CONSOLIDATED IMSO BRIEFING: APRIL 2015 TO DECEMBER 2019

INTRODUCTION

1 As a part of Director General’s (DG) commitment to the memberships of the Organization, the DG since joining the Organization in 2015, have ensured that briefings to the SOLAS Contracting Governments, IMSO Member States, non-IMSO Member States and observers are made periodically. However, despite best efforts, it has been difficult for some States to participate in such briefings on a regular basis. Hence, this consolidated report has been prepared to provide an update to all interested parties, outlining the works and substantive progress achieved by the Organization in key areas from April 2015 to December 2019, as outlined below.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

2 General

IMSO continues to perform its role as the global intergovernmental regulatory oversight body, protecting maritime public safety services (Global Maritime Distress Safety System - GMDSS) on behalf of the 165 SOLAS (International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea) Contracting Governments. It also serves as the coordinator of the international system for the Long-Range Identification and Tracking of Ships (LRIT) and functions effectively to meet safety, security and marine environmental protection needs of the SOLAS Contracting Governments. Membership of the Organization has increased from 99 to 105 Member States over the last four reporting years.

3 Ensuring continuity of Global Safety Services – GMDSS

3.1 Continuity of GMDSS services by the existing satellite service provider

3.1.1 IMSO has been closely monitoring the availability of both space and ground segments of the satellite system to ensure the GMDSS services provided by the existing commercial operator Inmarsat are up and running at all times. It’s critical given the growth and volume of international maritime trade that GMDSS services are readily available to safeguard seafarers and passengers on ships and that the commercial operator performs to the expected service availability requirements through its satellite communication network.

3.1.2 As there are likely to be new entrants to offering GMDSS, demand on IMSO directorate will be further increased in order to continue to monitor the expected performance levels required for the provisioning of GMDSS by multiple satellite service providers.

3.2 Assessment of a new additional GMDSS service provider

3.2.1 IMSO, at the request of IMO, has successfully carried out the technical and operational assessment of the Iridium satellite system, ensuring that it complies fully with the requirements of the GMDSS. IMSO provided detailed assessment reports to the IMO’s Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) for recognising Iridium as the new additional satellite operator for GMDSS. Iridium with its unique non-geostationary constellation of low earth orbiting satellites has enabled coverage of polar regions thus making GMDSS
services more readily available to seafarers and others at sea in these extreme environments as the impact of climate change has enabled polar routes to be opened up for a variety of maritime traffic. Following the signing of the Public Service Agreement (PSA) with Iridium on 12 March 2019, IMSO has further ratified the operational capabilities and issued the Letter of Compliance (LoC) to Iridium on 19 December 2019, enabling this second operator to offer satellite communication services in the GMDSS.

3.2.2 The introduction of an additional GMDSS provider with a non-geostationary (Low Earth Orbiting - LEO) satellite constellation has brought innovation with an enhanced global footprint, including the polar regions, and created competition to minimize the cost base for maritime users. Therefore, it can be concluded that the strategy of introducing additional GMDSS providers has been a success in creating a more competitive environment.

3.3 Recognition of Inmarsat’s new Fleet Safety service for GMDSS

3.3.1 Following the proposal by the United Kingdom on Inmarsat’s Fleet Broadband Maritime Safety Data Service (MSDS) or “Fleet Safety” service and under IMO invitation, IMSO conducted the technical and operational assessment of the Fleet Safety service for recognition and using in GMDSS. After submitting the assessment report to the 5th session of the NCSR Sub-Committee, resolution MSC.450(99) Statement of Recognition of Maritime Satellite Services provided by Inmarsat Global Ltd. was adopted at MSC 99, finalising the recognition of this new service from Inmarsat Ltd to further strengthen the provisioning of GMDSS. The Fleet Safety service introduces modern technologies and is designed to help save the lives at sea, bringing new features to support faster response to distress situations at sea.

3.3.2 Simultaneously with the “Fleet Safety” service, Inmarsat deployed two new web-based systems, the SafetyNET II and the RescueNET for use by Maritime Safety Information (MSI) providers and Search and Rescue (SAR) authorities. These systems provide improved interfaces for users and allow them to direct delivery their messages for broadcasting to ships. The RescueNet is provided without charges to Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs) and will support a wider number of them to be connected. The SafetyNET II is an improvement on top of the current SafetyNET that gives MSI providers greater control on their transmissions together with a significant total cost reduction.

3.4 Development of a Reference Public Services Agreement

3.4.1 IMSO carried out consultation and legal coordination with Inmarsat and Iridium to create an updated Reference Public Services Agreement (PSA) for use with all satellite service providers. This reference PSA was used in the introduction of the first additional recognised satellite service provider Iridium, which was signed in March 2019. The reference PSA can be used as the basis for any PSA between IMSO and any new additional provider of GMDSS services, once IMSO has successfully completed the technical and operational assessment subject to the requirements of IMO’s resolution A.1001(25).

3.4.2 IMSO signing of the PSA with multiple GMDSS providers ensures to the extent possible provisioning of GMDSS service. However, Member States may wish to note that contrasting with the previous situation whereby global public safety services were protected by additional administrative measures, today there are no fall back measures to guarantee the operations of commercial service providers in the event of their anti-competition alliance, bankruptcy or liquidation.

3.5 Assessment of another additional GMDSS provider

3.5.1 China has submitted its application for the introduction of the BeiDou Message Service System (BDMSS) to be recognised for GMDSS to the IMO Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) at its 99th session in
2018. In this regard, pursuant of MSC 99 instruction, the Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communication Search and Rescue (NCSR) at its 7th session in January 2020 invited IMSO to conduct the technical and operational assessment of BMDSS required for its recognition for use in GMDSS. Going forward, the IMSO Directorate will conduct the technical and operational assessment of BDMSS and submit an assessment report for IMO’s consideration at its future meetings.

4 LRIT Coordination

4.1 Current status of LRIT system

4.1.1 Long Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) of ships of all flag States is an essential part of safety and security measures that are being deployed by SOLAS States given the increased volume of international maritime trade and the growth of piracy activities in many of the international waters. Ever since its establishment in 2008, the system is gaining its importance, with SOLAS States using LRIT information to improve safety, security and search and rescue at sea.

4.1.2 Today, we have 165 SOLAS Contracting Governments, however, only 116 Contracting Governments, ten non-metropolitan territories and two special administrative regions are integrated into the LRIT system. IMSO, as the coordinating body, has undertaken efforts to engage with non-participating States to motivate them joining the system for its wider implementation.

4.1.3 It was found that a good number of States were disconnected from the system due to financial issues related to the provisioning of the service. IMSO efforts have helped them to solve their pending issues and to reconnect their data centres. IMSO has also encouraged new members to join the LRIT system. With both disconnected members re-joining as well as new members brought on board, has enabled not only successful and enhanced implementation of the LRIT system for ensuring safety, security, protection of the marine environment and search and rescue globally, but also enabled sustainable financing and lower audit fee.

4.1.4 In addition, increased membership of the LRIT system has meant that economies of scale with lower costs can be passed on to all participating members, as shown in section 4.2 below.

4.2 LRIT implementation

4.2.1 IMSO is in continual engagement with SOLAS Contracting Governments to demonstrate the benefits of joining the LRIT system. It delivered an international LRIT seminar at IMO HQ in February 2018 with the objective of promoting the LRIT system and for the capacity-building of SOLAS States. The Directorate has also been conducting an outreach campaign which has resulted in an increasing number of SOLAS Contracting Governments joining the LRIT system. Since 2015, 12 new Data Centres have been established and 9 States have joined the system. This increase in joining the LRIT system helps to implement the LRIT and reduces the overall cost base for all the SOLAS States. Going forward: the Directorate will continue to encourage more SOLAS Contracting Governments to join the LRIT system for its enhanced implementation.

4.3 LRIT audit fee

4.3.1 The backlog of audits has been completed, and all the remaining audits on target for completion. Since the Director General assumed the office in 2015, he has pursued a strategy for the LRIT functioning, so as to achieve higher output through wider implementation and minimisation of the audit fees such that they reach a more acceptable level for SOLAS Contracting Governments (as shown in the chart below). The DG, whilst maintaining the same LRIT cost base and audit fee successfully for the years from 2015 to 2019, introduced a further ‘reduction in audit fees’ for the upcoming 2020 audits. For 2020 IMSO will not only continue to carry out LRIT scheduled audits but equally make every effort to maintain lower LRIT audit fee in upholding the best interest of SOLAS Contracting Governments.
LRIT audit fee for a Data Centre was reduced to £3,300 in 2015, and then to £3,100 from 2016 to 2019, and finally £1,900 in 2020.

4.4 LRIT audit reporting

4.4.1 Seeking to improve its processes as the LRIT Coordinator, IMSO proposed amendments to the principles and guidelines relating to the review and audit of the performance of LRIT Data Centres and the International LRIT Data Exchange. The amendments, approved by MSC.101, reduced administrative workload and concentrated more effort in the technical part of the audit. Furthermore, the audit report format was updated, in order to provide more user-friendly information. MSC.101 also approved the LRIT third modification phase, and the Directorate staff have been upgrading the audit software infrastructure with internal resources in order to be able to audit the LRIT new features.

5 Directorate Activities

5.1 IMSO representation

5.1.1 The Directorate has continued to participate and submit input documents to meetings from various international organizations including IMO, International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and other relevant bodies. In advancing and promoting the modernization of GMDSS, with multiple new entrants and the need for a thorough assessment of new applicants and continued monitoring of the existing service providers coupled with the growth of LRIT and development of SAR for both GMDSS and Global Aeronautical Distress and Safety System (GADSS), the organization will be faced with providing input to various bodies and to attend relevant meetings.

5.2 Satellite communications frequency related activities

5.2.1 Following the outcome from International Telecommunication Union (ITU) at the World Radiocommunication Conference in 2015, in order to safeguard public safety interest in the use of the L band frequencies from 1518 MHz and above, IMSO has supported all possible efforts to protect L band and also C band for maritime and aeronautical safety services, in collaboration with concerned Member States and relevant international organizations and provided inputs to the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications (CEPT), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), IMO and ITU. IMSO
would further welcome continued support from Member States on the protection of both L and C bands for provisioning of global safety services.

5.3 SAR related activities

5.3.1 IMSO in support of SAR authorities, has collaborated with SOLAS States to minimize the volume of false distress alerts, particularly from fishing vessels and non-SOLAS ships. These false distress alerts negatively impact Rescue Coordination Centres which have been severely affected by these unnecessary false alerts.

5.3.2 IMSO has followed with interest the ICAO developments on the GADSS in the context of aeronautical and maritime search and rescue (IAMSAR), collaborating in common areas as per the Agreement of Cooperation executed between the organizations.

5.4 Capacity building

5.4.1 IMSO has continued to provide support to Members States for capacity building by:
- collaborating with Inmarsat in educating students of institutions including the World Maritime University and the International Maritime Law Institute, on the implementation of GMDSS;
- provided regular briefings on existing and new safety services including Inmarsat’s Fleet Safety service;
- organizing and holding LRIT seminar to update SOLAS States; and
- assisting Member States on implementation of GMDSS for tsunami early warning system.

5.5 Headquarters relocation

5.5.1 IMSO headquarters were successfully relocated to the IMO building in July 2018, maximizing the cost efficiency and capabilities of the Organization and also to collaborate easily with its Member States and IMO.

5.6 Financial matters

5.6.1 In advancing the “Do More with Less” strategy, in line with decisions of the IMSO Assembly at its 22nd session (2012), the Director General has undertaken significant initiatives with a reduced budget to achieve the goals of the Organization securing support from the SOLAS States, satellite service providers, and data centre operators, as well as motivating staff members to deliver key results as reflected above.

5.6.2 The Director General has continued to maintain a prudent cost base even with increased volume of activities, returning savings on GMDSS to the satellite service provider and minimising LRIT audit fees for SOLAS Contracting Governments. Progressively, the DG will continue to minimise costs as and where possible in the interest of all concerned parties including both Member Governments and GMDSS Operators.