**IHO Director SPEECH – IENWG24 – 29 May 2024**

Good morning to all present and welcome to this 24th meeting of the IHO-EU NETWORK WORKING GROUP, established some years ago following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2012, whose 10th Anniversary of the signature was co-organised by DG MARE and IENWG and celebrated on 6th May 2022 between the European Commission and the International Hydrographic Organisation.

First of all, I would like to thank on behalf of the IHO and its Secretary-General the host nation Denmark of this event and the DANISH GEODATA AGENCY, and in particular Mr Hendrik STANG for the organisational efforts, and France and the SHOM through the IENWG Chair Mr Pierre-Yves Dupuis and the IENWG Secretary Ms Adeline Souf for the meticulous preparation of the meeting and all the strategic and technical documentation that we are going to discuss today.

The IHO Secretariat and the IRCC, which is represented here by its Chair, Mr. Thomas Dehling, National Hydrographer of Germany, attach great importance and attention to the work of this working group, which has a peculiarity among the more than 30 Committees / Sub-Committees / Working Groups / Project Teams of the IHO, namely that of having a regional connotation geographically speaking, but with potential impacts at the level of the entire international hydrographic community.

Currently, as discussed at the last IENWG13 meeting, the strategy for the IENWG has been reviewed and the way forward has been discussed at the meeting, highlighting Maritime policies in order to continue to monitor and influence the EU policies, focusing on:

* the development of the S-100 hydrographic products and services, in order to promote them across the European Commission (to make good use of for the purposes of blue economy, marine safety, climate change, protection of marine areas and biodiversity),
* the IHO Capacity Building programme, in order to promote the development of programmes for the hydrographic capacity in the EU, and outside EU in particular for safe sea lines with East Asia and Africa, in connection with IRCC initiatives to extend CB funds,
* and finally the data collection, in order to develop common acquisition campaigns of bathymetric data in the EU maritime basins.

On the just-mentioned topics, the involvement of the IHO Secretariat was recognized as an asset for the promotion of activities at high level in the EU Commission, and the proof of that is the participation at Directing Committee level at this meeting (I remember that the IHO Secretary General stood for participating at the EMD workshop on Ocean Mapping, that unfortunately wasn’t accepted by the EMD organizers).

There are tangible examples of how what started in 2012 and recently reaffirmed in the IENWG13 meeting has been translated into facts, if we refer to specific areas of common interest including surveillance activities, offshore renewable energy, maritime spatial planning, integrated coastal zone management, marine observation and data networks, implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, marine research, data standards (including those specified by INSPIRE Directive 2007/2/EC) and co-operation with third countries.

I’m referring to the Emodnet bathymetry project, which has demonstrated best practice in regional coordination of hydrographic data processing, being embedded into IHO´s global authoritative bathymetric data set - the General Bathymetric Chart of the Ocean (GEBCO) grid. The benefit for the region and for the entire Maritime Community is immense. For instance, prominent examples are the reduction of planning costs for wind farms or laying subsea cables and improved forecasts of storm surges, as well as the identification and monitoring of marine habitats and ecosystems.

Then, I’m thinking also to the recent work on IHO AND EC COOPERATION IN THIRD COUNTRIES - A proposal for hydrographic capacity development that we will discuss today, in a wider context for the IHO, following the establishment of a Project Team for Fund Generation of IHO Projects’ Initiatives, which has as main objectives to explore options for the establishment ofalternative fundingfor programmed IHO activities, including capacity building and a sustainable structure for the IHO to manage the operational S-100 infrastructure.

Such work demonstrates that IHO priorities and EC international development priorities are synergetic, thereby offering potential for mutual benefits by intensifying cooperation. Therefore, there is an opportunity to align IHO and EC activities to realize the desired impact for both parties, whilst there are examples of such collaboration being very productive within Europe (e.g. EMODnet Bathymetry), capacity development in developing coastal States would be a new collaborative effort.

Finally, we will discuss on the main strategic messages that we should provide to the EU DG MARE to stimulate a renewed approach to the MoU signed in 2012, trying to make understand that the EU and IHO have common interests to cultivate in specific developing areas of the world, from which the benefits could be higher and more promising for both parties.

With this in mind, I renew the commitment and the availability of the IHO Directing Committee to participate actively to the works of the IENWG and to represent at high level the needs and the interest – from the European HOs – to cooperate with the EU DG MARE.

I definitely wish us all a fruitful and productive meeting.