

Flag up to task of becoming LRIT compliant

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THE Bahamas is one of the very few members of the International Maritime Organization to have met all its obligations on the introduction of a new long range identification and tracking system for ships.

The likely failure of many much richer countries, including those of the European Union, to be ready in time for the January 2009 deadline has been one of the talking points of the IMO's Maritime Safety Committee meeting which concludes on Friday.

In contrast, the small flag state which runs the world's third largest register has successfully completed LRIT trials that enable data to be transmitted securely from ships up to 1,000 miles away. "We will be ready," promises Dwain Hutchinson, deputy director of the Bahamas Maritime Authority and recently-elected vice chairman of the Flag State Implementation sub-committee.

For ships flying The Bahamas' flag, that should ensure they will not be penalised for failing to comply with international regulations.

Only half a dozen other nations, including the US, have established the required secure data exchange centres so that ship information can be sent safely without the risk of sensitive details falling in the wrong hands.

While LRIT progress is slow, the adoption of goal-based standards that The Bahamas and Greece have been sponsoring is moving forward and could be mandatory within two years. Goal based standards, developed in conjunction with the International Association of Classification Societies, are effectively rules for ship construction rules. The purpose is to specify the design life of a vessel and onboard equipment. Initially, the standards would apply to tankers and bulkers.

A pilot panel report was submitted to the MSC meeting which will decide by Friday whether to recommend modifications to the Safety of Life at Sea convention. All evidence points to support from other IMO members.

BMA consultant George Zarvanos says that if all goes according to plan, the idea first framed by The Bahamas and Greece in 2002 could be adopted at the 86th session of the MSC next year and come into force by 2011.

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