

NEWS RELEASE

Ice Services Enhance Maritime Safety in the Polar Regions

Hobart, Australia, September 29, 2017 – The International Ice Charting Working Group (IICWG) convened its 18th annual meeting September 25-29 in Hobart. This year’s meeting was hosted by the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre and the Antarctic Gateway Partnership. The theme for the meeting was “New technologies, big data, and the future of ice charting and forecasting”.

Over 60 scientists, mariners, regulators, and operational ice forecasters from 12 countries met to discuss issues affecting sea ice and iceberg information for the maritime community with a focus on the Antarctic. Discussions were held with the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) about how accurate ice information contributes to the safety of Polar tourism. IAATO also conveyed input from the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO). The Australian Antarctic Division led a table-top exercise to explore how the ice services could best support emergency responders in an Antarctic Search and Rescue situation.



Aug 11, 2017 - U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Maple follows the Canadian icebreaker Terry Fox in the Northwest Passage commemorating the 60th anniversary of the U.S.-Canada project to chart the Passage. (Courtesy USCG PO2 Nate Littlejohn)

Sea ice in the Arctic continues its uneven decline in both summer and winter. Despite the general pan-Arctic reduction of sea ice, neither the Northwest Passage nor the Northern Sea Route totally cleared of ice this summer. Additionally, the South Greenland sea ice season in 2017 lasted 2 months longer than the previous year causing delays and cancellations for large cruise ships. After reaching a record maximum extent in 2014, Antarctic sea-ice extent recorded record low seasonal values in 2016 followed by a record low minimum in February 2017, based on satellite data since 1979, prompting considerable scientific discussion about the cause.

The IICWG issued the following statement:

“Extreme variability, both from place to place and from year to year, makes knowledge of local and regional ice conditions critically important for polar shipping. The IICWG urges all polar vessel operators to include procedures to obtain up-to-date ice information as an integral component of their Polar Waters Operational Manual under the IMO Polar Code.”

The IICWG and its members regularly engage their users to ensure they are providing the best possible ice information, in the form of satellite images, charts, and forecasts, to help keep ships, their passengers, and the environment safe.

Significant events of 2017:

- Arctic sea ice set another record in March 2017 with the smallest winter *maximum* extent since records began in 1979. The summer *minimum* extent was reached on September 13 and was the 8th lowest in the 38-year satellite record. (NSIDC)
- In August, the Russian icebreaker “50 LET POBEDY” reached the North Pole from Murmansk in just 79 hours. This was the 129th visit to the Pole by a surface ship and the fastest ever. The voyage was dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the 1st trip by “ARKTIKA” in 1977 which took 176 hours.
- In July, CHRISTOPHE DE MARGERIE was the first LNG tanker to transit the Northern Sea Route without icebreaker assistance. The Arctic Class 7 vessel made the transit in less than 7 days following the high latitude path north of the New Siberian Islands enroute to South Korea.
- The Finnish MSV NORDICA made the earliest season transit of the Northwest Passage going from Alaska to Greenland in 24 days in July.
- CRYSTAL SERENITY completed her second summer transit of the Northwest Passage with 1,388 passengers and crew. She was assisted and escorted safely through the Canadian Arctic by two icebreakers, helicopters, ice pilots, onshore experts and intensive use of information from several ice services.
- In the Antarctic, sea ice reached a record low summer extent with the Amundsen Sea nearly clearing of ice. (NSIDC, AARI)
- During the 2016-17 summer season, 27 expedition vessels, 12 expedition yachts, and 4 cruise-only vessels carried 44,000 visitors to the Antarctic. During the next 4 years, these numbers are expected to increase as new, larger vessels enter the expedition voyage industry. (IAATO)
- On July 12, one of the largest icebergs ever recorded was calved from the Larsen-C ice shelf in Antarctica. It is unlikely to pose a hazard to shipping during the next few years due its slow movement in the heavy sea ice of Weddell Sea but ice services are monitoring it.
- Over one thousand icebergs invaded the North Atlantic shipping lanes making 2017 the fourth extreme iceberg season in a row. Calving from rapidly retreating Greenland glaciers is the source of these icebergs.
- The Baltic Sea experienced the fourth mild ice winter in a row, although the ice stayed unusually late to early June due to the cold spring.
- Ice cover on the Great Lakes in winter 2017 was very low for the second year in a row, after two consecutive years of unusually extensive ice cover.

The IICWG was formed in 1999 to promote cooperation among the world's ice services on all matters concerning sea ice and icebergs. The members of the IICWG are the operational ice services of Argentina, Canada, Chile, Denmark (Greenland), Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden, and the United States, as well as the British Antarctic Survey and the International Ice Patrol.

For more information, please see regional contacts on the IICWG web site: <http://nsidc.org/noaa/iicwg/>

For up to date information on Sea Ice Services in the world see: <http://wdc.aari.ru/wmo/docs/WMO574.pdf> (Edition 17)

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