

CIRCULAR LETTER 56/2004
6 August 2004

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN IHO MEMBER STATES AND THE IHB

Dear Hydrographer,

1. The SPWG has just completed an intensive assessment of the effectiveness of the IHO and recommended several changes to the Basic Documents to ensure a more responsive organization. A central issue addressed by the SPWG was the slowness with which the Organization was able to react to change. One source of this slowness is attributed to the lengthy period between Conferences. However, Article VI (6) of the IHO Convention provides that between sessions of the Conference, *“the Bureau may consult the Member Governments by correspondence on questions concerning the technical functioning of the Organization”*. Article 25 of the General Regulations and Administrative Resolution T 2.1 contain additional details of the procedure.

2. Actually, Circular Letters may be considered as the only way the IHB Directing Committee has to communicate directly with Member States between Conferences. Circular Letters are issued to keep Member States informed on administrative, technical and financial issues of importance to the proper functioning of the Organization. In some cases, Circular Letters propose initiatives put forward by Committees or Working Groups or by the IHB Directing Committee itself, seeking a decision of the Organization on a particular subject for internal purposes or for co-ordination with other international organizations. Therefore, Circular Letters are important vehicles for soliciting comments and registering the will of the Member States through voting, as necessary.

Member States by providing comments and further by voting, when necessary, do not simply exercise their right, but provide precise guidance to the Directing Committee on the way that they wish to proceed, according to the positions expressed. The Directing Committee follows the views expressed by Member States through the voting procedure.

3. It is with great regret that the Directing Committee informs Member States that the number of responses the Bureau receives on Circular Letters, either comments, votes or both, is far from satisfactory.

A survey of the responses received during 2003-2004, has indicated that:

- On average, only 40% to 50% of Member States responded to CLs;
- In several cases the responses were at the level of 25% to 30%;
- On a few occasions important, yet apparently non-controversial, issues were not accepted due to the low number of responses.

This level of responses makes it impossible to achieve the two-thirds majority needed for the approval of certain issues, and even difficult to achieve a simple majority. While the Convention clearly favours the decision-making process of the Conference, decision-making by correspondence provides ample

time to research, confer amongst other Member States and seek guidance or authorization within one's own government. It is not clear to the Directing Committee why many Member States do not vote.

4. The Directing Committee has very often, through telephone calls, e-mails and faxes, reminded Hydrographers that they have not responded to various Circular Letters. This cannot be repeated for all Circular Letters and must not be considered a normal procedure. Moreover, it is not an easy task as it may be interpreted as inappropriate influence from the Directing Committee. While there are initiatives under way to improve the decision-making process of the IHO, the length of time necessary to effect these changes will require use of the Circular Letter for the foreseeable future.

Not commenting and voting on Circular Letters affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the Bureau and the Organization. The Directing Committee brings this important issue to the attention of Member States in the hope that the situation will improve in the future. Any comments or suggestions are welcome.

On behalf of the Directing Committee
Yours sincerely,

(original signed)

Vice Admiral Alexandros MARATOS
President