

22nd Southern African and Islands Hydrographic Commission (SAIHC) Cape Town, South Africa

Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2026

Task [ref. TBC] Maintain relationship with Regional Hydrographic Commissions (RHCs), including the Southern African and Islands Hydrographic Commission (SAIHC)

High level summary:

- South Africa assumed the SAIHC chair and hosted the Commission's 22nd meeting in Cape Town, the city in which SAIHC was founded in 1996.
- Malawi confirmed to host the 23rd meeting and Uganda is proposed as a future host.
- The meeting's central theme was the inseparable link between S-100 implementation and capacity development: the IHO reported growth to 104 Member States, the establishment of the IHO Infrastructure Centre (IHOIC) in Busan, and a deliberate shift in terminology from "capacity building" to "capacity development."
- Member States were urged to prioritize a strategic "stack" of high-value S-100 products (S-101, S-102, S-104) at key ports rather than a blanket conversion of existing S-57 data, and to engage national IMO representatives on S-100 regulatory matters.
- National and working-group reports underscored persistent gaps in trained personnel, survey equipment, software procurement and data-sharing, even as new funding, including a RENC Activity Fund from IC-ENC and Primar, opened to support regional capacity projects.

Details:

The 22nd Southern African and Islands Hydrographic Commission was held in Cape Town, South Africa from September 8 – 10, 2026. Captain Nicolette le Roux (South Africa) took over the chair of SAIHC and hosted the Commission's 22nd meeting in the city in which SAIHC was originally established in 1996. The Commission was welcomed by the Chief of the South African Navy, Vice Admiral Monde Lobese, and by Flag Officer Fleet, Rear Admiral Handsome Matsane, who hosted delegates at a reception on the eve of the meeting. There were nine countries represented in Cape Town, including Angola, France, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Norway, Seychelles, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. The IHO was represented by Dr. John Nyberg.

Delegates confirmed a preference for the Commission's current one-year, rotating chair, which allows for re-election and a handover period of up to six months. No new nominations were received for chair or vice-chair, and the current officers, including Vice-Chair Mohammed Shamad Ayoob Saab (Mauritius), will continue. Malawi confirmed it will host the 23rd meeting during the week of 20–24 September 2026, with Uganda proposed as a subsequent host.

The IHO reported that the Organization is at an inflection point, with a new strategic plan, work programme and Directing Committee in place under incoming Secretary-General Rear Admiral Luigi Sinapi, Director Dr. John Nyberg, and new Director Mr. Adam Greenland, and membership now standing at 104 Member States. Recent institutional developments include the establishment of the IHO Infrastructure Centre (IHOIC) in Busan, Republic of Korea, and a new GEBCO Secretariat funded by the Principality of Monaco. The Secretariat also highlighted a deliberate shift from "capacity building" to "capacity development" terminology, intended to better recognize existing knowledge and talent within Member States, and reiterated its commitment to transparency, accountability and good governance.

S-100 implementation was framed throughout the meeting as inseparable from capacity development: global standards are effective only where Member States have the capability to apply them. Rather than converting all existing S-57 data to S-101 regardless of underlying survey quality, the IHO advocated a strategic rollout, building a full “stack” of high-value S-100 products (e.g. S-101, S-102, S-104) at key ports and complex waterways, and urged Member States to engage their national IMO representatives on related regulatory matters. The report from the WEND Working Group’s 16th meeting focused on S-100 readiness, product-specification maintenance, and the importance of consistent S-57/S-101 coverage during the transition period.

The Capacity Development Sub-Committee (CDSC) presented its three-year work plan, spanning capacity-development phases 0–3 (phases 0 and 1 open to non-IHO Members), and highlighted continued support from the Nippon Foundation and the Republic of Korea for advanced training. The Regional ENC Coordinating Centres, IC-ENC and Primar, announced new RENC Activity Funds to finance regional capacity-development proposals, which can include non-RENC members, and encouraged Member States to submit ambitious project ideas. Additional initiatives included expansion of the IHO eLearning Centre and a proposed task team to modernize C-55 reporting.

Namibia reported completed surveys at Pelican Point and elsewhere, port-infrastructure updates and navigational-aid replacement, alongside challenges including the loss of its qualified hydrographic surveyor, reliance on outsourcing, poor connectivity, and a grounding incident attributed to shifting sand; planned port expansion will require new baseline surveys. Malawi reported officers trained in the United Kingdom under an existing MOU, progress toward IHO membership, and a continuing shortage of survey software (e.g. CARIS) and trained personnel needed to convert existing bathymetric survey data into official charts. The African Great Lakes and Rivers Working Group reported Kenya’s use of uncrewed surface vessels to survey Lake Victoria and Uganda’s establishment of a national hydrographic committee, alongside continuing regional data-sharing challenges.

Seychelles reported the transition of its hydrographic function to the Maritime Safety Authority (pending Cabinet approval), engagement with the UKHO and the Indian Navy Hydrographic Office, and a five-point plan covering priority surveys, charts and data, and capacity-development training; it requested technical assistance, equipment and funding guidance, and help reactivating its National Hydrographic Committee, which the UK offered to support as an observer once reactivated. Mauritius reported joint deep-sea surveys with the Indian Navy Hydrographic Office under an existing MOU, two national productivity awards, and enactment on 1 July of a new Mauritius Hydrographic Services Act establishing its Hydrographic Service as custodian of national hydrographic data. Norway reported an office relocation and reorganisation around three renewed strategic goals, continued development of its marine-knowledge-collection programme and a new national marine base-map pilot. The United Kingdom (UKHO) reported migration of home-waters chart production to an ENC-based, CARIS-supported workflow due for completion by year-end, continued rollout of digital sailing directions and S-100 trials, a new gridding scheme spanning S-57 and S-100 products, and a multibeam-equipment loan programme for Member States.

Industry presentations covered satellite-derived bathymetry and rapid-response survey support, Sentinel-based satellite data services, autonomous-vehicle and digital-twin survey services across Africa, including cable surveys in Angola, and high-resolution synthetic-aperture sonar applications. IALA updated the Commission on its transition to a 50-member international organization and stressed the importance of African participation in aids-to-navigation standard-setting alongside the IHO’s S-100/S-200 work.

Upcoming meetings:

The 23rd SAIHC meeting will be hosted by Malawi during the week of 20–24 September, with Uganda proposed to host the following year.

Photos



South African Navy and SAHIC leadership overlooking Table Mountain, Cape Town



Chart-room briefing aboard SAS Protea



SAIHC in Action



Chart-room briefing aboard SAS Protea



Delegates viewing chart compilation and ENC materials



SAS Protea alongside



SAHIC delegates group photo, Cape Town