

In-force Bulletins: An Alternative View

Submitted by NAVAREA X

SUMMARY

Executive Summary: This paper proposes that In-force Bulletins be deleted from IMO Resolution A.706(17) and replaced by In-force Warnings.

Action to be taken: Paragraph 6.

Related documents: WWNWS4/4/3B dated 23 August 2012

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 NAVAREA I has drawn the attention of the WWNWS-SC to the inconsistent procedures in place amongst NAVAREA Co-ordinators with respect to In-force Bulletins.

1.2 The IMO Resolution A.706(17) introduced In-force Bulletins during the 1970s when morse code was the standard form of long range maritime communications and when Notices to Mariners (NTM) were only available in hard copy and distributed by the mail system.

1.3 The definition of “In-force Bulletins” as currently stated in A.606(17) was based on the historical methodology of promulgating maritime safety information (MSI) and only requires to be broadcast NOT LESS than once a week.

2. COMMENTS

2.1 Since the 1970s, communications have improved considerably in reliability and speed, and ships now have access to SafetyNET, e-mail and the internet. Navigational warnings are delivered reliably by SafetyNET and ships can obtain, for voyage planning or a check of their communications, a list of all navigational warnings that are current by e-mail or internet access. The transition of navigational warnings to NTM after six weeks is also much more straightforward as NTM are now available from websites and are not subject to the delays and uncertainties of the mail system in the past.

2.2 Furthermore, over this period of forty years, ships bridge watchkeeping officers have taken over the communications function previously performed by radio operators. These officers have many functions and are concerned about the navigational warnings that are currently being broadcast or have made their way into NTM and corrected their charts (paper or electronic). They do not have the time to dwell on warnings that have been issued and

cancelled in the previous six weeks because the aid to navigation has been repaired or the oil rig has moved to another location, which will be the subject of a new navigational warning.

2.3 The current requirement to broadcast “not less than once per week” can result in a vessel not receiving the bulletin whilst transiting a NAVAREA.

3. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MARINER

3.1 When voyage planning, the mariner has to obtain navigational warnings and ensure that the charts have been corrected for the NTM. As per A.706(17) paragraph 4.1.2: “Navigational warnings shall remain in force until cancelled by the originating coordinator. Navigational warnings should be broadcast for as long as the information is valid; however, if they are readily available to mariners by other official means, for example in Notices to Mariners, then after a period of six weeks they may no longer be broadcast.” The mariner has a responsibility to be suitably informed and, these days, both navigational warnings and NTMs are much easier to obtain than they were in the 1970s.

3.2 With regard to NAVAREA X, the mariner can obtain navigational warnings via SafetyNET, e-mail and the internet. All current navigational warnings are broadcast on SafetyNET and if still valid after six weeks are either continued on SafetyNET or cancelled when published in NTMs. Furthermore, a list of current navigational warnings, a summary of the locations of mobile drilling rigs and special purpose vessels is available from the website or by e-mail to ausmsi@amsa.gov.au. This list of current warnings is updated every 30 minutes rather than the once per week minimum required by A.706(17). This is a better service as it only presents the relevant warnings and not those that have been issued and cancelled in the previous six weeks.

3.3 Regarding NTM, these can be obtained in the Australian area at: <http://www.hydro.gov.au/n2m/notices.htm> and the correlation to the navigational warning is noted at the relevant notice or section.

4. IN-FORCE BULLETINS

4.1 The paper presented by the NAVAREA I Co-ordinator reports inconsistencies amongst the NAVAREAs, some use the Bulletin and others do not and there are variations in the information presented.

4.2 The fact that NAVAREA X does not use In-force Bulletins does not affect the quality of its performance in providing navigational warnings. The combination of improved maritime communications and the quantity of navigational warnings negates the requirement for the Bulletin. NAVAREA X has decided to either continue broadcasting warnings that are valid beyond six weeks and have not been issued as NTMs, rather than create a list of warnings that are still in force but not broadcast. Therefore, navigational warnings are either broadcast on SafetyNET or incorporated into NTMs and cancelled, there is no other status.

4.3 In effect, NAVAREA X meets its commitments to mariners with regard to navigational warnings without requiring the use of In-force Bulletins by utilising the communications capability of SafetyNET, e-mail and the internet.

4.4 NAVAREA X has not received any negative feedback from mariners due to the non-promulgation of In-force Bulletins. This matter can be taken further by promulgating a questionnaire for mariners to respond to.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 With regard to NAVAREA X, there is no requirement for In-force Bulletins. Improved maritime communications allows the mariner to obtain navigational warnings on SafetyNET, e-mail or the internet. The quantity of navigational warnings in NAVAREA X does not require In-force Bulletins and warnings are either being broadcast or in NTMs.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 NAVAREA X recommends that the meaning of “In-force Bulletin” be deleted and replaced by “In-force Warnings” to mean:

“In-force Warnings are only those warnings that are currently being broadcast. It does not include the warnings that have been cancelled due to insertion in Notices to Mariners after a six week period.”

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE

7. The Sub-Committee is invited to consider the recommendation at section 6.