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Improving the provision and quality of nautical port information

Submitted by the International Harbour Masters' Association (IHMA), the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH), the International Federation of Ship Masters' Associations (IFSMA) and the Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF)

	SUMMARY
Executive summary:	The various, sometimes inconsistent sources of nautical information required for port entry and berth/terminal usage can lead to confusion on the part of the user. Misunderstanding or misuse of such data bears directly on ship and port safety, the efficiency of port operations and the protection of the environment. It is, therefore, necessary to consider a more efficient and standardized way of making this information available to users, including publishers of nautical information. A web-based template for the input and production of port entry information is now available and work is underway to develop a similar system for berths/terminals. This document updates information previously submitted to MSC 83.
Strategic direction:	8
High-level action:	8.3.1
Planned output:	-
Action to be taken:	Paragraph 20
Related documents:	SOLAS regulations V/9.1 and V/34; resolution A.893(21), paragraph 1.3; resolution A.970(24), paragraphs 2.3 and 3.2; MSC 83/INF.19 and FAL 35/INF.4

Introduction

1   It has been recognized that there is a significant lack of uniformly presented, complete, accurate and easily accessible nautical information about ports (nautical port information). For a variety of reasons, this information is considered to be of great importance to masters, shipping lines, company trading floors, agents and publishers of such information. Initial research has shown that harbour masters are seen as the authoritative and trusted source for this information.

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2   Nautical port information can be divided into two parts:

    .1   General port information, such as:

-        Contact information and port regulations;
-        Notifications, arrival and departure checklists;
-        Port description and navigation;
-        Port safety;
-        Port security;
-        Environmental information;
-        Nautical services and communication;
-        Port operations and services.

    .2   Specific berth/terminal information, such as:

-        Admission policy;
-        Terminal particulars (including berth depth/length/width, type of fendering and details and availability of cargo handling equipment like cranes, manifolds, etc.
-        Terminal regulations;
-        Terminal facilities (bunkers, waste reception, etc.).

3   The lack of uniformity and availability of sound nautical port information stems from the fact that this information is generally published in printed documents and therefore any amendments to such information are administratively cumbersome, resource intensive and, inevitably, late. In addition, there is no central point from which information is available. Thus a port's customers tend to turn to ships' agents for information, as they cannot necessarily rely on existing publications. They, in turn, along with other enquirers call the harbour master's office and/or terminal operators to gain the required information; ships' agents have reported that 95% of the queries they handle involve nautical port information. Apart from being very time consuming, the process has the almost inevitable consequence of providing apparently inconsistent information, as it is, where necessary, brought up to date at the time of response.

4   The process for the provision of nautical port information has been under consideration since early 2006. Following debate, within IHMA, a proposal for a web based solution was conceived. The result was intended to be the presentation of the information in a standardized form, freely available to all users, including the producers of nautical publications.

5   After successful, desk-top testing of a template and its use to provide a sample product in a major port, a template for the input and production of port entry information has been finalized and is freely available for use via the IHMA website (www.harbourmaster.org). Use of this facility is being encouraged by the sponsors and promoted by the major publishers of nautical information.

6   A similar system for berth/terminal information is now being developed, together with the marine industry. It should be noted that this is a different project as most of the information is gathered via various terminal operators. In this respect, harbour masters will be facilitating terminal operators to display the terminal information, together with nautical information, such as admission policy.

Importance of sound nautical port information

7   Easily accessible, accurate and up-to-date nautical port information, presented in a standardized format, is considered important because:

.1   Masters have to comply with IMO requirements for berth to berth port passage planning. The significance of this activity is highlighted by the fact that most accidents happen between the pilot station and the berth. However, passage planning is made more difficult when the available information differs from source to source and the master is faced with the task of selecting what is correct. Such decisions are being made prior to arrival in port, at a time when masters may have to make almost immediate executive and operational decisions. It is, therefore, vital to implement a process which improves and informs a master's decision making at such a critical time.

.2   Masters have difficulty in establishing what information needs to be sent to which body at what time. There is a clear need for a 'single system solution' covering all ports.

.3   Shipping lines can find it difficult to comply with the provisions and stipulations laid down by insurance companies, as port information needs to come from a reliable source; something that P&I clubs re-iterate in their advice on exchange of information ahead of pilotage.

.4   Confusion about where and when specific reports are to be made and incorrect arrangements for manifold and/or gangway set-up can arise from the lack of adequate nautical port information, leading to inefficient port operations.

.5   Trading floors, where a ship's destination is decided, need nautical port information for use during the buying and selling of cargo.

Consultation

8   Following recognition of the need to harmonize the provision of nautical port information, IHMA began consultation within the maritime industry. Bodies consulted included: IAPH, BIMCO, IFSMA, INTERTANKO, SIGTTO, OCIMF, the UK Hydrographic Office, Lloyd's Register – Fairplay, Lloyd's Maritime Intelligence Unit (Informa), International P&I clubs, Maersk, BP Shipping, Exxonmobil and Shell. Support for the initiative from those consulted was uniformly positive.

9   The consultation confirmed the view that reliable and up-to-date nautical port information is key to the needs of the maritime industry and the basis for marine and port safety and the efficiency of port operations. There is clearly support for a central point of reference, acting as a direct link between the harbour master and the users of nautical port information. IHMA is ideally positioned, in this respect, and has happily assumed this role.

Benefits accruing

10   The provision of accurate, up-to-date, freely-available nautical port information, in a standardized format, will improve the planning capability of masters in their berth to berth passage plans and, as a result, improve the execution of such plans. This is sound risk management and will promote better safety in port waters, which in turn will improve protection of the environment and the efficiency of port and berth/terminal operations.

11   The subject is within the scope of IMO's objectives for safety of ships and those on board and/or the environment, as well as issues involving the ship/port interface. The proposal meets the requirements of the strategy developed in resolution A.970(24) and should be considered as a contribution to e-Navigation.

12   The wide dissemination of accurate and timely port information is expected to ease the task of passage planning in an era when professional competence at sea and on shore may be expected to decrease. This should reduce the decision workload on masters in port waters. It should also improve the decision making capability of cargo movement and port operations planners.

13   The initiative to provide a uniform, standard and central source of port information, based on an authoritative source for each port/terminal is considered feasible because:

    .1   It provides an efficient and accessible solution to a common problem acknowledged on all sides of the maritime industry;

    .2   It avoids duplication of effort in gaining the same information and prevents data being duplicated and minimizes time delays.

Other matters

14   This should result in an industry standard.

15   IHMA and IAPH have undertaken to strongly advise their members to instruct their departments responsible for providing port information to use only this template. The UK Hydrographic Office and Lloyds Maritime Intelligence Unit (Informa) are promoting the concept to their customers.

16   Noting that the information will be in Word format and so may not be easily adapted for use in a database, the application would be available to IMO, so that the information could be included in the Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS) database.

17   An example of the use of the template for port information, downloadable in .pdf form and then usable as a port handbook can be found via the IHMA website.

Conclusions

18   The sponsors are convinced that for the initiative to work, it must benefit all parties involved: the shipping industry that makes use of ports and terminals *and* the harbour masters/ports and terminal operators that provide it, as well as the publishers, who need to gather the data. One consequence of this is that basic nautical port information must be freely available to all users.

19   The sponsors believe that:

.1   Acceptance of a single format, by ports, masters, shipping companies and nautical information publishers, for the entry and display of port entry and berth/terminal information, will set an industry standard.

.2   This initiative will provide a significant improvement in the quality and timeliness of port entry information and the information associated with berths/terminals.

.3   Templates developed should be made freely available in a web-based application.

Action requested of the Committee

20   The Committee is invited to note the updated information provided.

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