

23rd South West Pacific Hydrographic Commission Nouméa, New Caledonia, 18 – 20 February

Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2026

Goal 3

SWPHC - South West Pacific Hydrographic Commission

High level summary:

- Renewed the IHO/SPC MoU
- Fiji and Australia were confirmed as the new IHO Council representatives for SWPHC
- A Hydrographic Survey Working Group was formed and will develop annual collaborative survey concepts for November 2026.
- S-100 progress and regional coordination was strengthened
- Capacity Building opportunities and strategy were discussed and agreed for the region

Details:

The 23rd South West Pacific Hydrographic Commission (SWPHC) meeting convened in Nouméa, New Caledonia. With a confirmed quorum of member states—including Australia, Fiji, France, Kiribati, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vanuatu—as well as associate members (Cook Islands, Indonesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, and Palau). The IHO was represented by Dr. John Nyberg. The meeting emphasized the critical importance of ocean mapping and hydrography to Pacific priorities, including sovereignty, maritime safety, environmental protection, and economic development across sectors such as fishing, maritime transport, energy, and tourism. Delegates acknowledged the immediate realities of climate change and sea-level rise, stressing the need to balance ocean resource exploitation, particularly seabed minerals, with protection of this fragile marine environment.

The Commission highlighted significant progress in regional capacity building and technological advancement, including the successful delivery of the Hydrographic Leaders Program Cohort 2 and the approval of IHO capacity-building funding for two projects: a Maritime Safety Information (MSI) workshop and high-level IHO Director visits to associate and non-members. Major emphasis was placed on S-100 implementation as an immediate priority, with the phased introduction of S-101 Electronic Navigational Charts already underway.

The Chair, Hiliary Thompson (Australia) began the meeting with the approval of the agenda and acceptance of minutes from the previous meeting. The IHO Secretariat (Dr. Nyberg) provided comprehensive updates on S-100 implementation, noting that Phase 1 product specifications are now operational with tight IMO implementation deadlines approaching. Members were strongly encouraged to respond promptly to circular letters, submit Phase 1 coverage plans for INTogIS III and the IHO service registry and to actively engage in IMO discussions on S-100 data distribution, security, and decentralized control. The Secretariat highlighted that IHO membership has reached 104 member states, including recent additions of Panama, Lithuania, The Gambia, The Bahamas and Kiribati. The IHO and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community renewed/refreshed a longstanding MoU between the two organizations to enable continued collaboration.



Renewal of the IHO-SPC MoU

National reports from Member States demonstrated substantial operational progress and growing regional capacity across the Southwest Pacific. Key accomplishments included the completion of multi-team marine surveys with external partners and efforts to centralize marine datasets through national library systems; S-100 implementation plans for 2026; establishment of national hydrographic committees for whole-of-government coordination, and completion of joint multinational surveys; community awareness initiatives, and addressing workforce capacity gaps. Member States acknowledged common challenges including equipment sustainment costs, workforce retention, data management constraints, and meeting increasing demand that exceeds current capacity, while emphasizing the critical importance of continued international cooperation and capacity-building support to advance hydrographic capabilities throughout the region. Regional S-100 readiness stands at 50% with five member states planning initial S-101 ENC production in 2026. Implementation challenges identified include human resource constraints, technical infrastructure upgrades, dual-system maintenance burdens, and workforce retention issues.

Industry partners presented S-100 tools and services including many S-100 projects, S-101 viewer, S-124 NAV-warning tool, and S-128 catalogue builder. Remote sensing capabilities demonstrated 10m resolution satellite-derived bathymetry with physics-based radiative-transfer inversion reaching 25-30m depth in clear Pacific waters.

A presentation from the cruise industry highlighted the critical need for high-density ENCs at band 6 - harbor scales with 1m depth contours. Carnival Cruise Lines, operating 29 ships globally with 4 in the Australia/NZ/Southwest Pacific region, emphasized that insufficient chart scale prevents safe corridor navigation and restricts port access.

A survey in Port Vila, Vanuatu successfully demonstrated regional collaboration between a PCA, industry, and local government. The survey found no significant navigational changes but identified wreck removals and new channel from port development. Key lessons included need for wet-testing equipment before deployment, interoperability standards, and recommendation for annual collaborative exercises.

The Japan International Cooperation Association (JICA) reported on the completion of an ENC support project (Dec 2025) in the Solomon Islands ports of Honiara and Noro with cooperation with the Australian Hydrographic Office.

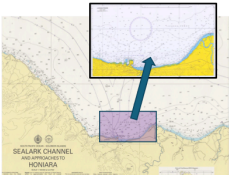
The SWPHC completed 2 funded CB projects: Maritime Safety Information workshop and high-level visits to FSM and Marshall Islands, with a follow-on visit tentatively planned for Palau. The Hydrographic Leaders Program Cohort 2 was successfully completed with 12 participants (6 men, 6 women), including weekly VTC sessions, mentorship, and Law of the Sea training. There was strong engagement reported with active WhatsApp group continuing post-program; Cohort 3 is planned for 2027 subject to funding.



SWPHC Hydrographic Leaders Program

Project areas


• **Honiara**
Identical to the existing chart area of 1:20,000.



ENCs and paper charts for Honiara

- One ENC cell navigation purpose: harbor
- Two paper charts scale: 1:5,000, 1:20,000

• **Noro**
Noro port, Munda Bar, and Blackett Strait



ENCs and paper charts for Noro

- Three ENC cells harbor and approach **Including two new cells!**
- Four paper charts 1:5,000, 1:15,000, 1:20,000, 1:50,000 **Including two new charts!**

JICA Project Areas in the Solomon Islands

Regional retention challenges were identified as capacity-building trainees often leave for industry, depriving host nations of expertise. The Commission received one recommended solution to establish contractual training agreements requiring minimum service periods (commonly 1 year) following CB training.

Australia and Fiji were elected as IHO Council representatives for three-year term and Australia offered to continue as SWPHC Chair for 12-month interim period pending member approval. Fiji was nominated and supported for Vice-Chair position.

The Commission established a Hydrographic Survey Working Group established with Commander Jarvis-Robinson as the inaugural chair to develop concept toward annual collaborative regional surveys.

Photo





Upcoming meetings:

The 2027 SWPHC will be held in Bali, Indonesia – dates TBC.