The 54th session of the Sub-committee on Safety of Navigation

By Kim Fisher, Chairman Marine Navigation Traffic Group (RIN)

The meeting was held in the newly refurbished IMO headquarters in July with a very heavy agenda.

The dominating issue concerned the mandatory carriage of Electronic Chart Display and Information Systems (ECDIS) which had been under discussion for some years. After very considerable debate mandatory carriage was finally agreed for new ships after 2012 of size 500 gross tonnage for passenger ships and 3,000 gross tonnage for cargo ships. A timescale for existing ships down to 10,000 gross tonnage for cargo ships was agreed extending out to 2018. A further mandatory carriage requirement was agreed for a Bridge Navigational Watch Alarm System for passenger ships and cargo ships of 150 gross tonnage starting from 2011.

Three difficult issues were successfully concluded. Japan had proposed the development of a code of conduct during demonstrations/campaigns against ships on the high seas. The meeting decided that this was not necessary in the light of the existing Conventions of COLREGs, SOLAS, SUA and STCW. A resolution was drafted to remind all parties of this to be considered again at the next session. Norway had proposed changing the colours of navigation lights to align them with the colours specified for motor vehicles and Italy had proposed a review of COLREGs regarding the right of way of vessels over pleasure craft. In both cases it was decided not to proceed with the proposals and the issues were deleted from the work programme.

The meeting was also charged with concluding the agenda item on the development of an e-Navigation strategy which had been actioned by a correspondence group. The output achieved was the generation of a strategy for the development of an e-Navigation implementation plan with a proposal for a time frame of four sessions i.e. to 2012.

A need to review pilot transfer arrangements was agreed and a correspondence group set up. A further correspondence group was set up to review binary messages for AIS. The Circular concerning installation of AIS was revised to note that the designation of the noxious liquids pollution categories has changed from A.B.C,D to X,Y,Z.OS in the latest
edition of MARPOL. A symbol for the display of the AIS-SART was agreed.

New traffic separation schemes were agreed in the approaches to the port of Thessaloniki, for the Åland Sea together with a deep water route and a two way route and in Liverpool Bay together with an area to be avoided, Amendments to existing traffic separation schemes were agreed in the approaches to Boston Massachusetts, off Land’s End, in the approaches to the River Humber and at Hatter Barn. Areas to be avoided were agreed in the great south channel off the east coast of the United States, and in the western north Atlantic ocean off the coast of the United States. A new mandatory ship reporting system off the coast of Portugal was agreed and amendments to the ship reporting system for the Papahanaumokuakea Marine National Monument were agreed.

The meeting was the last meeting for the Chairman, Kees Polderman, who was standing down after eleven years. The new Chairman will be Mike Sollosi of the USCG and the next meeting will be held in late July 2009.