

## ANNEX C TO EA<sub>t</sub>HC WEST AFRICA ACTION TEAM REPORT DECEMBER 2002

### COUNTRY REPORT: GABON

#### INTRODUCTION.

1. International. Gabon is not a member of IHO, nor associate member of the EA<sub>t</sub>HC. Gabon has participated as observer to meetings of this regional hydrographic commission, but it seems that for the last two meetings, no invitation to participate and no report of the Conferences have reached them. Gabon is a member of MOWCA and of PMAWCA (via OPRAG: Office des Ports et Rades du Gabon, which is subordinated to the Minister of Merchant Marine).
2. Gabon is not a member of IALA, nor signatory to the SAR convention, but has acceded to SOLAS and to UNCLOS.
3. Preliminary Liaison. The visit of the WAAT was prepared by the French Defence Attaché services (colonel Turpin, Major Beaulieu), with the help of Commander P Leclerc (French advisor to the Gabonese CNS for the implementation of radar/visual watchtowers near Libreville) and in close liaison with Mr Christian BIGNOUMA-IBINGA of the Minister of Merchant Marine.
4. Points of Contact. Up-dates to the IHO Yearbook:
  - a. Name and rank of the Director or Head / Nom et grade du directeur: Mr Christian KOWETH-DEEMIN , Conseiller du Directeur Général de la Marine Marchande, BP 803 Libreville, + 241 51 45 44
  - b. N° of Charts published / Nombre de cartes publiées: 7 (cartes du SHOM (France) n° 6183, 6369, 6372, 6373, 6378, 6446, 6666 correspondant aux cartes INT 2812, 2921, 2922, 2923, 2924 et 2931)
  - c. Maritime Authority / Autorité Maritime : M le ministre de la Marine Marchande
  - d. Lighthouse Authority / Service des Phares et Balises : M Hilarion ONE , Chef du Service de la Signalisation Maritime + 24176 23 15
  - e. Processing of nautical information / Traitement de l'information nautique: Direction Générale de la Marine Marchande (office to be created / bureau à créer)
  - f. Land cartography / Cartographie terrestre : Institut National de la Cartographie
  - g. Harbour surveying / Hydrographie portuaire : M Boudiongo OPRAG (Office des Ports et Rades du Gabon) BP 1051 Libreville

#### DESCRIPTION OF MARITIME ACTIVITIES.

5. National Maritime Affairs. National maritime affairs are dealt with by the Ministère de la Marine Marchande / Direction Générale de la Marine Marchande (General Directorate of Merchant Marine). The General Director (Mr Alfred NGUIA BANDA , tel & fax + 241 76 01 85) is seconded by Mr Alain GNAMBAULT KAKA (Deputy Director: tel + 241 76 01 93 , e-mail [alagnaka@yahoo.fr](mailto:alagnaka@yahoo.fr)) and assisted by following directors or head of services:

Mr Christian BIGNOUMA-IBINGA , Directeur des Gens de Mer, de la Navigation et de la Sécurité Maritimes, tél & fax + 241 76 06 00

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M Hilarion ONE, Chef du Service de Signalisation Maritime de l'Estuaire , tel +241 76 23 15

6. There are 4 local delegates (délégués provinciaux) for Maritime Affairs for the areas of Libreville/Port-Gentil (M Allyanoh MOUENZI MOUENZI +241 72 45 47), Maritime Ogooué (M Bernardin ENDAMANE ENGONE +241 55 24 53), Middle Ogooué (M etienne IGAMBAT AWORET +241 58 11 62) and Mayumba (M Ruben NZIBE +241 83 51 87).
7. The main part of Maritime Affairs are concentrated within this Ministry. The Navy (contact, Assistant to the CNS, Capitaine de Corvette Major Mally HONDJOUA) considers that Maritime Safety is under the responsibility of the Merchant Marine Minister, and that the Navy has no direct role to play in this matter. The Navy has implemented three radar/visual watchtowers in the area of Equatorial Guinea/Gabon border, to the North of the access channel to Libreville and Port-Gentil, which are intended to contribute to the control of illegal immigration. These watchtowers could also be used for SAR purposes, but their surveillance area is localized to the approaches to Libreville.
8. M Pierre MAGANGA (Direction Générale du Droit de la Mer at the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et de la Francophonie, tel +241 73 12 48, e-mail [dgdm@internetgabon.com](mailto:dgdm@internetgabon.com) ) participated in one of the WAAT meetings, and was concerned by the application of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and by the need for setting up a national oceanographic database.
9. Trade and Maritime Traffic. No original statistics on shipping transit and port calls, nor national report on maritime activities were available. OPRAG was asked to forward some recent figures concerning these activities.
10. Through Routes. These routes concern mainly the traffic with Nigeria, Togo and Benin, with Europe, and in the South of Gabon a small amount with Sao Tome.
11. Transshipment. There is no real transshipment activity. The port traffic is mainly concerned with exportation of oil and manganese from Owendo and Port-Gentil, from Mayumba and Cocobeach (wood).
12. The oil terminal in the North of Port Gentil is a private harbour (Elf and Sogara) and is devoted to exportation of oil produced from inland oilfields.
13. Feeder, Coasting and Local Trade. Coastal and local trade is limited and concerns Lagos, Douala, Cotonou and Sao Tome for foreign exchanges. National maritime routes concern the links Port Gentil – Libreville, Port Gentil – Gamba – Omboué – Mayumba for mainly freight, Port Gentil – Lambaréné (inland waterways) for freight and passengers (half/half).
14. Tourism - Cruise Liners. No cruise liners visit Gabon.
15. Tourism - Small Craft. No real tourism traffic is observed; only a few sailing boats sail between Libreville and Port Gentil, or in the Bay of Cap Lopez. There are possible plans for establishing a marina at Port Mole (Libreville), however water pollution and the danger posed by semi-submerged logs in the river could be a problem.
16. Fisheries. National fishermen conduct artisanal fishing from Port Gentil, Libreville and Mayumba. Foreign fishing vessels are numerous (Korea, Russia, Japan and China) and poorly regulated. They are known to fish from close to the shore to well offshore, usually transferring catches to factory ships.
17. Responsibility for Safety of Navigation. Responsibilities in this area are poorly defined. OPRAG and the pilots claimed shared responsibility for buoyage in the approaches to the main harbours, however neither was charged with responsibility for bathymetric survey work and the positioning,

marking and removal of wrecks. No clear responsibility is assumed by any authority for safety of navigation in the coastal waters as well as the rest of the EEZ.

18. Defence Force Responsibilities. The Navy is not directly involved in hydrographic matters. Co-operative actions between Navy, maritime police and national police have taken place in May 2002 against Nigerian pirates operating from a Gabonese fishermen village against ships anchored near Libreville.
19. Coastal Zone Management and Environmental Protection. An act has been promulgated for land protection, but not for marine areas : it concerns mainly pollution control.
20. It is observed that the coastal areas in Gabon are generally uninhabited, and consist of mangrove or sand dunes.

### **CAPACITY ANALYSIS.**

21. Status of surveys within the National Maritime Zone. Published French charts of Gabonese waters are mostly based upon surveys from the 1950's and early 60's. Regular up-dates from Gabonese authorities were received by SHOM till 1986 (see below), but since then the information flow has stopped. The WAAT were told that none of the ships passing through Gabonese waters had reported any concerns about the quality of charted information. Recent surveys have been carried out between Libreville and Port Gentil by the USNS HENSON (end 1999, beginning of 2000): the validated fairsheets were expected to be delivered to Gabon at the end of October 2002. The French member of the WAAT requested that these be passed to SHOM for charting action – this was agreed to by the US and Gabonese representatives at the WAAT meeting. Gabon should indicate their intentions to the Commanding Officer, Naval Oceanographic Office prior to dissemination of the data to a third party, as outlined on the distribution statement on the smooth sheets. The French survey vessel BH LAPLACE was conducting additional survey work off Port Gentile whilst the WAAT was in Gabon. The results of these two surveys will be very helpful in bringing charts up to date.
22. The Gabonese also raised a question about the source data for information shown on Spanish chart 55A near the border with Equatorial Guinea. This is a medium scale chart covering mostly Equatorial Guinea. There is concern that the source data diagram indicates Spanish surveys encroaching into Gabonese waters, which the Guinean authorities are using to back up their maritime boundary claim. Such a possibility seems very unlikely since survey authorization would have been sought from Gabonese authorities, and exchange of information with the primary charting authority should have occurred in accordance with IHO principles.
23. Finally, there is a need for modern surveys in the port of Mayumba which is planned to be developed for the export of wood and minerals.
24. Collection and Circulation of Nautical Information. Up to date information was regularly sent to SHOM until 1986, before the “Bureau de l'Information Nautique” disappeared during a re-organization of the services. M Koweth Deemin insisted on the importance of re-activating such a Bureau with the assistance of the NAVAREA II coordinator. The possibility to use the SafetyNet service of INMARSAT via the NAVAREA II coordinator, as an interim phase before NAVTEX capacity is locally implemented, has not been followed by Gabon in spite of a formal proposal by SHOM. Hence there is no dissemination of nautical information except via the pilots.
25. Unfortunately there is much information that needs to be given to ships at sea. For instance, 90% of the light buoys are presently out of order; and there are several well known dangers in the port approaches in addition to temporary hazards such as large floating tree trunks. The WAAT were informed about a particularly dangerous wreck with superstructure that emerges at low tide, located very close to the Libreville entrance channel; the wreck is not accurately positioned or

marked, has not been reported to SHOM and is not portrayed on the published chart. Several other wrecks were located in the vicinity of Libreville during the HENSON surveys of 1999-2000.

26. Concerning the SAR provisions, there is no clearly defined liaison between sea and land. When the ferry “Bab Ben Zélé” sank in 2002, with more than 80 persons killed, the MRCC organization (Coordination center in Spain, regional center in Congo, centre in Gabon) proved to be ineffective, since all the assistance was provided by ships sailing near the location at the time of the sinking, after the distress alert had been passed by sea to sea VHF contacts. The Florence Conference on SAR (2000) was mentioned, but so far no regional solution has been developed.
27. Survey Capability. OPRAG has set up an hydrographic survey unit in Owendé, where two Category B surveyors<sup>1</sup> carry out in-surveys of the main jetty before dredging. The Dutch company Boskalis International conduct dredging on the main jetty<sup>2</sup> in order to maintain safe depths alongside. The two port surveyors are onboard for this out-survey, but they have no access to the data.
28. The equipment held in the port survey unit is obsolete, consisting of an analogue echosounder Raytheon 719 and ‘Topofil’ distance measuring unit with a maximum range of 150m. This less than adequate equipment is all that is available to conduct surveys in Owendé, Port Gentil and Port Mole (Libreville). To try and improve their capacity, a reasonable list of standard equipment was requested in 2000; this comprised of a DGPS compatible with the differential station used by Boskalis Int, a dual frequency echosounder, some IT (laptop, digitizer and processor) and a modern tide gauge. So far this request has not been responded to by OPRAG. The WAAT thoroughly endorse the request, believing that the modest investment in new equipment could make a significant improvement hydrographic capability, such that additional tasks (positioning of buoys and wrecks, monitoring channel depths, post-dredging surveys) could be achieved which in turn would provide economies or revenues for OPRAG and improve the safety of navigation in the port.
29. The enthusiasm and skill of the two surveyors, with their proven ability to gain results from rudimentary equipment is impressive. They represent an embryonic survey capacity in Gabon that should be nurtured. With the addition of updated equipment they could provide a shallow water survey capability.
30. The oil companies carrying out surveys in Gabon’s EEZ are supposed to send results of their surveys to Gabon authorities.
31. Independent Chart Production Capability. The Institut National de la Cartographie is officially responsible for all kinds of cartography. In practice they work on topographic maps and are not involved in marine charting.
32. SHOM assumes the primary charting responsibility for Gabon’s waters, and can continue this task provided that nautical information is regularly made available. At this stage of development it is not considered necessary or feasible for Gabon to set up its own marine cartographic unit.

## **PROPOSALS FOR CO-ORDINATION AND CAPABILITY BUILDING.**

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<sup>1</sup> MM Bertrand LELE et Simon KING, harbour surveyors, trained at Université de Bordeaux and at SHOM in 1998. Since that time they have maintained contact with Bordeaux and SHOM and were able to observe survey operations onboard, however no further training has been received.

<sup>2</sup> Siltation problems did not occur with the initial harbour configuration: tidal currents were cleaning out the approaches to the jetties. Siltation problems appeared when new main jetty was built, most probably due to a modification of the tidal currents. A model would have perhaps predicted this problem: for running the model hydrographic data would have been necessary (depth, tide, currents). The main jetty presently needs surveying every 2 weeks and dredging approximately every month.

33. National Hydrographic Committee. There is no high-level co-ordinating body for hydrographic matters in Gabon. At present the Ministry of Merchant Marine plays a central role and it should be easy to use this particular position in order to organize a regular meeting of all interested parties involved. A first stage would be to organize the collection and dissemination of Maritime Safety Information (MSI: see below). The MSI should meet the needs of mariners and shipping companies, and make a significant improvement in the safety of navigation in Gabonese waters. A second stage would be to expand the capacity of the OPRAG port survey team based at Owendo and start tackling priority survey tasks in port approaches.
34. The proposed terms of reference and the tasks of such a Committee were provided by the WAAT. The creation of such a committee has been raised with the Minister for Merchant Marine, Mr Felix SIBY, who clearly supported the proposal. Importantly, the Committee needs to be officially recognized by the Government as part of its response to meeting national responsibilities under IMO instruments like the SOLAS convention or GMDSS organization. All of the key administrations (Navy, Merchant Marine, Foreign Affairs) were found to be in favour of such a Committee.
35. MSI Organisation and GMDSS. For the time being, there is no real MSI organisation nor GMDSS operations. The existing method is to pass important information to ships on arrival via the pilot. For ocean-going ships, the navigational warnings should be made available on INMARSAT (SafetyNET) via the NAVAREA II coordinator: although it was noted that no input has been received from Gabon for many years. For ships sailing through Gabonese waters or approaching Gabonese harbours, NAVTEX should be the optimum solution; but this infrastructure does not exist at the moment. However, since the concerned ships are part of international shipping, they will have INMARSAT facilities onboard, hence the same information could be passed on SafetyNET via the NAVAREA II co-ordinator. This requires the MSI to be made available to the NAVAREA coordinator by telephone/fax/e-mail. For local coastal warnings, the only practical solution is to use VHF through the “capitaineries”. The casualty of Bab Ben Zélé suggests that the present VHF communications between land and sea are not optimized. The situation should be fully reviewed whilst maintaining the important role of the pilots in any future GMDSS organization.
36. No NtMs nor nautical publication (List of Lights, sailing directions, etc) are issued by Gabon. These publications are published and maintained by SHOM.
37. Hydrographic Capability. There already exists an embryonic hydrographic capacity which could be greatly improved with a modest investment in new equipment. With continued close co-operation with France and USA, a much more effective capacity could be developed.
38. Regional activity could be easily prepared under the auspices of IHO (EAtHC), where technical matters, training, and implementation of GMDSS are discussed and promoted. For hydrographic surveys such a regional cooperation does not yet seem a priority since the most important work to be carried out concerns inshore shallow waters. For MSI a regional solution for a shared NAVTEX station with neighbouring country is necessary (the range of HF make its possible to cover the waters of several countries with one station).
39. Gabon is represented in regional structures like MOWCA or CEMAC (Communauté Economique et Monétaire des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale, which has a maritime protocol) by OPRAG. Contacts are mentioned with the IMO regional coordinator in Abidjan.

## **PROPOSALS FOR ASSISTANCE.**

40. Training. There is no immediate need for training additional qualified surveyors, although details of available courses were provided by the WAAT. When new equipment is purchased for the port survey team of Owendo it will be important to ensure appropriate training is also provided.
41. Equipment. The list of equipment requested by the port survey team was fully endorsed by the WAAT. The total purchase cost is estimated to be of the order of \$100,000 and should make a significant improvement to the ability of the team to undertake survey tasks for the port authority.
42. Funding. No specific funding issues were raised. The cost of new equipment could be found within the budget of OPRAG and revenues raised from surveying services.

## **FOLLOW UP ACTIONS.**

43. Formation of a NHC and Development of a National Hydrographic Strategy. The formation of a National Hydrographic Committee (or Committee for Maritime Safety) has been proposed and has received general agreement, notably by the Minister.

### **Action : Gabon**

44. Provision of hydrographic services in accordance with SOLAS. France can continue to issue nautical publications, charts and up-dates, on behalf of Gabon. The provision of MSI and the capacity to conduct surveys according to local priorities will support the safety of navigation in Gabonese waters. An agreement between the States of France and Gabon could provide an unambiguous statement regarding Gabon's commitment to meet SOLAS regulations.

### **Action: Gabon & France**

45. Encouragement of effective and timely collection and promulgation of Hydrographic Information.
  - a. It is urgent to report existing known dangers to navigation – particularly the wreck in the approaches to Libreville which requires fixing and possibly marking as soon as possible.  
**Action: Gabon**
  - b. An organization for the collection and dissemination of Maritime Safety Information needs to be instituted as soon as possible, with a link being established with the NAVAREA II co-ordinator at EPSHOM, Brest, for the distribution of urgent MSI on INMARSAT SafetyNET.  
**Action: Gabon & EPSHOM**
  - c. Recent co-operative surveys with the USA (USNS HENSON) and France (BH LAPLACE) will provide modern hydrographic data in the approaches to the major ports of Libreville and Port Gentil. It is important this modern survey work is reflected as soon as possible in nautical charts and publications published by SHOM.  
**Action: Gabon & SHOM**

46. Encouragement of Development of Hydrographic Capability.

- a. Consider purchase of new equipment for port survey team a priority. France/IHB provide advice as necessary on equipment and training packages.  
**Action: Gabon and France/IHB**
- b. Once equipped, immediate priorities for survey work are to monitor the port approaches all the way from the fairway buoy, checking of buoyage, checking of berths (particularly monitoring post-dredging surveys) and fixing dangers to navigation in the inshore coastal areas.  
**Action: France continue to provide advice and assistance.**