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The Mobile Services Conference (1983) in retrospect



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Introduction

THE World Administrative Radio Conference for the mobile services (WARC-MOB-1983) was concerned with all mobile services, but as a result of the limited time available, it focussed its attention primarily on the need to create a regulatory framework for the further development of the Future Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (FGMDSS) to enable the International Maritime Organization (IMO), responsible for the system, to carry out its trials, testing and evaluation programmes. Where feasible, elements of the system may be introduced at an earlier stage, on condition that it will not jeopardize the functioning of the present system, which will remain in force until the final implementation of the FGMDSS.

The FGMDSS was conceived and formulated by IMO to take advantage of modern communication techniques in order to minimize the present unacceptable high casualty rate, which is unnecessarily claiming life and property at sea.

The objectives of the Conference were satisfactorily achieved, thanks to a very cooperative and positive attitude taken by the 500 delegates of nearly 90 countries taking part. The Conference also resolved to apply the system and the use of its frequencies to the land mobile service in uninhabited and remote areas after technical and operational studies by the International Radio Consultative Committee (CCIR) on the matter. This will prove to be of great humanitarian value.

Quite a large number of delegates were confronted for the first time with the aims and objectives of the FGMDSS. Under the circumstances it was not unnatural that many delegations were

loath to depart from the status quo and wished to provide at least some accommodation for smaller ships and yachts, even after the implementation of the new system. It is expected that IMO will give due attention to this desire during the testing and evaluation proceedings, bearing in mind that the introduction and operation of the FGMDSS should be complementary to and not adversely affect the existing distress and safety services for those ships that are not subject to international conventions.

Apart from the items directly related to the future implementation of the FGMDSS and the allocation of frequencies, valuable preparatory material was provided for the planned WARC-MOB-87, as well as for a Regional Administrative Radio Conference for the maritime mobile service and the aeronautical radionavigation service in certain parts of the MF band in Region 1, and another Regional Administrative Radio Conference in the European Maritime Area for maritime radiobeacons, both to be held in 1985. The satisfactory results of WARC-MOB-83 completes the first preparatory phase of the introduction of the FGMDSS by IMO.

This organization is now invited to realize the objectives of the FGMDSS in terms of software as well as hardware.

Detailed incorporation in the Radio Regulations will be one of the subjects of WARC-MOB-87.

The impact of the FGMDSS

The new system presents a unique opportunity for the maritime mobile service, as well as other associated mobile services, to create an integrated multi-purpose communication system, based on conventional and satellite techni-

ques. Safety and operational/commercial requirements should be neatly balanced in this concept. In many instances the same equipment will be used for different functions, thereby reducing costs and enhancing availability. When this is achieved the term "Future Global Maritime Distress and Safety System" may well become a misnomer and should then be changed into a more appropriate title by the time the WARC-MOB-87 takes place.

It is evident that the emphasis on automation and simplicity of operation will have a distinct impact on the functions of the present somewhat exclusively qualified radiotelegraphy and radiotelephony operator. Manual participation in various communication processes may be reduced to speaking, listening, typing, reading and the interpretation of the received information. On the other hand "availability" and "readiness" of the equipment used for its intended functions will become a predominant condition.

Automatic distress alerting paired with automatic listening devices will not only remedy the unforgivable occurrence that ships still get lost without trace, but it will also minimize the arduous and unproductive tasks of guarding distress and safety channels on a 24-hour basis. For commercial communications improved accessibility may prove to be of great economic advantage, in spite of the initial investments.

Automatic reception of vital navigational and meteorological warnings will be an invaluable asset to shipping in the prevention of accidents.

Finally, the automatic inclusion of position information in distress-alerting and "polling" functions will enable search and rescue organizations to reduce the costly and inexpedient search phase to a minimum.

Further implications

The results of the WARC-MOB-1983 place a heavy responsibility on IMO, the International Maritime Satellite Organization (INMARSAT) and the supporting International Telecommunication Union (ITU) organs, CCIR and International Telegraph and Telephone Consultative Committee (CCITT).

Preparation for the WARC-MOB-87 can start none too soon. Representatives of administrations to these international organizations should give their full support to these undertakings.

Some of the Resolutions and Recommendations need particular attention:

Resolution COM4/3

Implementation of the frequency 156.525 MHz for distress and safety digital selective calling

Resolution COM4/4

Procedures for transmission of NAVTEX warnings to ships

Resolution COM5/3

Development of operational provisions for the FGMDSS for introduction into the Radio Regulations

Resolution COM5/4

Selection of coast stations to assume watch-keeping responsibilities for the FGMDSS

Recommendation 201 (Rev. MOB-83)

Distress, urgency and safety traffic

Recommendation 204 (Rev. MOB-83)

Application of Chapters IX, X, XI and XII of the Radio Regulations.

In order to accomplish the tasks the Conference has invited IMO to undertake in time for the 1987 Conference, there is a clear need to expedite its current work on the FGMDSS, in particular on:

- ship carriage requirements,
- transition provisions,
- development of draft revised Chapter IV of the 1974 International Convention on Safety of Life At Sea (SOLAS)

and, in addition:

- prepare a co-ordinated global plan of selected coast stations to keep watch on FGMDSS frequencies (Resolution COM5/4),
- co-ordinate NAVTEX broadcasts (Resolution COM4/4).

INMARSAT should be actively considering which elements of the FGMDSS are to be incorporated in the second generation of its space segment and in addition co-ordinate with IMO and CCIR the operational characteristics and technical specifications of the satellite emergency position indicating radio-beacons (EPIRBs).

Maritime administrations should consider and determine the future characteristics and functions of their coast stations, including future services (safety and commercial), coverage areas required and introduction of automation where feasible, bearing in mind the actions taken by the Conference and the growing interest in maritime satellite communications.

Finally, the maritime radiocommunications industry should consider meeting the challenge of producing and supplying inexpensive but reliable equipment for digital selective calling (DSC) and satellite EPIRBs, the knowledge that these two pillars of the FGMDSS will very likely become mandatory equipment on board ships.

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