



## Circular Letter 14/2021

8 April 2021

**Subject: Postponement of the 20<sup>th</sup> IALA Conference from 2022 to 2023 and the impact of the pandemic on events for the remainder of 2021**

**To: Members and Sister Organizations**

Dear member,

### **THE CURRENT AND FUTURE COVID-19 SITUATION**

The situation with respect to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to vary world-wide. Whilst in some regions, there are signs of an improving situation in others, it remains more dynamic in nature. It is also unclear as to the impact of newer strains of COVID-19 on the evolution of the pandemic and as to whether further 'waves' of the virus may be expected and of what magnitude.

Whilst the vaccination rollout is progressing, it is unclear as to when the proportion of the world-wide population will be vaccinated to a level to facilitate a reduction in restrictions to international travel and larger gatherings of people. It is considered unlikely that world-wide travel, to a level like that experienced pre-pandemic, will resume in the medium term.

### **THE IMPACT ON THE 20TH IALA CONFERENCE AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2022**

The 20th IALA Conference and General Assembly was scheduled to take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, between the 28 May and 4 June 2022. Therefore, bearing in mind the current world-wide situation with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide certainty to all stakeholders and to increase the likelihood of a successful physical event, the Council has decided to postpone the 20th IALA Conference and General Assembly to take place in May 2023. The call for abstracts due in March 2021 will of course also be postponed. This will be communicated in a separate message to the potential contributors.

Following the Conference and General Assembly in 2023, it is foreseen that the regular interval of two years between the Conference and Symposium will be re-established. Therefore, Singapore will host the Symposium in 2025 with India hosting the Conference and General Assembly in 2027.



## THE IMPACT ON IALA EVENTS FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2021

IALA has successfully made the transition to the hosting of virtual meetings, particularly the technical committees, Policy Advisory Panel (PAP), Legal Advisory Panel (LAP) and Council. Whilst the return to the provision of face-to-face meetings will remain the main objective, it is recognized that the current evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic will make a return to this method of working challenging, especially in the short term (the remainder of 2021). Considering the restrictions that will likely remain in place with respect to world-wide travel and the gathering of people indoors, the remaining IALA events scheduled for 2021 will be conducted virtually or postponed or cancelled, as appropriate.

For the remainder of 2021, the technical committees, PAP, LAP and Council will meet virtually following similar protocols as for the recently conducted meetings. The Secretariat has continued to develop the online functionality supporting the technical committees and positive feedback has already been received from the those participating in the spring meetings.

With respect to the planned workshops for which postponement or cancellation decisions have not yet been made, the workshop on Marine Aids to Navigation in the Autonomous World will take place virtually in May 2021. The workshop on Cyber Security, due to take place in Quebec, Canada, between the 1 and 5 November 2021 will be hosted virtually.

The full text of the Council decision can be found in the Annex.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'F. Zachariae'.

Francis Zachariae  
Secretary-General



Annex:

**IALA COUNCIL**



**INTERSESSIONAL  
DECISION**

## **The impact of COVID-19 on IALA meetings and events in 2021 and 2022**

### **THE CURRENT AND FUTURE COVID-19 SITUATION**

The situation with respect to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to vary world-wide. Whilst in some regions, there are signs of an improving situation in others, it remains more dynamic in nature. It is also unclear as to the impact of newer strains of COVID-19 on the evolution of the pandemic and as to whether further ‘waves’ of the virus may be expected and of what magnitude.

Whilst the vaccination rollout is progressing, it is unclear as to when the proportion of the world-wide population will be vaccinated to a level to facilitate a reduction in restrictions to international travel and larger gatherings of people. It is considered unlikely that world-wide travel, to a level similar to that experienced pre-pandemic, will resume in the medium term.

### **THE IMPACT ON THE 20TH IALA CONFERENCE AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2022**

Councillors will recall that the 20<sup>th</sup> IALA Conference and General Assembly is scheduled to take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, between the 28 May and 4 June 2022. Bearing in mind the current world-wide situation with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is suggested that an early decision is taken with respect to contingency arrangements for the Conference and General Assembly.

Whilst there is still over a year before the Conference and General Assembly, many organizations look to make early arrangements and commitments with respect to their participation in major events whether that be as a delegate, speaker, exhibitor or sponsor. This is especially so with the Conference, which is the focal point of the IALA calendar for many reasons including the ability to showcase and discuss the entire spectrum of IALA activities and, importantly, to bring together Marine Aids to Navigation professionals from around the world.

A vital component of the Conference is the Industrial members exhibition. This is a key event for the Industrial members offering the opportunity to showcase their products and services, participate in the Conference and to have unique access to a large number of Marine Aids to Navigation professionals in one location. Participation in such an exhibition represents a major financial, logistical and operational commitment on the part of the Industrial members.

The Industrial Members Committee have been continuously monitoring the current evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and have concerns that Industrial members may be reluctant to commit to exhibiting at a time when significant uncertainty remains with respect to the ability of international Conference participants to attend the event. It should also be borne in mind that the Industrial members also lost the opportunity to exhibit at the 2020/2021 IALA Symposium due to COVID-19 and that a similar situation with respect to the forthcoming Conference should be avoided.



Whilst recognizing that the Conference is still some time away, the need for effective participation from IALA members and non-members is vital to its success, both for IALA and reflecting the significant commitment made with respect to hosting the event by the National member of Brazil.

Experience has shown, both within IALA and elsewhere, that it is advantageous to take early decisions with respect to the future of major events, such as the Conference and General Assembly, which may be impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, experience has also shown that it is complicated and time consuming to have parallel plans for major events (i.e., a plan A and plan B) and that such an approach also provides uncertainty for the various stakeholder groups involved in both planning and participating in such events.

An early decision on the plans for the Conference and General Assembly would provide certainty for the National member of Brazil and the associated organizations involved in the execution of the event (such as the conference centre, hotels, social event venues etc.) as well as assisting all categories of IALA member and others in planning their participation.

Whilst it may be technically feasible to conduct the Conference and General Assembly virtually, it is considered that maximum effort should be focussed on securing a well-attended physical event, supported by an Industrial members exhibition, in Rio de Janeiro. This reflects the importance of the Conference in the IALA calendar and the wide-ranging opportunities that physical events provide to IALA members and non-members alike as well as direct and indirect financial benefits.

Considering the General Assembly, Article 7 of the IALA Constitution states that *“General Assemblies of members are held at intervals of not exceeding five years and, normally, concurrently with IALA Conferences”*. Consequently, there is some flexibility in the timing of the General Assembly and a potential delay would not pose governance issues. Therefore, to provide certainty to all stakeholders and to increase the likelihood of a successful physical event, and subject to the agreement of Council, it is proposed to postpone the 20<sup>th</sup> IALA Conference and General Assembly to similar dates in 2023 (for example, 20 to 27 May 2023).

Following the Conference and General Assembly in 2023, it is foreseen that the regular interval of two years between the Conference and Symposium will be re-established. Therefore, Singapore will host the Symposium in 2025 with India hosting the Conference and General Assembly in 2027.

## **THE IMPACT ON IALA EVENTS FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2021**

IALA has successfully made the transition to the hosting of virtual meetings, particularly the technical committees, PAP, LAP and Council. Whilst the return to the provision of face-to-face meetings will remain the main objective, it is recognized that the current evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic will make a return to this method of working challenging, especially in the short term (the remainder of 2021).

Considering the likely restrictions that will likely remain in place with respect to world-wide travel and the gathering of people indoors, the remaining IALA events scheduled for 2021 will be conducted virtually or postponed or cancelled, as appropriate.

For the remainder of 2021, the technical committees, PAP, LAP and Council will meet virtually following similar protocols as for the recently conducted meetings. The Secretariat has continued to develop the online functionality supporting the technical committees and positive feedback has already been received from the those participating in the spring meetings.



With respect to the planned workshops for which postponement or cancellation decisions have not yet been made, the workshop on Marine Aids to Navigation in the Autonomous World will take place virtually in May 2021. The workshop on Cyber Security, due to take place in Quebec, Canada, between the 1 and 5 November 2021 will be hosted virtually.

### **THE COUNCIL IS REQUESTED TO**

**Decide on the postponement of the 2022 IALA Conference and General Assembly and note the plans for IALA events for the remainder of 2021.**