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MEMBERSHIP OF THE IHO

1 The Maritime Safety Committee, [at its eighty-seventh session (12 to 21 May 2010)], in response to a proposal from the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) for the issue of an MSC circular, approved the note set out in the annex. The note indicates the responsibilities of the Contracting Governments to SOLAS for the provision of hydrographic services under chapter V, and encourages coastal States that need to develop or improve their hydrographic capabilities and that are not already IHO members to give favourable consideration to becoming members of the Organization.

2 Member Governments are invited to bring the attached annex to the attention of their national authorities responsible for Safety of Navigation, Hydrography and Nautical Cartography, as well as of other appropriate parties.

ANNEX

NOTE FROM THE IHO TO ALL COASTAL STATES

The Safety of Life at Sea Convention (SOLAS) at chapter V places clear obligations on Contracting Governments to arrange for the collection and compilation of hydrographic data and the publication, dissemination and keeping up to date of all nautical information necessary for safe navigation. In particular, Contracting Governments undertake to cooperate in carrying out the following nautical and hydrographic services, in the manner most suitable for the purpose of aiding navigation:

- to ensure that hydrographic surveying is carried out, adequate to the requirements of safe navigation;
- to prepare and issue nautical charts, sailing directions, lists of lights and other nautical publications, satisfying the needs of safe navigation;
- to promulgate notices to mariners in order that nautical charts and publications are kept up to date; and
- to provide data management arrangements to support these services.

The IHO is an Intergovernmental Organization established in 1921 and has as its objectives:

- the coordination of the activities of the national hydrographic services;
- the maximum possible uniformity of nautical charts;
- the effective and reliable methods for carrying out hydrographic surveys; and
- the development of the hydrographic science and of descriptive oceanography.

The IHO is recognized by the United Nations Organization as the competent International Organization for hydrography and nautical charting. It provides a range of international standards that govern the conduct of hydrographic surveys, the provision of nautical charts and publications and, in conjunction with IMO, the promulgation of Maritime Safety Information.

In order to meet the obligations set out in SOLAS chapter V, coastal States need to establish, if one does not already exist, a national Hydrographic Service under whose authority hydrographic services are provided. There are various models operated by IHO Member States under which this is being achieved. Coastal States may seek the assistance and support of the IHO Secretariat, the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB), in developing such a service and are encouraged to consider joining the IHO in order to benefit fully from the support and capacity-building opportunities that exist.

The IHO is uniquely positioned to assist coastal States to meet their obligations under SOLAS chapter V. Membership of the IHO allows a State to participate fully in the activities of the IHO and to receive the full benefit of its coordination, support and capacity-building activities. These efforts are coordinated through its Inter-Regional Coordination Committee which focuses its activities through the 14 Regional Hydrographic Commissions which cover the globe. In particular, membership and participation in the IHO provides direct access to advice, assistance and the experience of other States in the execution and delivery of the hydrographic services required to be provided under SOLAS chapter V.

Hydrographic services have much to offer coastal States in addition to improving safety of navigation and protection of the marine environment. Hydrography underpins almost all maritime applications including port construction, fisheries, coastal zone management, delimitation of national jurisdictional zones, pipeline and cable installation, defence and the mitigation of tsunamis and other natural disasters.

The cost of IHO membership is very low in relation to the benefits that an effective hydrographic service can bring to a coastal State. Membership contributions are related to shipping tonnage and range from 8,000 euros for States with a registered tonnage less than 250,000 to a maximum of 108,000 euros for States with a registered tonnage in excess of 29,000,000. Member States with larger tonnage enjoy certain additional rights with regard to the election of the executive management of the organization and participation in the Council.

The International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB), as the Secretariat of the IHO, is ready to provide further information about membership and access to assistance for those coastal States that wish to develop or improve their hydrographic capabilities in order to meet their obligations under chapter V of SOLAS.

Today IMO has 169 Member States and there are 159 Contracting Governments to SOLAS, whereas the IHO currently has only 80 Member States, with a further 6 pending. It will be to the benefit of every coastal State and for safety at sea if all coastal States were Members of the IHO. The IHB is available to provide any information or assistance that may be required regarding the IHO. The address of the IHB is:

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