

G General Information

44 The International Hydrographic Organization

The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) is an intergovernmental consultative and technical organization that was established in 1921 to support safety of navigation and the protection of the marine environment.

The International Hydrographic Bureau was established as a result of international conferences which had the following objectives:

To consider the advisability of all maritime nations adopting similar methods in the preparation, construction and production of their charts and hydrographic publications; of rendering the results in the most convenient form to enable them to be readily used; of instituting a prompt system of mutual exchange of hydrographic information between all countries and of providing an opportunity for consultations and discussions to be carried out on hydrographic subjects generally, by the hydrographic experts of the world.

While specific statutes now clearly state the objectives of the Bureau, the objective of the early conferences still generally applies.

Four international conferences were held. The first of these was the International Marine Conference (Washington, 1889); the second and third were the International Congress of Navigation (St. Petersburg, 1908 and 1912); and the fourth was the First International Hydrographic Conference, sponsored by Great Britain and France, held at London in 1919.

The Bureau began its activities in 1921 with nineteen Member countries. Over the years, this membership has increased and ninety-eight nations are now Member Governments.

The Principality of Monaco was selected as the seat of the Bureau, partly because of its central position, but largely because of the generous offer of Prince Albert I of Monaco - who was deeply interested in Oceanography - to provide accommodation for the Bureau in his Principality. The reigning Prince, SAS Prince Albert II has graciously extended the use of this accommodation indefinitely.

The official representative of each Member Government within the IHO is normally the national Hydrographer, or Director of Hydrography, who, together with their technical staff and representatives of recognized observer organizations, meet at 3-yearly intervals in Monaco for an IHO Assembly. Assembly reviews the progress achieved by the Organization through its committees, sub committees and working groups, and adopts the programmes to be pursued during the ensuing 3-year period. A Secretary General and two Directors are elected to administer the work of the Organization during that period. The present directing committee is Secretary General Dr Mathias Jonas (Germany) and Directors Abri Kampfer (South Africa) and Luigi Sinapi (Italy).

The Secretary General and Directors, together with a small international staff of technical experts in hydrography and nautical cartography and locally recruited administrative support staff make up the 20 personnel of the IHO Secretariat in Monaco. The Secretariat of the IHO, coordinates and promotes the IHO's programmes and provides advice and assistance to Member States and others.

At the 9th International Hydrographic Conference at Monaco in May 1967, a Convention was adopted with the aim of establishing the Bureau as an inter-governmental organization. This Convention came into force on September 22nd, 1970, from which date the new title of International Hydrographic Organization came into effect. The title International Hydrographic Bureau then only referred to the administrative headquarters at Monaco.

In 2016, several amendments to the Convention entered into force. The principal changes to the IHO were:

- The term International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB) used to describe the headquarters and the secretariat of the IHO ceased to be used and was replaced by the term IHO Secretariat;
- The Directing Committee, comprising a President and two Directors ceased to lead the IHB (Secretariat of the IHO). Instead, the Secretariat of the IHO is now led by a Secretary-General assisted by two subordinate Directors;
- The term International Hydrographic Conference used to designate the principal organ of the Organization, composed of all Member States, was replaced by the term Assembly. The ordinary sessions of the Assembly are held every three years instead of every five years for the Conference; and
- For States wishing to join the IHO that are already Member States of the United Nations, there is no longer a requirement to seek the approval of existing Member States of the IHO.

The IHO is a non-political international organization working solely for the good of seafarers of all nations. It enforces no rules or regulations, but rather sets forth Hydrographic and Cartographic standards as they are agreed upon by the Member Governments. Thus, it is hoped to obtain uniformity, as far as possible, in the charts and hydrographic publications produced by the world's hydrographic offices.

The next session of the Assembly of the International Hydrographic Organization will take place in 2023 in Monaco.

Visit the International Hydrographic Organization's website at [International Hydrographic Organization](https://www.iho.int).

Authority: Canadian Hydrographic Service (CHS)