

Arctic Virtual Science Forum and 10th Conference of the Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission (ARHC)

11 and 13-14 August 2020

Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2020		
Task 3.2.1.1	Prepare for and report meetings of the Regional Hydrographic Commissions (RHC) / ARHC	

The 10th Conference of the Arctic Regional Hydrographic Commission (ARHC) was held in a scaled down virtual format, consisting of two four-hour meetings, on 13 and 14 August 2020. The meeting was interrelated with the Arctic Virtual Science Forum which preceded the Conference on 11 August 2020.

The decision for the virtual format was taken in light of the continued and ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the working arrangements of all national and regional bodies affected. The convening of the Arctic Science Forum and ARHC Conference as virtual events presented an opportunity for a wider audience to participate than in previous years.



The ARHC convened its annual Arctic Science Forum to share experiences, insights and information concerning activities of interest to the hydrographic services community with responsibilities in the Arctic region. More than 120 participants attended the Forum. The event addressed an impressive amount of topical issues ranging from tracking of ships traffic, specific geodetic challenges and the engagement with indigenous communities addressing changes in the arctic marine environment. The presentation by Saildrone® on the ongoing Alaska US Continental Shelf Mapping Mission, an ambitious survey carried out by four sailing USV¹s launched from California due to Covid restrictions for traveling, was certainly a great opportunity for the participants to touch on the theme of the year “*Hydrography – enabling autonomous technologies*”.

¹ Unmanned Surface Vehicle

Around thirty participants representing four ARHC Members (Canada, Denmark, Norway and the USA) and three Associate Members (Finland, Iceland and Italy) participated in the Conference. The Russian Federation informed the Chair of the impossibility to join remotely because of administrative reasons.



The Conference was chaired by Rear Admiral (RDML) Shepard Smith, (NOAA, USA). The IHO Secretariat was represented by Secretary-General Dr Mathias Jonas and Assistant Director Yves Guillam.

The ARHC Members were informed by the Secretary-General on the various consequences on the conduct of the 2nd Session of the IHO Assembly (A-2) and associated activities resulting from exceptional circumstances due to COVID-19 (IHO ACL 17/2020 refers). Noting that the ARHC is currently undertaking the revision of its Statutes, he invited the ARHC to adapt their respective instruments to comply with the recommendations of the IHO Resolution 2/1997 as amended by A-2.

All participants reported on their activities in the Arctic region since the last Conference. The Conference took note of items such as manned and unmanned survey technology, national survey programs, ENC re-scheming for regular grids, new chart production systems to enable paper chart production from ENCs, the implementation of national SDI solutions and other themes of relevance for all Hydrographic Offices of the region. Special focus was given to the liaison with the SeaBed2030 and the related Crowd Source Bathymetry (CSB) initiative of the IHO.

The ARHC and the Arctic Council's Working Group on the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) share common interests to protect the marine environment and enhance the safety of maritime transportation in the Arctic. Following initial collaboration in assessing the status of arctic hydrographic surveys and hydrographic information (see below), PAME and ARHC developed a proposed MOU to underscore the value of further cooperative efforts, exchange, and dialogue between the two bodies. This MOU promoting collaboration was signed in April 2020. Based on USA's initiative, the Commission considered potential topics that may be of mutual interest to ARHC and PAME and which may be candidates for future collaboration, based on resources accessible and available to each body and their members. As a result, it was agreed to draft a discussion paper concerning potential activities that could be undertaken in the spirit of the ARHC-PAME MOU.



A comprehensive overview of the impact and opportunities of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development was kindly provided by Mr Craig McLean, Head of US Delegation to IOC and Assistant Administrator – NOAA Oceanic and Atmospheric Research. His presentation was complemented by the IHO Secretary-General’s presentation.

At the end of the meeting, RDML Shepard Smith, (NOAA, USA) offered to keep USA holding the Chair of the ARHC for another year. It was agreed that the next physical meeting of the ARHC in 2021 would be hosted by USA likely in Alaska, USA as planned for this year. The Chair informed on his forthcoming retirement at the end of 2020 and concluded with the prospect of the handover of the chair to his prospective successor.

All available documents of the meeting are posted on the ARHC-10 webpage of the IHO website.