



ICPC News Release

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ICPC Plenary 2014 - Meeting a Challenging Future

Against a backdrop of rapidly changing natural and socio-economic environments, the International Cable Protection Committee held its 47th Plenary to discuss actual and potential impacts of such changes on submarine communication and power cable systems.

Hosted in Dubai by *E-marine*, a major submarine cable solutions provider in the Middle East, the Plenary provided a forum for over 120 delegates representing 64 cable companies from 31 nations. The theme of the meeting - ***Managing Critical Infrastructure in a Changing Natural & Socio-Economic Environment*** - attracted experts from the cable industry, governments, legal profession and research organisations.



Attendees at the ICPC's 47th Plenary held in Dubai, hosted by *E-marine PJSC*.

Presentations

A highlight was a stellar presentation by the keynote speaker, His Excellency Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim, Director General of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the United Arab Emirates. His address drew attention to the importance of partnerships between the submarine cable industry and national governments and regional bodies such as the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Invited speaker, Professor Larry Mayer (University of New Hampshire), focussed on the flurry of seabed mapping activity in the Arctic Ocean seabed - a region that is poorly covered by modern charts. Nations with Arctic coasts are seeking to extend their sovereignty over resources on and below the seabed under the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This trend accompanies a rapid decline in the extent of summer sea ice in the high Arctic thus opening up commercial shipping lanes, routes for submarine telecommunications cables and exploration of hydrocarbons.

Ocean change was also the topic of another invited speaker, Professor Bruce Howe (University of Hawaii). He discussed the potential of installing sensors on submarine cable systems for the long-term monitoring of ocean temperature, pressure and other variables. From a scientific perspective, sensor-equipped cables are feasible and would provide information on long-term ocean change as well as acting as a warning system for natural hazards especially earthquakes and tsunamis.

Professor Robert Beckman (Centre for International Law, National University of Singapore) provided a critical review of UNCLOS and the 2012 OSPAR Guidelines on Best Environmental Practices in Cable Laying and Operations. His presentation underscored the negative aspects of *creeping jurisdiction* by coastal States and regional bodies, whereby express freedoms to lay and maintain international submarine cables under UNCLOS are diminished.

Elegant in their simplicity is an apt description of two presentations that highlighted simple approaches and solutions to important issues.

1. Dr Anja Drews (TenneT Offshore) presented the results of field trials concerning the penetration of ships' anchors beneath different types of seabed. That information will help define a realistic and effective depth for the protective burial of cables.
2. Mr. Alessandro Maiolino (Explorer Marine SBoSS) discussed a cost-effective means of re-establishing coastal meadows of sea-grass. Field trials, using a biodegradable plastic frame to hold sea-grass plants, have achieved up to a 90% success rate. This holds much promise for restoring or even extending sea-grass meadows disrupted by the installation of coastal infrastructure.

Several industry presenters explored means of improving the protection of cables in increasingly crowded and hazardous seas and coastal zones. Solutions included:

1. the development of emergency coastal stations in the advent of earthquake and tsunami damage as occurred in Japan 2011,
2. technological advances to improve mesh protection of integrated land and ocean cable networks, and
3. the development of warning systems that provide automatic notification of impending damage to cables.

Key Points

A wealth of new data and ideas, concerning cable protection in a changing world, were presented and is encapsulated by the following points:

1. Proposed expansion of environmental protection to the *high seas*, beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone, appears to conflict with the freedoms to lay and maintain communications cables as prescribed under UNCLOS. Positive engagement with policy makers is needed to resolve this potential issue.

2. Related to the first point, is the clear need to continually liaise with governments and their regulatory bodies to inform them of legal and strategic aspects of cables as well as their neutral to benign relationship with the marine environment.
3. The increased growth of human activities offshore also requires continued dialogue and education of other seabed users relating to cables.
4. The risk of natural hazards is increasing in coastal to deep-ocean environments to become a significant consideration for cable protection. However, it should be recognised that advances in cable technology have improved responses to disruptive hazards through, for example, the use of mesh networks.

Farewell and Welcome

A standing-ovation from the Plenary delegates marked the farewell of Graham Marle - the long-serving General Manager and head of the ICPC secretariat. For more than 16 years Graham has played a major role in making the ICPC the premier representative and forum of the submarine cable industry. He leaves on a much deserved achievement "high" and the ICPC Executive and membership wish him every success in his new business ventures.

As one door closes another opens and the Plenary welcomed Keith Schofield who will take up the General Manager's position starting July 1, 2014. Keith is an experienced senior executive with over 32 years in the submarine cable industry, encompassing consultancy, investment, ownership and supplier activities. We welcome Keith and look forward to the continued development of the ICPC's activities and membership.

About ICPC

The ICPC was formed in 1958 and its primary goal is to promote the safeguarding of international submarine cables against man-made and natural hazards. The organisation provides a forum for the exchange of technical, legal and environmental information about submarine cables and, with 140 members from over 60 nations, is the World's premier submarine cable organization. More information about the ICPC is available at www.iscpc.org

Source:

Neil Rondorf
ICPC Chairman

Enquiries: general.manager@iscpc.org