

**Agenda Item 6.5**

**RCC/MRCC CAPABILITIES AND RESOURCES FOR REGIONAL SAR SUPPORT**

**1. ACTION REQUIRED**

The Joint Committee is invited to:

- a) note limitations of RCCs/MRCCs capabilities and resources to meet required SAR assistance in the search and rescue service area and consider the recommendation that Cospas-Sarsat address these issues to IMO/ICAO; and
- b) suggest appropriate measures to mobilize necessary resources and support from alternative sources (neighbouring RCCs/MRCCs)

**2. BACKGROUND**

On couple of occasions, Indian SPOC countries reported inability to support long range search and rescue operations due to limitations of resources available. In such cases either the SAR incident is delayed or not attended.

In the past, INMCC came across two such cases:

**2.1 Singapore Vessel in Srilankan waters (18-24 July 2004):**

A distress alert involving Singapore vessel “MV Setia Jaya”, which was abandoned 400 nm off Sri Lanka Coast in Indian Ocean (02 43.5N 085 02.5E) due to fire explosion, was detected by Indian Mission Control Centre (INMCC) at ISTRAC from 18 to 24 July 2004.

The EPIRB was detected until 24 July 2004 in 42 satellite passes. The distress messages were continuously transmitted to Sri Lankan RCC after each pass. In addition to automatic message transmission by AFTN, twice manual fax messages were sent (one to Sri Lankan RCC on 18th July 2004 and another one to MRCC, Chennai on 24th July 2004). Singapore MCC was also informed by sending an NOCR message.

On oral enquiries on 24th July 2004, Sri Lankan RCC informed that they are not equipped with SAR resources such as long range aircraft and broadcast facility and hence could not take action.

It may be noted that the distress alert provided by the Cospas-Sarsat system was the only source of information for taking up the SAR operations involving rescue of 15 precious human lives out of 21.

On 23 July, MRCC Chennai got the request from the owner in Singapore that they do not have contact with the ship from 17<sup>th</sup> July onwards, and have received an EPIRB alert, and requested whether MRCC, Chennai can send an aircraft for SAR. On receipt of this information, Officer In-Charge MRCC, Chennai contacted INMCC to verify the EPIRB alert detection by INMCC. MRCC Chennai then immediately released a broadcast on international safety net via Inmarsat network, and made the contact with the vessel "British Pride", which in turn rescued the survivors on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

The crew desperately waited for rescue for 6 days as total communication was lost, conserved the battery of the EPIRB by radiating the EPIRB only during day with time intervals.

## **2.2 Liberia Vessel in Sri Lankan waters (29 April 2006):**

On 29<sup>th</sup> April 2006, Liberia flag vessel "MV Maunakea" reported distress in Srilankan waters (01 39.3N 089 53.2E) by activating the EPIRB. The vessel had fire in the engine room and there was no power, total communication was cut-off. INMCC provided the alert information to RCC Colombo and Colombo radio and also followed up with telephonic communication. RCC Colombo could not take action due to lack of resources, and also could not broadcast the distress in the region to get support from the nearest vessel. Then the matter was taken up with MRCC Chennai.

The MRCC Chennai and ship management company "Eastwind Ship management" from Singapore coordinated the rescue by diverting another vessel to the distress site and rescued all the crew members.

## **3. COMMENTS**

In the first case (Singapore vessel) above, it is very disturbing to note that even after detecting the distress, the survivors have to wait for 5-6 days to get SAR assistance. Given the distress information available in time, possibly all the 21 crew members could have been saved on 18<sup>th</sup> July itself, had alternative resources in the region mobilised. In such cases, if the concerned RCC/MRCC does not have required resources, it should seek assistance from neighbouring countries and coordinate the SAR operations.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i) Cospas-Sarsat Secretariat may address these issues to IMO/ICAO and ensure that authorities concerned may assess the RCCs/MRCCs capabilities, and identify alternate SAR agencies in the region to support the SAR operations.
- ii) Each RCC/MRCC not equipped with required SAR capabilities should pass on the distress message to alternate SAR agency immediately, and at least coordinate to ensure necessary SAR assistance to the people in distress is provided.