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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Proposals on the review and revision of the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases

Submitted by China and IMLA

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document provides a preliminary summary of changes in the marine environment and marine communication phrases and terms over the past two decades and proposes to review and update the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases

Strategic direction, if applicable: 6

Output: Not applicable

Action to be taken: Paragraph 21

Related documents: Resolutions A.380(X), A.857(20), A.918(22) and A.1158(32)

Introduction

1 Effective communication is essential to the safety of navigation at sea and standardized marine communication phrases and terms can help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication and reduce the risk of misunderstanding. In this context, in November 2001, the twenty-second session of the IMO Assembly adopted resolution A.918(22) on *IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases* (SMCP).

2 SMCP covers the standard English communication phrases in the relevant safety aspects laid down in the 1974 SOLAS and the 1978 STCW Conventions. SMCP has played an active role in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of shore-to-ship, ship-to-shore, ship-to-ship and onboard communications, enhancing the quality of maritime education and training and promoting safety of navigation at sea.

3 Two decades after the adoption of SMCP, the rapid development of global shipping brought with it significant changes to the conditions of navigation at sea and the modernization of the GMDSS and the implementation of the e-navigation strategy resulted in a process of upgrading of radiocommunication and navigation equipment and technology used on board.

At the same time, several SMCP-related international conventions, rules and standards, including SOLAS, MARPOL, ISPS, VTS Guidelines, etc. which have significant impacts on maritime safety, have undergone continuous amendments. Therefore, the existing SMCP can no longer fully meet the actual needs of marine activities and if not reviewed or revised in a timely manner, it may affect the effectiveness of marine communication, thus bringing hazards to the safety of vessels and seafarers as well as the marine environment.

4 It is also noted that resolution A.918(22) authorizes the Maritime Safety Committee to keep SMCP under review and to amend it, when necessary, in accordance with the relevant procedure set out in annex 2 to the resolution. This document preliminarily collates the changes in marine communication phrases over the past two decades and proposes to review and revise SMCP.

Background

5 In 1973, MSC 27 agreed that, where language difficulties arise, English should be used as a common language for navigational purposes, and in consequence, the Standard Marine Navigation Vocabulary (SMNV) was developed and adopted in November 1977 by resolution A.380(X), which was amended in May 1985.

6 In 1992, MSC 60 instructed the Sub-Committee on Safety of Navigation (NAV) to develop more comprehensive standardized marine communication phrases based on SMNV, taking into account the changing conditions in modern seafaring and covering all major safety-related verbal communications. In 1997, MSC 68 approved the draft SMCP submitted by the NAV Sub-Committee. After several years of international trials, SMCP was adopted on 29 November 2001 by resolution A.918(22).

7 SOLAS regulation V/14.4 stipulates that for ships to which chapter I applies, English shall be used on the bridge as the working language for bridge-to-bridge and bridge-to-shore safety communications as well as for communications on board between the pilot and bridge watchkeeping personnel, unless those directly involved in the communication speak a common language other than English.

8 According to the 1995 amendments to the STCW regulations, the use and understanding of SMCP is the minimum standard of competence for officers in charge of a navigational watch on ships of 500 gross tonnage or more.

Discussion

GMDSS modernization and e-navigation strategy implementation

9 The SMCP glossary is divided into general terms and VTS special terms. In the past two decades, the GMDSS modernization has brought a large number of new marine communication terms such as Automatic Identification System (AIS), Digital Navigational Data System (NAVDAT), VHF Data Exchange System (VDES), and some common terms have gained new meanings compared with previous interpretations.

10 It is neither necessary nor possible to provide in SMCP an exhaustive list of terms that may be used in marine navigation, however it is important to provide, as far as possible, major and representative terms in common use. Therefore, it is considered further review and updating of SMCP terms including their definitions are needed to meet the needs of prospective users and eliminate possible ambiguities. In addition, the general terms contain many terms and phrases of different types used in different scenarios, which is not easy for users to find or access. It is recommended to organize and classify the SMCP terms into

sub-categories according to major maritime services and/or typical scenarios to improve user-friendliness. The sub-categories are suggested to include: radiocommunication, VTS, MSI, TMAS, ship construction, ship operation, life-saving appliances and arrangements, etc.

11 With the development of radiocommunication and medical technologies, telemedical assistance service has been improving day by day. In the *E-navigation Strategy Implementation Plan – Update 1* (MSC.1/Circ.1595), Maritime Service 9 (Telemedical Assistance Service (TMAS)) proposes to implement standardized telemedical services such as monitoring the health status of the patients, remote consultations, etc. through the internet. Therefore, a standardization of the TMAS phrases will help enhance the quality of telemedical practices and treatment.

12 SMCP contains only nine phrases related to requesting medical assistance (A1/1.3), which can no longer fully meet the needs of TMAS, and some phrases, such as "Radio Medical Guidance" (A1/1.3.2.1) and "Radio Medical Guidance on High Frequency Channels/Frequency Arrangements" (A1/1.3.3) are no longer suitable considering the development of TMAS practice. When the transfer is required, no matter ship-to-ship transfer, helicopter transfer or ship-to-shore transfer, consideration should be given not only to the cost of services and the deployment of relevant medical resources, but also to the risks that rescuers put themselves into to save people at sea. In this context, MRCCs, shipowners and medical staff all need to give specific medical advice or make decisions based on their understanding of the basic conditions of the patients. In this respect, it is suggested the *International Medical Guide for Ship* (IMGS), jointly issued by IMO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), in particular chapter 25 on External assistance, providing guidance on medical advice, helicopter evacuation, ship-to-ship transfer of doctor or patient, and referral information to accompany evacuated patients, should be taken into account.

Amendments to the relevant conventions and regulations

13 In recent years, a couple of maritime safety-related conventions and regulations have come into force, such as the MLC 2006, the 2004 BWM Convention, the ISPS Code, the amendments to MARPOL 73/78, etc. which have a direct impact on the complexity of marine communications. For instance, after the ISPS Code became effective on 1 July 2004, security-related communications between ship-to-ship, ship-to-shore, ship-to-naval convoys and on board are becoming very common. Therefore, security information exchange between ships and port facilities, security level declaration, pirate attack information report, etc. should also be an important part of SMCP.

14 Greenhouse gas emission reduction and the development of green shipping have been put high on the agenda, gradually broadening the content of marine communication, for example, the use of low-sulphur fuel or LNG fuel to meet an Emission Control Area (ECA) requirement and the use of shore power, etc.

15 VTS communication is an important part of SMCP (Part A1/6). With the development of VTS, the global consistency and applicability of VTS communications have always been the focus of the shipping industry. IALA released the *VTS Communications* (R1012) in January 2018 and the 2.0 version of *VTS voice communications and phraseology* (G1132) in June 2021 respectively. In addition, the thirty-second session of the IMO Assembly in 2021 adopted the revised *Vessel Traffic Service Guidelines* by resolution A.1158(32), which deleted the content related to the original VTS service types, and instead highlighted the VTS services in typical scenarios such as timely and relevant information provision, vessel traffic monitoring and management, and responding to developing unsafe situations. The SMCP A1/6 part, which is developed based on resolution A.857(20), needs to be updated accordingly to be consistent with the newly adopted VTS related IALA Guidelines and IMO resolution.

16 In addition, it is envisaged that the rapid development and application of computer, network and communication technologies as well as autonomous shipping will both facilitate and bring new vitality and challenges to effective communication at sea. Considering the complexity of effective communication in the context of shipping innovation and development, this may be considered and accommodated during the review and revision of SMCP.

17 SMCP is largely based on relevant conventions, resolutions, standards, circulars, guidelines or manuals. Some references are outdated, for example, the IAMSAR Manual (1998) cited in A1/1.2.3 and B2/6 has been amended to the 2019 edition, and resolution A.851(20) on *General Principles for Ship Reporting Systems and Ship Reporting Requirements* cited in A1/6 has been amended by resolution MEPC.138(53). Some new references such as the *International Medical Guide for Ships* and the *VTs voice communications and phraseology* (IALA G1132) may need to be added. A new appendix is recommended to be developed to list the SMCP normative reference documents and their version information, which would be easier to use and maintain.

Increased marine activities

18 Maritime safety information (MSI) is an important part of SMCP (Part A1/3). With the development of marine activities, the types and content of MSI are also increasing. In this respect, the phrases and terms related to navigation warnings contained in SMCP are insufficient to cover the scenarios specified in the revised *Joint IMO/IHO/WMO Manual on Maritime Safety Information (MSI)* (MSC.1/Circ.1310/Rev.1) and it is recommended that at least two categories of navigational warnings in relation to large-scale recreational activities and sports and designated areas be added.

19 The sub-category of large-scale MASS recreational activities and sports may include water exhibition, regatta, aqua show, etc., while the designated area sub-category may include area to be avoided (Navigation/Anchoring), pipeline/submarine cable area, dangerous mine area, anchorage, dumping area, cultivation/entertainment area, fairway, ship reporting point (RP), traffic control area, etc.

Proposals

20 In light of the above, it is proposed to review and amend SMCP, taking into account the changing conditions and practices in modern seafaring. If the Sub-Committee agrees, China and the International Maritime Lecturers Association (IMLA) will submit a new output proposal to MSC and will be happy to lead the work.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

21 The Sub-Committee is invited to consider the proposals contained in paragraph 20 and take action, as appropriate.