

11th CHRIS MEETING
IHB, Monaco, 16-19 November 1999

The Secretary General
International Organization for Standardization
Case Postale 56 CH-1211
Geneva
Switzerland

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD FOR ELECTRONIC CHART SYSTEM DATA

Dear Sir,

At the Annual Assembly Meeting of the Radio Technical Commission-Maritime (RTCM), held on 10-12 May 1999 in Orlando, Florida, the President of the Nautical Electronic Chart Systems Association (NECSA) stated that a submission had been made to ISO (ref: ISO/TC8/SC6 N32) in regard to establishing a performance standard for the database of Electronic Chart Systems. As the International Hydrographic Organization's (IHO) Director responsible for both paper and electronic charts, and as Chairman of the International Maritime Organization (IMO)/ IHO Harmonization Group on Electronic Chart Display and Information Systems (ECDIS) (HGE), I have taken the liberty of writing to you on the above matter.

As you may be aware, the IHO has been involved, for many years, in the consideration and development of performance standards and product specifications for digital charting. As the responsibilities of the National Hydrographic Offices, in regard to the provision of nautical charts and other safety of navigation information, are very specific, careful consideration has had to be given to every aspect of the transition from the traditional paper charts to the digital chart version. The IMO Performance Standards for ECDIS, which were developed by the IMO/IHO Harmonization Group on ECDIS (HGE) were eventually adopted by IMO Resolution A.817 (19) in November 1995 after more than ten years of intensive study and preparation. IHO Special Publication 57 (IHO S-57) is the IHO Standard for the Transfer of Digital Hydrographic Data that was formally adopted, as the official IHO standard at the XIVth International Hydrographic Conference in May 1992. Specifically referenced to the IMO Performance Standard for ECDIS, it contains more than 800 pages of technical charting requirements and includes a Product Specification for the Electronic Navigational Chart (ENC). The IMO Performance Standards permit National Maritime Safety Administrations to consider ECDIS as the functional equivalent of the charts required by regulation V/20 of the 1974 SOLAS Convention.

In 1995, the IMO Navigation Sub-Committee (IMO NAV) requested the HGE to draft "Guidelines for the Use of non-equivalent ECS". After many meetings, the HGE

advised the IMO NAV Sub-Committee that it was unable to obtain consensus about the advisability of formally recognizing the ECS in any way. At IMO NAV 44, held on 20-25 July 1998, the adoption of guidelines (or advice) on the use of non-equivalent electronic chart systems was deemed unnecessary, and is no longer under active consideration.

RTCM is considering standards for ECS equipment since there are a large number of smaller vessels that are unlikely to carry an ECDIS. The IMO, IHO and IEC have all considered or have declined to consider standards for ECS data.

The opinion of the overwhelming number of the IHO Member States is as follows:

- a) RTCM Performance Standards for ECS equipment could serve a purpose within industry and could serve as a guide for national legislators.
- b) An international standard for ECS data, that, by definition, does not meet the IHO/IMO standard for electronic charts, would create confusion amongst the users.
- c) For legal, and possible liability, reasons, ECS data, that is used outside of territorial waters, whose authorities may permit their use, would be required to be used in conjunction with paper charts. The requirement for another standard is questioned. An ECS data standard could not, in any way, be regarded as an extension of the IMO/IHO Standard for electronic chart data as suggested, by NESCA.
- d) For an ECS data standard to be of value, it would have to cover the navigational issues addressed in the ENC Product Specification, even if it is intended for use in simpler systems.

The IHO appreciates the role of ISO in the formulation and promulgation of international standards but should your organization decided to proceed with the consideration of establishing a standard for ECS data, the IHO, as the international organization, recognized by the IMO as the advisory body on all charting matters, requests that we be kept informed. It is also requested that references to an ECS standard being an extension of the IMO/IHO standard be avoided.

On behalf of the Directing Committee
Yours sincerely,

Rear Admiral Neil GUY
Director