

Report of the IMO EGC Coordinating Panel

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

SUMMARY

Executive Summary: This document provides an abstract of the IMO Enhanced Group Call (EGC) Coordinating Panel report to the 11th session of the IMO Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communication and Search and Rescue (NCSR 11/5/5). Furthermore, this document provides attention to ongoing activities of the Panel.

Action to be taken: Paragraph 8

Related documents: MSC.1/Circ.1635, NCSR 11/5/5, MSC 108/20

1. Introduction

The IMO Enhanced Group Call (EGC) Coordinating Panel report to the 11th session of the IMO Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communication and Search and Rescue (NCSR 11/5/5) provided a summary of the Panel meeting held remotely 11 January 2024, including information concerning the implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service.

This document provides an abstract of the Panel report to NCSR 11. Furthermore, this document provides attention to ongoing activities of the Panel.

2. Broadcast of coastal MSI through the EGC service

At the meeting on 11 January 2024 the Panel noted that several MSI coastal warning areas are listed in the EGC services section of the GMDSS Master Plan of GISIS. The Panel noted further that no EGC certificates have been issued to national authorities or coordinators to exclusively broadcast coastal MSI through the EGC service. In this regard, the Panel acknowledged that national authorities and/or coordinators should be authorized, certified, and registered in order to broadcast coastal MSI through the service.

The Panel thus agreed to encourage national authorities and/or coordinators to:

1. apply for an EGC certificate if broadcasting coastal MSI through the EGC service, in lieu of NAVTEX¹; and
2. review their information in the EGC services section of the GMDSS Master Plan of GISIS, in particular information on MSI coastal warning areas, if applicable.

¹ Not applicable for NAV/MET-AREA coordinators broadcasting coastal MSI within their assigned NAV/MET-AREA.

In this regard, the Panel recalled the two methods available for broadcasting coastal MSI through the EGC services, in lieu of NAVTEX:

- .1 to rectangular and/or circular areas; or
- .2 through the facilities of addressing EGC broadcasts using the B-codes of the International NAVTEX service.

3. Cessation of rectangular area addressing in the Arctic

The Panel recalled that NCSR 9 had set 31 December 2023 as the date for the cessation of rectangular area addressed broadcasts in the Arctic. As far as the Panel is informed, three of the Arctic information providers have since 1 January 2024 changed the addressing of their SafetyNET broadcasts, from area addressing to direct addressing. No operational challenges have been reported in connection with this change.

4. Implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service

The Panel acknowledged that five years after the recognition of the Iridium SafetyCast service, the implementation of the service is still compromised by the lack of operational MSI, potentially compromising maritime safety and thus representing a major concern. The Panel further acknowledged the continuous and extensive effort made by both the IHO and WMO to inform and support NAVAREA and METAREA coordinators currently not providing operational MSI through the service.

The Panel noted that Iridium, in support of the implementation, suspended charges for some MSI providers in the period 2020 - 2023. The Panel noted further that Iridium is prepared to discuss the suspension of charging for those MSI providers that have yet to declare operational and contact the IMO Secretariat with a request for support.

The IMO Secretariat informed that, despite the fact that Member States have been encouraged to contact IMO if in need of technical assistance or funding support, no such requests have been received.

The Panel agreed to continue to encourage NAVAREA and METAREA coordinators to:

1. progress their implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service; and
2. take advantage of the assistance and support offered by Iridium, the IMO Secretariat and the Panel.

Since the last meeting of the Panel, MSC 108 agreed that MSI should be disseminated through all operational RMSSs with an implementation date not later than 31 December 2026 (MSC 108/20, paragraph 12.25.2), and further agreed to:

1. urge Member States to complete the implementation of the Iridium SafetyCast service as soon as possible; and
2. invite Member States that might experience delays with the implementation of the service to provide relevant information to the IMO Secretariat.

5. Registration of contingency arrangements between information providers

The Panel acknowledged the importance of establishing contingency arrangements between information providers (e.g. METAREA and NAVAREA coordinators or SAR authorities) as a measure to ensure broadcast of information in the event of disruptions. In this regard, the Panel recalled that no additional authorization or certification is required for the establishment of such contingency arrangements among already certified entities. The Panel acknowledged however, that information providers should inform the RMSS providers of their contingency arrangements to obtain the required access to the EGC systems.

The Panel thus agreed to encourage information providers to:

1. establish contingency arrangements; and
2. send written confirmation of such arrangements to the RMSS providers with a copy to the Panel, the IHO WNWNS-SC and/or the WMO AG-WWMIWSSC, as appropriate.

6. Broadcast schedules for EGC services

As set out in IMO Resolution A.706(17), navigational warnings should be repeated in scheduled broadcasts in accordance with the guidelines promulgated in the NAVTEX Manual and in the IMO manuals of the RMSS providers, as appropriate. At least two scheduled daily broadcasts are considered necessary to provide adequate promulgation of NAVAREA warnings. When using EGC in lieu of NAVTEX for coastal warnings, a MSI provider may need to consider an increase in the number of scheduled daily broadcasts compared with the requirement for NAVAREA warnings.

Broadcast schedules for NAVAREAs are set out in the EGC services section² of the GMDSS Master Plan of GISIS and are in addition published in relevant nautical publications. NAVAREA coordinators should adhere to the allocated broadcast schedules to facilitate reception of warnings through all EGC services. This so that seafarers can make sure that their terminals are operational, tuned and not in use for other communications at the times of scheduled broadcasts.

Scheduled broadcast times under the EGC service are coordinated through the Panel in cooperation with IHO and WMO. As set out in the IMO manuals of the RMSS providers, authorities should seek approval from the Panel for any changes to existing scheduled broadcast times.

NAVAREA coordinators are encouraged to review their information in the EGC services section of the GMDSS Master Plan of GISIS and other relevant nautical publications to make sure that their allocated broadcast schedule is:

1. aligned and reflected for both SafetyNET and SafetyCast services; and
2. published in relevant nautical publications.

² Section 8, main table and appendices.

7. Next meeting of the Panel

The next meeting of the IMO EGC Coordinating Panel will be held remotely at 11.00 UTC, Thursday 14 November 2024.

8. Action requested

The Sub-Committee is invited to note the report.