

High Level visit to the Republic of the Marshall Islands Majuro, RMI, 12 - 13 February 2026

Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2026

WP 3

Encourage new membership of the IHO

High level summary:

- Met with ministry level officials in the RMI to encourage new membership of the IHO
- Strengthened contact between the RMI authorities and their Primary Charting Authority
- Encouraged increased participation in the SWPHC
- Explained the benefits of hydrography to the RMI President, Ministers, and other government officials in the RMI
- Assessed basic hydrographic capabilities and potential solutions in the RMI

Details:

Mr. Keith Dominic of the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) and Dr. John Nyberg, Director of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), undertook a landmark high-level diplomatic and technical visit to Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands, on 12 and 13 February 2026. This strategic engagement represented a significant milestone in strengthening the relationship between the IHO, the United States, and the RMI. During the visit, Mr. Dominic and Dr. Nyberg provided a thorough and comprehensive introduction to the IHO, its mandate, and organizational structure, carefully outlining the substantial benefits that IHO membership would afford the Republic of the Marshall Islands. They emphasized the critical importance of establishing and maintaining effective collaboration with the nation's Primary Charting Authority, the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, which holds responsibility for producing nautical charts covering RMI waters under international agreements. These important discussions were held with senior RMI government officials at the highest levels, including Her Excellency Hilda C. Heine, Ed.D., President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and members of her Cabinet, including the Honorable Hilton T. Kendall, Minister of Transportation, Mr. Thomas Madison, Director of the RMI Ports Authority, and representatives from a number of key RMI governmental departments with interests in maritime affairs, navigation safety, and economic development.

Mr. Dominic and Dr. Nyberg commenced the visit with a detailed pre-briefing session with Minister Kendall and Director Madison to carefully prepare and refine the presentation that would be delivered to President Heine and her Cabinet. During this valuable preparatory discussion, Minister Kendall and Mr. Madison provided insightful guidance on potential points of interest and anticipated questions that were likely to arise during the Cabinet meeting, drawing on their deep understanding of national priorities and policy concerns. The pre-briefing also offered an important opportunity for additional members of the RMI Ports Authority staff to learn about the structure, functions, and benefits of the IHO, as well as to gain a clearer understanding of the existing relationship between the Republic of the Marshall Islands and NGA as their Primary Charting Authority—a relationship that underpins maritime safety and economic activity throughout Marshallese waters.



Mr. Thomas Madison, Dr. John Nyberg, and Mr. Keith Dominic with RMI Ports Authority team

Following the preparatory pre-briefing session, Dr. Nyberg delivered a comprehensive presentation on the benefits of IHO membership and the strategic value of maintaining a strong and collaborative relationship with a Primary Charting Authority to Her Excellency President Heine and her assembled Cabinet. The presentation outlined how IHO membership would enhance the Marshall Islands' maritime safety infrastructure, strengthen its voice in international hydrographic standards development, provide access to capacity-building programs and technical expertise, and support the nation's broader maritime governance objectives.

Following the presentation, President Heine and her Cabinet engaged in substantive dialogue, posing thoughtful questions about the potential benefits, associated costs, and ongoing obligations related to IHO membership. The discussion explored practical considerations including annual membership fees, technical capacity requirements, reporting obligations, and the tangible returns on investment that membership would provide. The meeting also briefly discussed potential funding mechanisms available to support the membership process and the domestic legislative and administrative path required for the Republic of the Marshall Islands to formally approve and ratify IHO membership.

In a gesture of support, Dr. Nyberg formally presented Minister Kendall with an official invitation letter and comprehensive informational materials outlining the procedural steps, documentation requirements, and timeline for pursuing IHO membership. Following the conclusion of the Cabinet meeting, Dr. Nyberg and Mr. Dominic remained available to government officials and provided additional detailed information and clarification on technical and administrative matters as specifically requested by representatives of the RMI government, ensuring that decision-makers had access to all necessary information to make informed judgments about this important strategic opportunity.



Center - Mr. Keith Dominic (NGA), Her Excellency Hilda C. Heine, Ed.D (President, RMI), and Dr. John Nyberg (IHO)



On 13 February, Mr. Dominic led an informative and interactive roundtable discussion focusing on the specific benefits and services provided by the Primary Charting Authority to the Republic of the Marshall Islands. This collaborative session brought together a diverse group of stakeholders and representatives from various RMI government agencies with vested interests in maritime safety, navigation, resource management, and economic development. Participants included senior officials and technical staff from the Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Fish and Wildlife, the RMI Ship Registry, and other relevant governmental departments. The roundtable format encouraged open dialogue and allowed participants to explore how enhanced coordination with NGA as the Primary Charting Authority could support their respective agency missions, improve maritime domain awareness, and contribute to safer and more efficient navigation throughout Marshallese waters and the broader Pacific region.