

## Deep divisions over LRIT costs Majority of members fail to state intentions for tracking systems

Neville Smith - Monday 12 May 2008

WORK on the Long-Range Information and Tracking programme is continuing at the International Maritime Organization's Maritime Safety Committee meeting in London, with the secretariat desperate to secure agreement on a number of key issues ahead of the January 1, 2008 deadline.

Member states are still split on who should pay for the position reports and how much of the cost should be passed on.

Slovenia, which holds the rotating European Union presidency, called for leniency in the early months of programme.

Shipowner organisations have also argued that the huge variance of preparation and readiness among the flag states could leave their members effectively non-compliant in January next year through no fault of their own.

In the most illuminating example of the problems afflicting LRIT, just 26 Solas-contracting governments out of 167 IMO member countries have replied to a questionnaire re-issued by the IMO at MSC 83 asking them for their intentions on their LRIT systems.

The respondents include the biggest flag states, Panama, Marshall Islands and Liberia, but they have differing views on how the system should be designed and implemented.

The Marshall Islands has established its own data centre and has been tracking ships since 2006.

Panama favours the establishment of an International Data Centre.

Liberia has indicated it would "probably" establish a national data centre but has said it "does not anticipate tracking its own ships".

Work is continuing on the interim International Data Exchange to be hosted by the United States but following the last MSC meeting, plans for an International Data Centre were dropped.

Instead member states must establish a national data centre or collaborate on regional or bilateral centres with neighbouring countries.

The Slovenian delegation made an intervention during the debate to point out that setting up an EU NDC to cover the 27 EU members as well as Iceland and Norway was proving a "large and complex undertaking".

He said: "Due to the complexity of the project, the European LRIT Data Centre might not be operational on time. This might also be the case for many other IMO member states."

Slovenia said it was not proposing postponement or amendment but the next session of the MSC should consider "leniency on the enforcement of the control provisions during the first year of implementation".

The mixed responses to the LRIT survey and the divergent levels of enthusiasm among member states are underscored by a deeply held unhappiness with the costs that developing nations which flag the majority of tonnage feel they are being made to bear because of the security concerns of other nations.

The delegate of the Bahamas repeated his previously expressed position that flag states were being made to

payfor messages sent during deepsea voyages that nobody would want.

Costs can only be passed on if the coastal state requests the message from the flag state. Having borne the cost of an NDC, he said that flag states should be able to pass on costs to shipowners as was originally envisaged.

"We don't object to the concept, but as a developing nation we have limited resources," he said. "Why should we pay for the security concerns of other nations?"

International Chamber of Shipping marine director Peter Hinchliffe warned that lack of progress in establishing the LRIT structure threatened chaos on January 1, 2009.

That many countries had made little or no provision for their long-range tracking data centres meant there was "a real danger that there would be no transmission path" for messages from ships andowners, which could be found non-compliant with Solas through no fault of their own.

For port calls to the US following the final rule-making published a few days ago, ships could face prosecution for civil or criminal offences, he added.

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