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**CIRCULAR LETTER 12/2003**  
**31 January 2003**

**RE-SURVEYING OF MAJOR SHIPPING ROUTES AND PORTS OF THE BALTIC SEA AREA**

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Dear Hydrographer,

We are pleased to include a letter from the Estonian Maritime Administration and a Press Release concerning a joint hydrographic re-surveying plan of the Baltic Sea countries, under the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission – HELCOM) initiative.

The IHB Directing Committee hopes that other areas around the world will follow the example of the Baltic Sea and initiate similar actions in order to improve the safety at sea.

On behalf of the Directing Committee,  
Yours sincerely,

*(original signed)*

Vice Admiral Alexandros MARATOS  
President

Annex A: Letter from the Estonian Maritime Administration (in English only)

Annex B: Press Release (in English only)

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Re-surveying of major shipping routes  
and ports of the Baltic Sea Area

Dear Mr President,

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission-HELCOM) is a intergovernmental Commission dealing with the protection of the Baltic Sea environment. Taking account of the growing intensity of sea transport (including the transport of oil and dangerous cargo) the HELCOM on the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting in Copenhagen on 10 September 2001 adopted the declaration on the safety of navigation and emergency capacity in the Baltic Sea area (HELCOM Copenhagen Declaration). According to this Declaration the Governments of the Baltic Sea countries agreed to improve the existing routeing measures in the Baltic Sea and adopted additional measures to ensure improved hydrographic surveys and to promote the use of ECDIS for navigation.

The task of the Governmental Hydrographic Offices of the Baltic Sea is to develop a scheme for systematic re-surveying of major shipping routes and ports in order to ensure that safety of navigation is not endangered by inadequate source information. The survey shall be carried out to a standard not inferior to the latest edition of IHO S-44. The scheme shall be elaborated jointly by Hydrographic Offices of the Baltic Sea not later than by the end of 2002 with the aim to begin its implementation in 2003. The major shipping routes and ports of the Baltic Sea must be covered by ENC by the end of 2002 and secondary shipping routes and ports by the end of 2004. The tasks adopted by the Copenhagen Declaration have been included (December 2002) into the HELCOM Convention as Regulation 9.

I am pleased to inform you that all the Hydrographic Offices of the Baltic Sea, members or associated members of Baltic Sea Hydrographic Commission (BSHC), have been very actively taking part in the activities to fulfil the above-mentioned tasks. Three extraordinary meetings of BSHC have been held to work out a Harmonized Hydrographic Re-survey Plan of the Baltic Sea. The Plan was adopted by the BSHC on December 2002 and will certainly help to speed up the process of coordinated and purposeful activities to get more reliable and precise information regarding the conditions of navigation on the fairways of the Baltic Sea and with that to improve the safety of navigation what is the main aim of our responsibility.

Perhaps the HELCOM initiative to improve the safety of navigation in Baltic Sea area will serve as a good example for other sea areas. May be it is reasonable that Regional Hydrographic Commissions whose areas of responsibility are as sensitive as the Baltic Sea (e.g. the North Sea, etc) will follow the Baltic Sea example and take similar action to improve the safety navigation with more reliable hydrographic information. The Harmonized Re-survey Plan is attached.

Also, please find enclosed the press release of the hydrographic re-survey in the Baltic Sea Area that could be used for information in IHO bulletin, etc. if you find it necessary.

Sincerely Yours,

Toivo Prela  
Chairman of the Baltic Sea Hydrographic Commission

# PRESS RELEASE

## **Baltic Sea countries have agreed on a joint hydrographic re-survey plan**

The Declaration of the Safety of Navigation and Emergency Capacity in the Baltic Sea Area (Copenhagen Declaration) was adopted on 10 September 2001 in Copenhagen by the Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (HELCOM). The improvement of existing routing measures and hydrographic re-surveying of major shipping routes and ports was foreseen in the Declaration.

Navigation today requires reliable data about the depth and bottom topography. Available navigational information concerning the depth of the Baltic Sea does not meet in many cases the present day demands. In several areas survey data are older than a hundred years and surveys have been carried out using old methods and equipment that do not meet mariners' needs and demands any longer. In addition to that during the course of years the bottom topography itself in many places might have also changed significantly.

The traffic in the Baltic Sea is very intense and is growing rapidly. Modern vessels (supertankers, high-speed liners, etc.) and their navigational devices (differential GPS, electronic chart systems – ECDIS) demand more precise and reliable data to guarantee the safety of navigation. Unreliable depth information of fairways can bring about disasters with irreparable damage to ships and serious pollution to the marine environment.

The chairman of the Baltic Sea Hydrographic Commission, Mr. Toivo Prela from the Estonian Maritime Administration, says:

“There is no excuse that almost half of the Baltic Sea area has not been adequately surveyed. The decision of the HELCOM in the Copenhagen Declaration to commit their countries to carry out systematic and regular re-surveying of shipping routes and ports and to develop the electronic navigational charts needed for a rapid introduction of ECDIS is timely and has led to a close co-operation between the Hydrographic Offices of the Baltic Sea countries.

The implementation of the co-ordinated survey plan will start in 2003 and will be a significant contribution to the safety of navigation since it is predicted that the amount of traffic increases in the Baltic Sea in the near future. The most recent accidents with tankers carrying cargoes in the Baltic Sea area is highlighting the importance that we must give our best to ensure the safest possible navigation in the Baltic Sea. The accident with the tanker Prestige might as well have occurred in the Baltic Sea area” concludes Mr. Toivo Prela.

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