

PAME II-2013 Agenda Item 4.1(c)
AMSA Recommendation I(A)
AOR Final Report Recommendation 3
Update on Activities of the Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission (ARHC)

BACKGROUND

AMSA Recommendation I(A) provides:

“That the Arctic states decide to, on a case by case basis, identify areas of common interest and develop unified positions and approaches with respect to international organizations such as...the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO)...to advance the safety of Arctic marine shipping....”

AOR Final Report Recommendation 3 provides, in relevant part:

The Arctic states should support work at ... international organizations with recognized competence to promote and advance safe, secure, reliable and environmentally sound shipping, including through ... enhancement of ... nautical charts to aid navigation.

Pursuant to these Recommendations, the United States and Canada provides a status report on activities of the Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission.

DISCUSSION

Regional Hydrographic Commissions (RHCs) are formed under the auspices of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). There are 15 such RHCs plus one IHO Hydrographic Commission on Antarctica that cover the globe to deliver IHO objectives at the regional level. The Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission (ARHC) was established in October 2010 by Canada, Denmark, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States in recognition of the need for enhanced collaboration and coordination on Arctic hydrographic issues.¹ By exchanging knowledge and information and by providing quality assured data, ARHC member states aim to facilitate an environmentally responsible exploration of Arctic waters and contribute to the development of the maritime infrastructure required for safe navigation and protection of the Arctic marine

¹ The constitutive document of the ARHC, *The Statutes of the Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission*, is available online at http://www.iho.int/mtg_docs/rhc/statutes/ArHC_Statutes.pdf. Additional information, including past ARHC meeting documents, may be found at http://www.iho.int/srv1/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=435&Itemid=690.

environment.² Finland and Iceland have participated as observers at the ARHC since 2011 in recognition of their membership in the Arctic Council.

ARHC ACTIVITIES AND PRIORITIES

ARHC's current activities and priorities are as follows:

- The development of the first draft of a strategic plan by Norway. The strategic plan is intended to be a common statement on the directions and commitment by members of the ARHC of actions to improve the state of hydrography in the Arctic.
- The Regional Hydrographic Commissions world-wide take responsibility for nautical charting within their area of responsibility; for the Arctic Ocean region this falls under the ARHC.
- As part of the ARHC service to mariners, Arctic Voyage Planning Guides (AVPGs) are being considered to enhance mariner awareness of the unique complexities and requirements of navigating in the Arctic environment.
- Recognizing the importance of safe navigation in the Arctic and the potential benefits of collaboration with like-minded bodies, the IHO, encouraged by the ARHC, applied for Observer status to the Arctic Council in 2013. The application was not reviewed by the Arctic Council Ministers due to time constraints. It is anticipated that the IHO will again seek Observer status at the Arctic Council when the Ministers next meet in 2015.

ARHC-4, IHO AND THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

As host country for ARHC-4, the USA plans to contact North America-based PAME member government representatives to participate in the Arctic Science Forum. The Arctic Science Forum is a one-day open forum held in conjunction with ARHC meeting to provide members of the ARHC with constituent and stakeholder information on priority issues within the navigation-related community. Nina Buvang Vaaja of the Arctic Council Secretariat presented background information about the Arctic Council at the Science Forum meeting in 2012.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States and Canada recommend that:

- The IHO, in consultation with members of the ARHC, be invited to provide relevant updates to PAME as requested on the status of hydrography and nautical charting in the Arctic region.
- PAME, IHO and ARHC seek ways and means for closer communication and collaboration.

² *Statement of the Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission*, ARHC1-07D (6 October 2010) (available at http://www.iho.int/mtg_docs/rhc/ArHC/ArHC1/ARHC1-07D_ARHC_Statement_Oct_6_2010.pdf.)