e-Navigation
the Way Forward

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your introduction, and especially for the opportunity to comment on e-Navigation as we come close to the end of a very useful day discussing a very important subject.

Of course, Canadian marine pilots, along with our colleagues around the world, endorse the IMO initiative in respect of e-Navigation. Canadian pilots are also particularly pleased to be participating in the implementation of the Canadian Coast Guard’s e-Nav strategy.

I am confident of the Canadian approach, both in developing and in implementing an e-Nav strategy. It is based on a solid foundation of careful planning, close collaboration among stakeholders, and a strong sense of the practical. Congratulations to the Coast Guard for its leadership.

While things are going very well here in Canada, both in terms of process and substance, the introduction of e-Navigation has been somewhat more controversial elsewhere.

To explain why this is so, it might be helpful to go back to first principles and reflect on how the initiative is described.

The universally-accepted definition of e-Navigation, set out by IMO, is:

“e-Navigation is the harmonized collection, integration, exchange, presentation and analysis of maritime information onboard and ashore by electronic means to enhance berth to berth navigation…”

Please note that the IMO definition speaks of “electronic means to enhance berth to berth navigation”, not to enhance electronic berth to berth navigation.
This is not just semantics. The placement of the two key words in this definition – “to enhance” – is crucial and conveys a very specific meaning. The meaning is that the purpose of the initiative is to improve already-existing navigational systems – by facilitating the exchange of information electronically – not to replace those systems.

The idea is not to upend our approach to safe navigation – it is to make it better. That is why I wish it was not called e-Navigation. The goal is surely not to have vessels sailing the seven seas from “berth-to-berth” only on the basis of electronic equipment – that would truly be e-Navigation.

Instead, what there is actually is enhanced navigation through better use of electronic tools. Or, put another way, electronic navigational aids.

As obvious as this may seem, some people, unfortunately, have taken the name of the initiative literally and are promoting a future with some aspects of the conduct of the vessel transferred from the bridge to the shore. Really, a form of remote electronic navigation.

A case in point is the Mona Lisa project, led by the Swedish Maritime Administration. This project, which examines ways and means to promote cleaner shipping in the Baltic region, has many positive elements. What concerns me is the project’s invocation of e-Navigation as a basis for shore-based control of vessels for some purposes.

Transferring decision-making from the bridge to the shore is obviously controversial, and an issue on which marine pilots, as well as many other maritime stakeholders, have strong views. To connect this issue with otherwise sound e-Navigation strategies, as some are doing, can only impede progress towards their implementation.
A word of caution is also in order regarding the benefits resulting from new – or the enhanced use of – electronic navigational tools. Notice I said “enhanced use of electronic navigational tools”, not e-Navigation!

The project we have underway is, as I said earlier, an excellent one and will certainly provide real benefits in terms of safer and more efficient marine transportation. But it is not a panacea, and we would be wise not to overestimate the benefits.

History tells us not only that it often takes longer than originally planned to achieve the intended results but that, in the meantime, other elements of the marine transportation equation will have changed, sometimes with consequences for the benefits anticipated from the initiative in question.

A good example of this is the case of ECDIS. IMO first adopted strict performance standards for ECDIS in 1995 via Resolution A817. The standards were amended through various other IMO Resolutions in the following years before eventually being integrated to Chapter V of SOLAS in 2002. As we all know, however, mandatory carriage of ECDIS on SOLAS vessels will only finally start, on a rolling timetable, later this year.

I think this very formal - and painfully slow - process has had the unfortunate effect of stifling innovation. Fixed standards have made the adaptation of ECDIS to new technologies - and the integration of new applications - more difficult than it needs to be. In some ways, this inability of ECDIS to integrate and adapt to new technologies has even amplified the need for "e-Nav" itself.

ECDIS was almost doomed to obsolescence the day fixed standards were introduced. Hopefully, the same mistake will not be made in respect of e-Nav and - rather than having prescriptive rules defining every single detail - I hope the focus will squarely be put on so-called "goal-based" standards, where over-arching objectives are defined but freedom to innovate is left to users and developers.
All this to say, it’s a good idea for us to remain somewhat cautious when quantifying expected benefits.

Over the last few years, I have had the opportunity to be involved with e-Navigation in a number of different contexts. I carry the e-Navigation file on behalf of the International Maritime Pilots’ Association and, as such, have not only participated in many meetings on the subject, but I have had a first-hand opportunity to observe the input and contributions being made by pilot groups around the world.

I am involved in the discussions at IMO as that organization moves towards the articulation of an implementation plan for its e-Nav strategy.

I have also attended meetings of the IALA during which members have discussed the Association’s vision of e-Navigation.

What strikes me about all of this activity is how well advanced the Canadian e-Nav effort is by comparison to others. We are leading the way. All the more reason for us to get it right; others are watching and many will follow.

To help make sure we get it right, Canadian pilots suggest that three considerations be kept in mind.

1- Find consensus. If key stakeholders feel their concerns are not being addressed, they will resist the initiative rather than help implement it. My point earlier about how some people have taken the e-Navigation concept and used it to promote shore-based control of navigation is a good example of this.

2- Remain practical. Canada’s marine transportation system is complex – it includes many jurisdictions and levels of government, a great variety of infrastructure, international and intermodal considerations, diverse local requirements, and important economic considerations, not only for private
interests but for the country as a whole. All of this calls for a pragmatic and flexible approach. Remember the ECDIS saga.

3- Be realistic. Enhanced use of electronic navigational tools will deliver significant benefits and will contribute to making navigation even safer and more efficient. But it is more evolution than revolution. And, like most good things, it will not happen overnight!

Thank you.