, the constitution and organisational body are still characterised by pre-computer era working methods.

The start-up for the announced quantum leap took a long time: In the early years of this millennium a proposal of amendments was elaborated to the IHO Convention by experts for public law, and agreed on unanimously in 2004 after intensive discussions on the Extraordinary Hydrographic

Conference under the chairmanship of the former BSH president Peter Ehlers.

The new IHO Convention, modestly called Protocol of Amendments, enjoys the status of an international contract; for its entering into force many member states needed the approval of its national parliaments. The well-known attitude of many states towards hydrographic significance is reflected in the ratification history of the renewed contractual text. It took twelve years for the last member state – Syria – to send the official ratification approval to its embassy in Paris and thus to obtain the quorum.

Which changes will bring the new IHO Convention taking effect on 8 November 2016 and which benefits will arise for the organisation?

The most significant change concerns the accession of new members. United Nations states are automatically qualified for IHO membership, thus the formerly time consuming procedures for seeking the approval of a two third majority of existing member states is not required anymore. An increase of members does not only imply a greater representation and political importance but also increasing membership fees, which are calculated according to the ship tonnage under the corresponding national flag. Huge flag states like Liberia, Panama and Malta do not belong to the IHO yet. The simplified procedures give hope for the accession of important new entries.

The revisions of the new IHO Convention introduce UN organisations, in particular to the IMO, with regard to the IHO internal administration and organisational body. The International Hydrographic Bureau headquarters in Monaco will now be called IHO Secretariat. It will be led by a future Secretary General replacing the former position of the IHB President. Robert Ward, current President, will take over the new position in this legislative period until 31 July 2017. These changes will show consequences. So far, the President was »first among equals« in the Directing Committee, that comprised a President and two Directors. His main task was to represent the organisation to the outside. However, passing a resolution concerning strategic and operational measures remained in the responsibility of the three nominated IHB Directors. The President had no directive towards the Directors. Based on the amended Convention this right is now given to the Secretary Gen-



eral. Furthermore, it changes the eligibility requirements for candidates applying for one of the three positions. So far, candidates needed to prove a close relation between their professional career, hydrography and practical experience at sea, ideally having worked in hydrographic surveying. However, this IHO relevant qualification doesn't automatically imply the ability to manage an international organisation. Talented managers with an academic, economic or legal background were excluded from the applications until now, as well as candidates older than 65 years seeking a position in the Secretariat. These regulations do not exist anymore.

The most important body of the organisation was the Hydrographic Conference taking place every five years so far. It will be replaced by an Assembly of all member states meeting in a three-year-cycle. A Council made up of 30 states that show highest interest in hydrography will meet annually – an entirely new element. One of the controversial questions is how to measure this interest according to the new convention. In future, ten seats will be given to the states with the greatest national tonnage; the remaining 20 seats will be divided among the 15 regional committees by means of a still untested procedure. The

aim of the three-year-cycle meetings of Council and Assembly is to provide more flexibility in decision-taking processes, choosing topics and use of budget. Additionally, the instrument of voting by correspondence changed in so far as decisions will be taken based on a majority of the member states that cast a vote, instead of the still existing arrangement where a majority of all member states entitled to vote is required. However, it is still unclear whether the Council with its 30 members is allowed to take decisions for the reporting committees for technical standardisation and international cooperation. This IHO working level made up of committees and related working groups had already been restructured in 2009 with regard to the new Convention.

The long awaited new organisation has finally arrived at the Côte d'Azur. It is now up to the Secretary General, the Directors and the Council Chairman to live up to the expectations of the former generation. The time has definitely come for these changes as processes depending on hydrographic information such as sea transportation, energy production, resource extraction and marine conservation speed up globally and call for an organisation that works successfully on international level. [↕](#)



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