

ICA Offshore

One significant focus of ICA work comes from the members of the ICA Commission on Marine Cartography. It has few members but they interact effectively with a number of other associations to bring cartographic and spatial expertise to bear on issues from a marine or maritime perspective. Mostly, the members work by correspondence but hold a work meeting whenever they can, usually at the biennial International Cartographic Conferences. Anybody with an interest in marine cartography is welcome to attend.

The vast majority of humankind lives on or near the coast and, by whatever definition is used for coastal regions, it is generally agreed that human pressures threaten them all. These threats, together with such issues as hugely differing time-scales, varying data sets and interpretive perspectives, bring unique but exciting challenges to GIS and cartographic professionals and practitioners applying the potential of GIS to aid in the management of the world's coastal regions.

There has been extensive development of GIS in relation to terrestrial natural resources information, more recently extended to include socioeconomic data, but there has been a slower uptake in relation to coastal and marine systems. The international collaboration stimulated by the Commission seeks to extend its examination of the latest state of data modelling and management to a consideration of the requirements for extensive spatial data infrastructures.

The Commission is responsible for a number of initiatives, which are explained below.

- Links between the Commission and the International Geographical Union's Commission on Coastal Systems, over the last decade or so, have resulted in the international collaboration known as CoastGIS (www.coastgis.org). There have been five biennial conferences that bring together researchers and practitioners focussed on spatial issues relating to coastal regions and on the potential of geographic information systems. The next two conferences will be held in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 2005 (www.coastgis2005.org.uk) and Australia in 2006 (www.uow.edu.au/science/eesc/conferences/coastgis06.html).
- A small group in Hungary is working on a multilingual gazetteer of marine names.
- The significance of the effort required internationally to produce hydrographic surveys and nautical charts covering the world's oceans and coastal regions is under-recognised. Collaboration between ICA and the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) has led to two members from this ICA Commission working on the FIG/IHO/ ICA Advisory Board for Standards of Competence for Hydrographic Surveyors and Nautical Cartographers. The recent introduction of internationally accepted standards of competency for nautical cartographers has come out of the collaboration: the Chinese Naval Academy at Dalian, PRC, will soon be awarded the very first recognition by the Advisory Board for its degree course in nautical cartography. The standards can be downloaded from www.iho.shom.fr. Approved and recognised Standards of Competence for Hydrographic Surveyors have been in existence for many years, but only in 2003 were such standards finally approved and accepted by the parent bodies of the Advisory Board. This has been a significant step for nautical cartography.