International Maritime Organisation (IMO)

Sub-Committee on Radio Communications and Search and Rescue (COMSAR 16)
12 to 13 March 2012

Agenda Item 1: Adoption of the Agenda

1. The Sub-Committee adopted the agenda and agreed, in general, that the work of the Sub-Committee should be guided by the annotations to the provisional agenda and timetable. The list of Working and Drafting Groups was noted.

Working Groups:

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Agenda Item 2 Decisions of other IMO bodies

COMSAR noted the decisions and comments pertaining to its work by other IMO committees

Agenda Item 3 Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS)

There is a lack of a definite objective/plan. As an objective of this session, COMSAR established the Drafting Group on the Finalization of the Scoping exercise under the chairmanship of Mr. Kim Fisher (IEC) and instructed it to finalize the draft Work Plan along with a proposal for a new unplanned output on the "Revision and modernization of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System" for approval by the Committee.

On receipt of the report of the Drafting Group on the Finalization of the Scoping exercise, COMSAR approved the report, in general, and endorsed the draft revised Work Plan as a new unplanned output on the "Revision and modernization of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System" and invited the Committee to approve it;

Agenda Item 4 ITU maritime radio communication matters

The outcomes of the IMO/ITU Experts Group were noted and supported. There was no objection to retention of Accounting Authorities although there is little current need for them.
The 16/4/3 paper promoted a particular option for safety information use of the 500kHz band. Several delegations expressed their interest in this newly developed system, but the majority of the delegations who spoke were of the view that there would be a need for a new unplanned output before the Sub-Committee could consider this issue. Romania, supported by others, explained that this system was a result of four years' work and fully in line with IMO's approved position on relevant WRC-12 Agenda items, in which IMO had supported an exclusive primary allocation to the maritime mobile service in the band 495-505 kHz to fulfil possible requirements in future. In light of the foregoing, the Sub-Committee invited interested Member Governments to submit a proposal for a new unplanned output to the Committee.

COMSAR also discussed whether diver distress beacons and other MOB devices should alert the parent vessel rather than a public GMDSS system. (16/4/4 refers). Several delegations expressed the view that there would be a need to send a liaison statement to ITU-R in which the purpose of the GMDSS was highlighted in relation to the use of designated GMDSS frequencies by non-GMDSS systems. COMSAR recalled that it had earlier agreed that this kind of operation should be undertaken by non-GMDSS frequencies. After a brief discussion, the Sub-Committee decided to refer this document to the Technical Working Group for detailed consideration and the preparation of a liaison statement to ITU-R Working Party 5B, as appropriate.

**Agenda Item 5 Consideration of developments in Inmarsat and Cospas-Sarsat**

COMSAR noted that COMSAR 15 had considered information and recommendations related to arrangements for the use of distress priority communications in the shore-to-ship direction (COMSAR 15/5) and revised and approved COMSAR.1/Circ.50/Rev.1 on Distress priority Communications for RCC from shore-to-ship via Inmarsat. The Sub-Committee considered document COMSAR 16/5 (IMSO) providing additional and updated information in relation to arrangements for the use of distress priority communications in the shore-to-ship direction via Inmarsat and decided to refer this document to the SAR Working Group.

As a result of the SAR working Group report, COMSAR agreed to advise Member Governments, SAR authorities and RCCs of the new services provided by INMARSAT with respect to distress priority communications in the shore-to-ship direction via INMARSAT. COMSAR further agreed that there was no need to revise Circular 50 on distress priority communications for RCCs from shore-to-ship via INMARSAT.

**Agenda Item 6 Search and Rescue (SAR)**

COMSAR received a report from the SAR working Group and endorsed:

- The draft revised MSC circular on Guide for cold water survival and invited the Committee to approve it.
- The draft COMSAR circular on Guidance for entering and updating information on Search and Rescue into GISIS and on how to access information for operational use and invited the Committee to approve it.

COMSAR considered document COMSAR 16/6/2 (United States) providing information that a SAR application was being sold that used e-mail to notify SAR authorities of a distress situation. It was also noted that the United States Coast Guard had safety concerns about this application and had asked for its removal for sale in the United States. After some discussion, the Sub-Committee concurred with the concerns expressed by the United States and decided to instruct the SAR Working Group to prepare a draft COMSAR circular with the aim to inform Member Governments on the issue and recommend actions to be taken.
The draft COMSAR circular on Guidance on Smartphone and Other Computer Devices was endorsed by COMSAR 16.

COMSAR considered document COMSAR 16/6/4 (Argentina) proposing an evaluation of the technical and operational feasibility of including "number of persons on board" (NPB) as a mandatory field in the AIS message data structure for class A and class B equipment. It noted the pros and cons of the operational desirability and feasibility of including a mandatory application of an AIS message standard field for "number of persons on board" and agreed that SAR services would greatly benefit from such information if it correctly reflected the number of persons on board at any given time. However, no consensus could be reached on the mandatory application for class A and class B equipment.

The Sub-Committee considered the matter of manual activation of EPIRBs at the early stage of an emergency and agreed to invite Member Governments and interested organizations to submit proposals clarifying the issue for seafarers to the next session of the Sub-Committee (COMSAR17).

COMSAR invited MSC to extend the target completion date for the agenda item "Development of guidelines on harmonized aeronautical and maritime search and rescue procedures, including SAR training matters" to 2013.

**Agenda Item 7 Developments in maritime radio communication systems and technology**

COMSAR considered document COMSAR 16/7 (Poland) proposing the inclusion of an automatic transmission of radiotelephone station identification during operation of radio equipment in the VHF and MF/HF frequency bands. This is not new as there is already an EU directive covering the Inland Waterways of Europe. On receipt of the report from the technical working group, COMSAR noted the opinion that the proposal on automatic transmission of radiotelephone station identification should be considered by the correspondence group on the Review of the GMDSS.

In considering the issue of developments in Man Overboard (MOB) and similar devices using AIS-SART technology (COMSAR 16/7/3, paragraphs 12 to 20), COMSAR agreed with the view that there was a need to consider the use of the AIS symbol for these kind of devices and to develop guidance to inform seafarers that there were devices which operated in a similar way to an AIS-SART, had the same symbol displayed, but were used for different purposes. COMSAR recalled that this was a matter for the NAV Sub-Committee and agreed to invite it to consider the use of the AIS symbol for these kinds of devices and to develop appropriate guidance to seafarers for further consideration and finalization by COMSAR 17. COMSAR also noted that there was inconsistency between AIS-SART and radar-SART in SOLAS chapter IV, regulation 7.1.3, and annex IV of COLREG (COMSAR 16/WP.5, paragraph 5.6).

COMSAR considered document COMSAR 16/7/2 (China) proposing to promote a study on AIS Personal Locater Beacons based on AIS-SART technology, to be used on lifejackets, in order to facilitate effective search and rescue of survivors in water. After a brief discussion, the Sub-Committee invited China to submit a proposal to the Committee for a new unplanned output for future consideration of this matter. The delegation of China confirmed that, as advised, they would submit a proposal to the Committee. The CIRM observer suggested that, since the term "PLB" was linked to Cospas-Sarsat beacons, it might be more appropriate to use the term AIS Man Overboard devices.

**Agenda Item 8 Development of amendments to the IAMSAR Manual**

This item covers the same area as 6 above. COMSAR endorsed the draft amendments to the IAMSAR Manual and requested the Committee to approve them for inclusion in the 2013 edition of the Manual and to further approve the associated draft MSC circular.
**Agenda Item 9 Development of measures to avoid false distress alerts**

The Sub-Committee considered documents COMSAR 16/9/1, COMSAR 16/9/2 and COMSAR 16/9/3 (Republic of Korea), proposing that: the specification and location of distress alarm buttons needed to be standardized, not from the perspective of a radio communication installation, but from users' viewpoint, taking into account factors such as the human factors and the navigation bridge designs; a standardized system of audio and visual indications of distress alarms needed to be created, aimed at indicating the alarm's transmission status with a view to preventing user confusion; and an appropriate size for a distress button was needed to prevent malfunctions inadvertently caused by the users.

The Korean papers were thought to go into more detail than was required and proposals should be more goal-based. However, the size of the distress button may be an issue, but any future requirements should only be applicable to new ships.

**Agenda Item 10 Development of measures to protect the safety of persons rescued at sea**

No papers were submitted under this item. However, COMSAR noted that the Secretariat had attended an Expert meeting organized by UNHCR in Djibouti (8 to 10 November 2011) on the development of a Model Framework for cooperation following rescue at sea operations involving refugees and asylum seekers. This Model Framework was to be seen as complementary to the development of a draft Regional MoU being undertaken by IMO.

**Agenda Item 11 Development of an e-navigation strategy implementation plan**

COMSAR noted that, in paragraph 25 of the report of the Correspondence Group (COMSAR 16/11), the following communication services were identified as representing some of the main elements of the e-navigation concept:

- AIS (Next generation), including satellite AIS (S-AIS);
- VHF Data Communications; and
- Digital broadcasting of Maritime Safety Information (MSI) in the 500 kHz band (495-505 kHz).

COMSAR also noted that NAV 57 had re-established the Correspondence Group on e-navigation under the coordination of Norway with the terms of reference, as set out in paragraph 6.42 of the report of NAV 57.

**Agenda Item 12 Revision of the Recommendation for the protection of the AIS VHF Data Link (resolution MSC140 (76))**

COMSAR considered document COMSAR 16/12 (IALA), proposing to update resolution MSC140 (76) on the protection of the AIS VHF Data Link, in anticipation of the dissemination of a large volume of information from of class B devices. The Sub-Committee further considered document COMSAR 16/12/1 (United States), commenting on document COMSAR 16/12, which proposed changes to resolution MSC140 (76) regarding loading of the AIS VHF data link.

In the ensuing discussions, COMSAR came to the conclusion that the proposal by IALA (COMSAR 16/12) should be supported; and that concerns related to the proposals by the United States (COMSAR 16/12/1), in particular the issue of monitoring the AIS VDL, was a new IALA recommendation (A-124) on which very little feedback was available.

**Agenda Item 13 Consideration of LRIT related matters**
COMSAR noted that with not enough buyers it is proving difficult for some states eg SIDs to fund LRIT Commitments. An example from Tuvalu was given with the cost being $10,000 and the income $450 which is not sustainable.

There was an extensive discussion under this item during which a number of delegations and observers provided comments and expressed their views on the following issues:

- Cost of the audits of DCs;
- Audit requirements, including frequency of the audits;
- DCs unwilling to be audited or not audited due to the cost of the audit;
- Suspension of operations or penalization of DCs which were not timely audited or could not demonstrate compliance with the relevant provisions of LRIT; and
- Additional amendments to the Principles and guidelines relating to the review and audit of the performance of LRIT Data Centres and of the International LRIT Data Exchange, as proposed by IMSO.

However, there was little of interest from a recreational boating perspective.

**Agenda Item 14 Biennial agenda and provisional agenda for COMSAR 17**

COMSAR agreed to establish, at its next session, working groups on the following subjects:

- Search and Rescue (SAR);
- GMDSS, ITU and operational matters and performance standards; and
- e-navigation and LRIT.

COMSAR established a correspondence group on the Review of the GMDSS, subject to approval by MSC 90 of the Work Plan and the new unplanned output on the "Revision and modernization of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System" for the COMSAR Sub-Committee, and the inclusion of this agenda item on the agenda of COMSAR 17 which has been tentatively scheduled to take place from 21 to 25 January 2013.

**Agenda Item 15 Elections of Chairman and Vice-Chairman for 2013**

In accordance with rule 16 of the Rules of Procedure of the Maritime Safety Committee, COMSAR unanimously re-elected Mr. C. Salgado (Chile) as Chairman for 2013. Furthermore, having been informed that the Vice-Chairman would not be available for re-election, the Sub-Committee decided to elect its Vice-Chairman for 2013 at the beginning of its next session. The Sub-Committee expressed its deep appreciation to Mr. H Supriyono (Indonesia) for his outstanding contribution over many years to the work of the Organization, especially the Sub-Committee, and wished him every success in his future undertakings.

**Agenda Item 16 Any other business**

MSC 89 instructed that ECDIS anomalies be looked at by this and other sub committees. This was dealt with by COMSAR under this item. Many felt that this resulted in less time and fewer people available for informed discussion.

COMSAR noted that DE 56 had referred the draft Polar Code to the Sub-Committee together with relevant explanatory comments (DE 56/WP.4, annex 2), with a request to consider the parts of the draft Code under its purview and advise DE 57 of the outcome of their consideration. It was noted that, in particular, the DE Sub-Committee had invited COMSAR to consider chapter 10 of the draft Code, which related to the functional requirements of the communication equipment, with few prescriptive or performance requirements to define how these might be fulfilled, and chapter 8.3 for additional requirements for communications with life-saving equipment. After a brief discussion, COMSAR noted that due to the short period of time between DE 56 and this session, it had not...
been possible for Member Governments to consider this request from the DE Sub-Committee. Furthermore, noting that DE 57 was scheduled eight weeks after COMSAR 17, the COMSAR Sub-Committee invited Member Governments and interested organizations to consider the matter in detail and submit comments and proposals to COMSAR 17. COMSAR also agreed to invite the ICAO/IMO Joint Working Group and the Joint IMO/ITU Experts Group to consider the issue and provide relevant advice to COMSAR 17.

**Agenda Item 17 Report to the Maritime Safety Committee**

To follow

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