

Increased participation on IHO bodies activities
Proposal for discussion of the situation and follow up activities

Submitted by:	Secretary-General
Executive Summary:	The presented considerations about the situation and potential follow up activities respond to the request from the SWPHC at A3 for the provision of mechanisms to ensure greater inclusion and participation of all Member States at IHO meetings, in particular the IHO Assembly
Related document:	A3_2023_G_06.14_EN SWPHC Report Decision A3/21

References

- A. IHO Publication P-6 Proceedings of the 3rd session of the IHO Assembly 2-5 May 2023

Introduction/Background

1. Over the last decade the IHO saw a massive growth in membership on all continents, including regions remote from the IHO Secretariat, in terms of geographic distance and time zone. To constantly and continuously follow and contribute to the great variety of all ongoing IHO activities is a challenge for historic and new IHO members.
2. The principal means to address the items of the IHO Work Programme, approved by Assembly and overseen by the Council, are through the Working Groups and associated Project Teams, which receive their instructions from and report to the two main Committees: HSSC and IRCC.
3. The Secretariat facilitates this process through the distribution of working papers and other relevant materials, and assists the organizational aspects of the bodies meetings either conducted at the Secretariat or hosted by Member States.
4. Face to face discussions before making informed decisions are an irreplaceable element of the organs, the committees and the working groups work. The resulting travel however is time and resource consuming and, being mindful to the CO₂ footprint, a subject of constant re-assessment of its appropriateness. Because of the expressed interest for greater inclusion in discussions and decision making of the Organization, it seems now worth to review the applying regulations and the common practice in place. This review should be done in reflection of the desire for increased participation in all phases, not limited to the meetings only, and on all levels of IHO bodies work, not limited to the Assembly.
5. The objective of this paper is therefore to review the current practices in place by the Working Groups and Project Teams, the Committees, Council and Assembly supported by the IHO Secretariat and the meetings host countries, in the light of their Rules of

Procedures with the desire of more inclusive participation in all phases, while keeping the high level of efficiency in the decision-making processes and a reasonable cost for all parties involved, then to explore the possible evolutions on a “case-by-case basis”.

Analysis/Discussion

6. Triggered by the global outbreak of the COVID pandemic, hybrid and fully virtual meetings have gained popularity and helped the IHO to keep functioning. Though the pandemic situation is now over, these means are here to stay. The IHO regulations in place, however, do not reflect such an expanded definition of participation so far. An example was the challenging procedure the IHO Secretariat set up for the 2nd Session of the Assembly, seeking the formal approval of IHO Member States for waiving some Rules of Procedure throughout 2020 and reporting at the end of the year on ex-post facto decisions.
7. The use of digital means and internet based communication tools have become inherent part of the IHO Secretariat’s toolbox. The Secretariat has invested in VTC provider licenses and the supporting technology such as in-build ceiling loudspeaker, table microphones and a semi-professional camera in the conference room and VTC technology in two smaller meeting rooms. To facilitate the registration process for meetings on all levels, a fully online registration tool is supported.
8. All those technical means available at the Secretariat are in common and nearly daily use for formal and informal remote-active and remote-passive presence meetings at working level. The technology works well in the margins of their capacity, however the meeting’s agenda have mostly to be compacted to great extend taking due regard on the burden for the remote participants resulting from the time shift from Far East to Far West. Transmission of video and voice were not optimal for all participants and consensus on decisions was obtained by means of tacit approval (agreement by silence).
9. In the interim, numerous Member States who have hosted IHO events have managed to integrate a remote element to make the meeting a hybrid event. In this context it should be mentioned that the technical and organizational arrangements of hybrid meetings require additional materiel and human resources beyond the usual capacity required in the past. This all adds costs to the already significant in-kind contributions in hosting.
10. Possible steps striving for greater inclusion by technical and organizational means can be categorized into three categories of participation and formats: in-person only, remote-active only, hybrid (the combination of in-person and remote-active), and in-person plus remote-passive. The following types of meetings should be evaluated in terms of established practice, the regulatory situation and the cost/benefit ratio:
 - *Working Groups and Project Teams*
 - *Committees and Subcommittees*
 - *Council*
 - *Assembly*

Working Groups and Project Teams

11. Hybrid meetings have turned out to be a useful and cost-effective tool for Working Group and Project Team meetings. The technical means for groups of a limited size can be usually provided by the Secretariat or the host country on a decently good level, in general with the recommendation that all participants (including those attending in person) are equipped with their own laptops and independent headsets during meetings. The cost/benefit ratio is positive. There are no legal constraints to conduct meetings on this level other than adaptation of the respective Rules of Procedures.
12. The Secretariat's experience is however that no remote arrangement can fully compete with the efficiency and the effectiveness of a personal encounter, bearing also in mind the language barriers and cultural differences in a multilateral environment. The opportunity for the working group and team members to discuss complex technical question in depth inherent in the development of technical standards for the IHO, to cultivate contacts and participate in the important side talks which helps the discussions move forward cannot not be overestimated.

Committees and Subcommittees

13. The Committees, namely HSSC and IRCC tackle a wide range of topics with great complexity. They are nominally attended by the respective chairs of the subordinate bodies, the RHC chairs in charge and expert contributors. All those attendees hold specific expertise, the resulting discussions are complex and in general, while remaining informative or educative for newcomers on medium management level, not of great benefit to follow for persons who are usually not involved on this level of detail in the different phases of the IHO work items.
14. Remote-active participation is useful in selected cases for active contributors which are for specific reasons unable to join in person. To make this technical possible, additional effort is on the host of the Committee and Subcommittee meetings. Remote-passive participation through live stream may be offered if the additional resources required are affordable by the host.
15. There are no legal constraints to add remote options to the conduct of Committees and Sub-Committees meetings.

Council

The conduct of the Council is based on specific regulations. Participation is limited to Council Members and other Member States registered as observers. Usually hosted by the Secretariat, the Council agenda items are of mainly strategic nature. For C-6, the first in-person Council after COVID, a live stream was broadcasted to registered participants.

Assembly

16. The Assembly is taken place every three years at a conference venue available at the Principality of Monaco. The event is traditionally combined with the Member States exhibition and the industry exhibition. Both exhibitions are of much value for the Member States delegations and make it even more worth to come to Monaco.

17. The average participation on the Assembly, which includes the observers and the crews of the two exhibitions, sums up to a number between 350 and 450 persons. The Secretariat cannot host an event of this size and is therefore dependent from the technology at hand at the selected venue. The two conference venues available in Monaco and used in the past were the Grimaldi Forum and the Auditorium Rainier III. So far none of the two venues provide camera equipment and other means used by UN bodies such as IMO to enable remote-active and/or remote-passive participation yet. It appears unlikely that such equipment can be installed for temporary use only on request of the IHO and in case it would come with enormous extra costs.
18. But this scenario may change in the future. What will not change is the attraction for industry to come here and meet Hydrographic Office representatives directly. Remote participation will reduce the overall number of participants and will make it less attracting for industry to invest the time and the effort to be present in the margins of the Assembly.
19. It seems worth to quote here a statement of ongoing validity made in the brochure to celebrate 50 years of IHB/IHO in 1972. Captain Victor A. Moitoret, IHB-Director wrote:
- “Quite possibly the greatest accomplishment of the IHB goes mostly unrecognized. For the Bureau would in truth almost completely have justified its existence if its only accomplishment had been the preparation for, carrying out, and producing the meticulous detailed records of the International Hydrographic Conferences. For it is the coming together of the world’s Hydrographers, in person, for a period generally lasting two weeks, in Monaco once every five years, for extended debates, arguments, exchanges of views, lectures, demonstrations of equipment, and general building of lasting personal friendships that has really been the basic foundation for much of the resulting improved coordination, collaboration, and standardization in the field of Hydrography for the benefit of the navigators of the world.”*
20. There is another factor to be taken in account if the options of remote participation would be envisioned. The Principality of Monaco is committed to host the IHO and the Assembly which both are understood as a heritage being now in place at the Principality since more than hundred years. There is a specific ethics behind this hosting such as the commitment of the House of Grimaldi to the human interaction with the oceans, however, there is also a give and take with the IHO as the only intergovernmental organization resident here. This side effect of the Assembly should not be underestimated if it comes to the assessment of the pros and cons of a shift from physical to remote participation.

Regulatory situation

21. The relevant regulatory foundations of the work of the IHO bodies are compiled in IHO Publication M-1 consisting IHO’s Basic Documents, namely:
- Convention of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO Convention)
 - General Regulations of the International Hydrographic Organization (GR)
 - Financial Regulations of the International Hydrographic Organization (FR)
 - Rules of Procedures of the IHO Assembly (Assembly RoP)
 - Rules of Procedures of the IHO Council (Council RoP)
 - Rules of Procedures of the Finance Committee (RoP Finance Committee RoP)
- Some other applicable regulations are in the IHO Publication M-3, such as IHO Resolutions 4/1957, 8/1967, 2/1997, 12/2002,

22. The phrase “Members [Member States] present and voting” is a repeatedly used in paragraphs describing decision making processes in IHO Convention, the Assembly RoP, the Council RoP and the Finance Committee RoP.
23. Bearing the historic genesis of these regulations and the statement of the Assembly RoP under Rule 2 in mind: *“The Assembly shall meet in ordinary session every three years at the seat of the Organization in Monaco ...”*

There is no doubt that this phrase was and can only be interpreted as in-person presence on the meetings of all three bodies, i.e. Assembly, Council and Finance Committee.

24. A new interpretation of “present and voting” which accepts remote-active presence as equivalent to in-person presence would require changes of the regulations listed. In view of the substance of such a change it is understood that it would need two thirds of the Member States present at Assembly and voting in favour of such a change. An adaptation of the regulations to new forms of participation is not impossible, however, they need careful consideration on the desired and maybe lesser obvious side effects. For the Assembly, there would be also the need to consider amendments on the rules of procedures for the election of the Secretary-General and Directors. This does not seem neither opportune nor technically feasible.

Recommendations

25. The hybridization and virtualization of meetings offer chances for greater participation, but come with added efforts in terms of technical support, human resources and additional costs. It is expected that not all Member States which normally offer to host in person only IHO meetings are able to provide support for full hybrid meetings in particular. It is recommended to undertake a survey which Member States are in the principal position to add remote participation services to its in-kind contribution as a host and respond about the range of such a support in terms of maximum in-person participation.

Working Groups and Project Teams

26. It is recommended that Working Groups and Project Teams continue with their established practice to offer all forms of in-person, remote-active and remote-passive participation. The respective office bearers of the bodies are invited to discuss the available technical options with the prospective host if the meeting is assigned to venues or the Secretariat if the meeting is hosted in Monaco.

Committees and Subcommittees

27. It is recommended that Committees and Subcommittees are not required to offer remote-active or remote-passive participation as default. Depending from the capacities of the host, it may be considered on a “meeting by meeting” basis in consultation between the Chair, the Secretariat and the host representative. If arranged, remote-active and/or remote-passive participation should be open for pre-registered participants only.

Council

28. It is recommended that the Council offers remote-passive participation as live stream for pre-registered participants. However, this should not be interpreted as an incentive for non-physical participation since the Council quorum rule is only met by those delegations physically present.

Assembly

29. Remote participation of any form is not recommend for Assembly. If technical means will become available at the usual venue, video recording for later share might become an option. Member States which cannot attend are invited to forward comments on Assembly Proposals for inclusion into the Red Book according to the Assembly regulations in place and collaborate with the respective RHC Chair in advance of the session.

30. Regional Hydrographic Commissions may consider to authorize the respective Chairs to express a collective position in the course of the Assembly's deliberations.

31. The same principle may apply to proxy comments on behalf of a neighbouring Member State if this is documented officially and in writing by the proposer. This method is limited to comments and does not include any form of proxy vote.

Justification and Impacts

32. In order to implement the above recommendations, adaptations of the Rules of Procedures for the Working Groups, Project Teams and Committees may be required.

33. The Council may confirm the facilitation of remote-passive participation as live stream as a standard means.

34. For the conduct of the Assembly no action is required at this stage.

Conclusions

35. Based on the working principles in place, there are many options to become more involved into the IHO activities on all levels by responsiveness to the information distribution framework, active engagement, and remote participation at IHO bodies which offer this option.

36. There is no realistic scenario to run the Assembly as hybrid meeting with remote-active participation. Video recording shared post Assembly or broadcast as live stream for remote-passive participation may become future options if technically facilitated at the venue under the condition that this can be accommodated in terms of costs. If so decided, the Assembly fund must see in increase which may go on the account of other IHO commitments in the triennial budget. In this case, Rules of Procedures of the Assembly needs to be amended since participation in Assembly sessions is limited to Members States and Accredited Observers only.

Action Required of the Council

37. The Council is invited to:

- Take note of the recommendations and to
- initiate a survey among Member States on their preference with regards to in-person or remote attendance and their capacity to host IHO meetings which include a remote participation component,
- invite HSSC and IRCC to let amend the Working Groups and Project Teams their respective Terms of Reference,
- task the Secretariat to organize remote-passive participation as live stream on Council meetings and work out an respective amendment to the Council RoP for adoption at A4.