

IALA VTS Committee

by Paul Owen, Assistant Secretary General

The IALA (International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities) VTS (Vessels Traffic Services) Committee meets twice yearly at their headquarters in Saint Germain-en-Laye on the outskirts of Paris. IFSMA is represented by the Assistant Secretary General.

Attendance is always good and bad, good because it provides a much better representation of views from a diverse cross section of people, and bad because it can stretch the limits of the IALA office accommodation.

More than 50 representatives attend the Committee, they come from government administrations, (e.g. Australian, China, Chile, UK, USA), IALA industrial members (e.g. Transas, Norcontrol, Sofrelog, HITT, Lockheed Martin), and other relevant organisations (e.g. IFSMA, IAPH, Trinity House, Nautical Institute).



The VTS Committee in March 2007.

Until recently the VTS Committee was heavily involved with the implementation of AIS with particular reference to VTS, another IALA Committee dealt with drawing up the actual equipment standards which have now been agreed by IMO.

The VTS Committee is now in the process of finalising the 2008 edition of the VTS Manual, this is currently updated very four years. An update is required at regular intervals due to the rapid development and change of equipment used by VTS and the corresponding operational procedures. Besides the recent introduction of AIS, security is becoming increasingly important. The Manual will be launched at the VTS Symposium to be held in Bergen, Norway in August 2008, to coincide with the finish of the Tall Ships Race involving some 100 sailing vessels. VTS has come a long way since the VTS Committee first met in the early 90's, and thanks in large part to the work of this committee, agreed

standards now exists to guide new and existing VTS systems for equipment specifications, staffing levels, operator training and operating procedures. Detailed specifications for VTS equipment are available elsewhere in other IALA publications as is the IALA Model Training Course for VTS Operators.

Not all subjects considered are straight forward, for example the question of navigational assistance as it relates to pilotage, a rather controversial subject, was on the agenda, but to guide the Committee representatives from Trinity House, International Maritime Pilots' Association and Crescent River Port Pilots' Association were in attendance.

Another difficult area the Committee is working on is the study of VTS operator fatigue, to define safe hours of work under various conditions, this is ongoing and unlikely to be concluded in the near future.

With the new emphasis in E-Navigation (E-Nav) in IMO, IALA were invited by the IMO Secretary General to consider this subject in detail and report back to IMO in due course. The IALA E-Nav Committee first met in September 2006 with the second meeting in March 2007, one of the first jobs was to define E-Nav, and therefore what the E-Nav Committee work programme should include. A related matter was to distinguish, as explained by Torsten Kruuse, Secretary General if IALA in his introduction to the meeting, was to consider the domain awareness between the two Committees where the VTS Committee would have to consider operational aspects and the E-Nav Committees would provide technical solutions. In addition the boundary between ship and shore aspects of e-navigation had not yet been agreed.

In the ever and rapidly changing maritime world the VTS Committee is also considering whether to change its scope and name from VTS to VTM (Vessel Traffic Management). This is an evolutionary step that almost seems inevitable. VTS considers the movement of vessels within the VTS area, what may not be so obvious is that VTM would consider the movement of vessels from berth to berth. The IALA Council, the governing body, has yet to agree to this change. The first task is define what VTM is, up to now there is no internationally accepted definition. There is no intention to abandon the VTS aspects of this Committee.