

IMO EGC Coordinating Panel Report

Submitted by the Chair of the IMO Enhanced Group Call Coordinating Panel

SUMMARY

Executive Summary: This document provides a summary of the IMO Enhanced Group Call (EGC) Coordinating Panel report to the 10th session of the IMO Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communication and Search and Rescue (NCSR) (NCSR 10/10/8), including related considerations made by the Sub-Committee. Furthermore, this document provides attention to ongoing activities of the Panel.

Action to be taken: Paragraph 9

Related documents: MSC.1/Circ.1635, NCSR 10/10/8, NCSR 10/WP.1/Rev.1

1. Introduction:

The IMO Enhanced Group Call (EGC) Coordinating Panel report to the 10th session of the IMO Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communication and Search and Rescue (NCSR) (NCSR 10/10/8) provided a summary of the Panel meeting held remotely on 29 November 2022, including information concerning the implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service. This document provides a summary of the Panel report to NCSR 10, including related considerations made by the Sub-Committee. Furthermore, this document provides attention to ongoing activities of the Panel.

2. Authorization and registration of contingency arrangements between METAREA and/or NAVAREA Coordinators:

At the meeting 29 November 2022 the Panel recalled the decision made by NCSR 9 that no additional certification is required for METAREA and/or NAVAREA Coordinators when arrangements are established with Search And Rescue (SAR) authorities for the purpose of broadcasting SAR related information, i.e. other than navigational warnings and meteorological warnings and forecasts for which respective Coordinators are certified.

The Panel agreed that this equally applies to contingency arrangements established between METAREA and/or NAVAREA Coordinators. The Panel further agreed that no authorization is required for establishing such contingency arrangements and that such arrangements preferably should be registered in the GMDSS Master Plan module of GISIS. The Panel recognized the need to establish procedures on how to enter information on such arrangements in GISIS, noting that some system modifications might be required.

NCSR 10 agreed that no additional EGC certification should be required when contingency arrangements were established between METAREA and/or NAVAREA Coordinators.

In July 2023 a contingency arrangement was implemented due to challenges related to the contractual agreement between an information provider and a recognized mobile satellite service (RMSS) provider. This highlighted the importance of establishing contingency arrangements.

By default, an information provider is only allowed access to broadcast information to a pre-assigned area(s), e.g. a NAVAREA or a METAREA. When receiving written confirmation of a contingency arrangement between two METAREA and/or NAVAREA Coordinators however, the RMSS providers will assign additional areas to an information provider, e.g. assign NAVAREA XIX to the NAVAREA I coordinator. Such access can then be used in emergencies as a contingency.

Information providers are thus encouraged to send written confirmations on contingency arrangements to the RMSS providers. A copy of such confirmations should further be sent to the IMO EGC Coordinating Panel, the IHO WWNWS-SC and the WMO AG-WWMIWS-SC, as appropriate.

3. Cessation of rectangular area addressed broadcasts over the Inmarsat-C SafetyNET system in the Arctic:

At the meeting 29 November 2022 the Panel recalled that NCSR 9 set 31 December 2023 as the date for the cessation of rectangular area addressed broadcasts in the Arctic. The Panel noted that Arctic METAREA and NAVAREA Coordinators during 2022 had provided information on the cessation to relevant shipping organizations and companies. The Panel noted further that seafarers will be informed throughout 2023 by Notice to Mariners and broadcast of maritime safety information (MSI).

4. Revocation of SafetyNET certificates:

At the meeting 29 November 2022 the Panel recalled that SafetyNET certificates issued to METAREA and NAVAREA Coordinators had been replaced by EGC certificates. The Panel further recalled the decision made by NCSR 9 that SafetyNET certificates issued for SAR related information would expire on 31 December 2022. The Panel also noted the ongoing replacement of one SafetyNET certificate issued specifically to broadcast piracy warnings.

The Panel acknowledged that by 31 December 2022, all active SafetyNET certificates would be replaced by EGC certificates and thus invited NCSR to revoke all remaining SafetyNET certificates.

NCSR 10 noted that all active SafetyNET certificates had been replaced by EGC certificates, as appropriate, and confirmed the revocation of all SafetyNET certificates, with immediate effect.

5. Implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service:

Recognizing that MSI and SAR related information is of vital concern to all ships, regardless of the type of EGC receiver they have installed on board, the importance of information providers concluding an agreement with Iridium and progressing their implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service, was emphasized in the Panel report to NCSR 8 (NCSR 8/9/8, paragraph 5.1) and the Panel report to NCSR 9 (NCSR 9/10/6, paragraph 24).

At the meeting 29 November 2022 the Panel recalled that the Iridium SafetyCast service had been fully operational since December 2020. The Panel further recalled the decision made by

MSC 105 that once a mobile satellite service is recognized by the Organization, it must then be used by all information providers covering its service area. The Panel also recalled that establishing means for the approval and registration of potential information providers to ensure worldwide coverage of the EGC service, is part of the Panel's terms of reference. This is set out in annex 1 of MSC.1/Circ.1635 and includes ensuring that information providers conduct agreements with all RMSS providers serving the required sea area.

The Panel acknowledged that the lack of operational MSI in the Iridium GMDSS potentially is compromising maritime safety. In that regard, several members highlighted the need for the Panel to set a target deadline for the implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service.

The Panel agreed that if not all METAREA and NAVAREA Coordinators and SAR authorities with EGC certificates had concluded an agreement with Iridium by 1 July 2023, as part of an implementation process, the Panel will convene to identify actions required to ensure dissemination of MSI and SAR related information to all service areas. Such actions could include establishing arrangements with those information providers that have concluded agreements with Iridium, to disseminate information to service areas presently not covered. The Panel further agreed to continue to encourage and support the implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service.

NCSR 10 noted that the Panel had urged MSI and SAR related information providers to conclude agreements with Iridium if they had not done so and progress their implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service. NCSR 10 further noted that the Panel had set 1 July 2023 as the target deadline for METAREA and NAVAREA Coordinators, and SAR authorities, in receipt of EGC certificates, to conclude an agreement with Iridium as part of an implementation process and determine any necessary actions to be taken after that date to address gaps in coverage.

By July 2023 the need to address gaps in the coverage of operational MSI in the Iridium GMDSS was still under consideration by the Panel Chair, the chair of the IHO WWNWS-SC and the chair of the WMO AG-WWMIWS-SC in dialog with Iridium.

6. Authorization, Certification and Registration of EGC information providers:

By July 2023 a total of 68 EGC certificates have been issued, 18 certificates to broadcast Navigational Warnings, 22 certificates to broadcast Meteorological Warnings and Forecasts, 27 certificates to broadcast Search and Rescue Related Information and one certificate to issue Piracy Warnings. In addition, one national SAR authority have requested a certificate to broadcast SAR related information and will receive the certificate once sufficient EGC training is completed.

At the meeting 29 November 2022 several members of the Panel emphasized the need for all EGC information providers to be authorized, certified and registered, including information providers broadcasting to coastal warning areas only. Several members also addressed the importance of providing information on coastal warning areas, particularly to the seafarers but also to the RMSS providers for registration purposes. The IMO secretariat stated that it would be possible to modify the GMDSS Master Plan module of GISIS to contain such information. The chair informed the Panel that the matter of issuing certificates to information providers broadcasting to coastal warning areas only, will be progressed in corporation with the IMO secretariat, IHO and WMO.

7. Coastal warning areas broadcast:

At the meeting 29 November 2022 some Panel members highlighted, with reference to the establishment of the Arctic areas, the lengthy and rather extensive process of programming new areas into Inmarsat Ship Earth Stations worldwide. It was agreed that this excludes the option of programming new coastal warning areas into EGC systems.

Information providers is thus restricted to broadcast coastal warnings to rectangular and/or circular areas or through the facilities of addressing EGC broadcasts using the B-codes of the International NAVTEX Service.

8. Contractual agreements with RMSS providers:

As noted in paragraph 2, a contingency arrangement was implemented in July 2023 due to challenges related to the contractual agreement between an information provider and a RMSS provider. This highlighted the need to raise awareness of EGC contractual agreements in the multi satellite service provider environment.

As set out in annex 2 of MSC.1/Circ.1635, after receiving a Certificate of Authorization, an information provider should conclude an agreement with the RMSS provider(s) concerned, serving the required sea area(s), to obtain access to the system. For some information providers, such contractual agreements are concluded through a third-party, e.g. a governmental administration or a governmental company.

When concluding, updating or renewing an agreement, a RMSS provider will require time to complete compliance checks, contract review etc. Due to this, an information provider with the need to update or renew a contractual agreement should notify the RMSS provider in ample time to ensure that continuous access to the system is obtained through the timely conclusion of a new agreement. This is particularly important when third-party actors are involved, which may prolong the process of concluding the contractual agreement.

Information providers are thus encouraged to raise their awareness of the duration of their contractual agreements and notify RMSS providers in ample time whenever there is a need to update or renew contractual agreements.

9. Action requested:

The Sub-Committee is invited to note the report.