ICS ON IMO ACTION

The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), which represents global shipowners and 80% of the world merchant fleet, has welcomed the decision by the IMO Sub-Committee on Safety of Navigation (held from 2nd to 6th July in London) to take action to address operating anomalies with ECDIS, and to reject a proposal to establish a new recommended route for all ships in the Mozambique Channel that would have been approximately 1,000 miles long.

**ECDIS operating anomalies**
On 1st July, new mandatory IMO requirements for ECDIS entered in force, something which ICS has long supported provided that sufficient Electronic Navigation Chart availability could be met before the phased-in carriage requirements first become effective. Disturbingly it has become apparent that not all ECDIS systems may be fully effective, with the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) advising that some systems have reportedly failed to display significant underwater features in the ‘Standard’ display mode, necessitating the continued use of paper charts.

ICS Director Marine, John Murray remarked, “**ICS welcomes IMO’s recognition of the problem and its development of a circular providing advice on the issue to mariners, with a meeting with ECDIS manufacturers planned for September that will hopefully get to the root of this serious problem. But in view of the potential danger presented by ECDIS operating anomalies, ICS will continue to monitor the situation very closely.**”

There is also a workshop in October to be organised by IHO and hosted by IMO. The workshop will further consider this matter and in particular the long term safety aspects of ECDIS and other software-based navigational systems.

**Rejection of 1,000 Mile Routeing Measure in the Mozambique Channel**
IMO Member States have rejected a proposal to establish a new recommended route for all ships in the Mozambique Channel that would have been approximately 1,000 miles long.

The proposal had been made by Comoros, France, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, the Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania, having been given impetus by work conducted by the World Bank. However, ICS co-ordinated with
its member national shipowners’ associations to ensure that governments attending the IMO meeting were fully aware of the implications of taking forward such a measure.

ICS Director Marine, John Murray commented, “We are pleased that IMO has carefully listened to shipowners and made the right decision. Support for such a concept could have set a very unwelcome precedent for the management of deep sea navigation elsewhere. The compelling need for the measure was unclear and no statistical evidence had been provided regarding shipping casualties or near misses. This omission made it very difficult to quantify the anticipated benefit that the proposal might have delivered.”

The main aim of the proposal was advised to be a reduction to the risk of collision and grounding in the Mozambique Channel. However, despite vessels favouring certain routes, shipping currently is free to use the entire width of the Channel, which is in international waters. The proposed measure sought to concentrate shipping into restricted lanes and could potentially have increased the risk of collision. Even at its narrowest point the Mozambique Channel is over 200 miles wide, and today many ships make use of this width and keep well away from the routes used by transiting tankers and similar vessels.

John Murray added, “ICS is nevertheless very appreciative of the work that has been undertaken in the region to improve safety of navigation and to open up access to local ports. It is simply the routeing measure that has given shipowners difficulties given the apparent lack of any evidence-based justification.”