

## Select Committee 22nd March 2023

### Ratification of the Convention on the International Organization for Marine Aids to Navigation

#### Opening Statement

##### Introduction

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to discuss with you the ratification of the Convention on the International Organization for Marine Aids to Navigation.

The purpose of the Convention which I will be seeking the Dáil's approval of is essentially to **convert** a body which is merely an international association into a body which is an intergovernmental organisation (or IGO) under the auspices of the United Nations. In a nutshell, it is believed that doing so will raise the body's profile such that it will be more effective in achieving its aims.

Firstly I would like to tell you more about the current association.

##### The International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities

The International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (or IALA) is a non-profit, international technical association dating from 1957. The Association brings together marine aids to navigation authorities (such as our Commissioners of Irish Lights), manufacturers, consultants and scientific and training institutions globally, and offers them the opportunity to exchange information and compare experience. A key aim of the Association is to facilitate the harmonisation of marine aids to navigation worldwide and to ensure that the movement of vessels is safe, expeditious and economical, for the benefit of the maritime community and the protection of the environment. This is in part achieved through the agreement and promulgation of standards and guidelines. These are **not** mandatory.

IALA also has an important educational role which it delivers through its World-Wide Academy which develops model courses and the like.

As with any such international body it comprises a permanent secretariat and a number of components. The chief of these is the General Assembly, comprising all 327 Members, of which 91 are National members with voting rights which is the decision-making body approving IALA standards and overall policy. Under this is the Council, comprising 24 members elected by the Assembly. The Council is the executive organ of the Association and importantly, is responsible for approving recommendations and guidelines. Furthermore there are a number of technical committees which prepare and review standards for the Council to approve, and which also monitor developments and share information.

IALA is a global association comprising a significant proportion of nations which have a coastline, though not all.

##### The Department of Transport and the Commissioners of Irish Lights

My department is responsible for national policy in relation to maritime transport safety and safety of navigation. This function is carried out mainly by the Marine Survey Office and the Maritime Safety Policy Division, divisions within the department. Ireland has commitments under various international conventions to provide safe navigation and this are fulfilled in the main by Commissioners of Irish Lights and I would like to briefly set out what they do.

The Commissioners of Irish Lights (or CIL) is one of three General Lighthouse Authorities (or GLAs) set up under the 1894 Merchant Shipping Act - though its history goes back to the 1700s. It has responsibility for Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the adjacent seas and islands. The other two GLAs are Trinity House (responsible for England, Wales, the Channel Islands and Gibraltar) and the Northern Lighthouse Board (responsible for Scotland and the Isle of Man).

It has three Statutory Functions, namely:

- The provision & Maintenance of General Aids to Marine Navigation numbering over 300 of which 66 are light houses
- The Superintendence and Management of Local Aids to Navigation (numbering nearly 5,000)
- And the marking or removal of dangerous wreck outside of harbour areas

In addition to this:

- CIL also has a commercial offering such as chartering their vessel Granuaile and consultancy services.
- It also engages in tourism, heritage and community activities particularly through their network of lighthouses.
- They provide a valuable source of expertise and guidance on navigation matters to government departments and agencies - for example in the area of marine spatial planning.
- Finally they provide weather and sea state observations and assist the Irish Coast Guard in search and rescue operations on request.

## Ireland and IALA

The connection then between Ireland and IALA is two-fold: directly, Ireland, through the Commissioners of Irish Lights, has traditionally played an important role in the Association and has sat on the Association's Council as well as being active on its Committees; and indirectly, IALA sets the standards which the Commissioners of Irish Lights upholds both in terms of navigation safety but also in terms of the service standards against which CIL measures its performance and on which it reports annually.

Indeed CIL is seeking election to the IALA Council this year and Irish ratification of the IALA Convention will bolster this campaign.

## The Convention

### Background and reasons for the Convention

As I said earlier the purpose of the Convention on the International Organization for Marine Aids to Navigation is to convert IALA from an international association into an intergovernmental organisation, registered with the UN.

This move is overwhelmingly endorsed by the current association's national members as evidenced by the support received during the final phase of its development at a conference in Malaysia in early 2020.

During the period the Convention was open for signature, from January 2021 to January 2022, it was signed by 50 countries, of which Ireland. Signing a convention is a mainly diplomatic gesture but is an important statement of intent as to a country's intention to ratify. Since then 16 states have gone

on to ratify, of which several European countries, the UK, France, Denmark, the Netherlands and others. This is more than half the ratifications necessary for the Convention to come into force. CIL also strongly supports the ratification of the Convention.

The reasons behind wanting to change the status of the association are largely practical:

- The new status will raise the profile of IALA's work and should thereby lead to increased membership
- In turn this will lead to greater harmonisation of their standards
- It will strengthen the legal framework for the body and, underpinned by transparent governance, will enhance the status of IALA as an advisor to governments.
- IALA will in due course sign a Headquarters Agreement with France where it is currently based. HQ agreements are used to establish the legal capacity of an international organisation in the country in which it is based, the inviolability of its premises and other related matters. A HQ agreement will help resolve issues for those governments and benevolent funds that can only work with international organisations.
- It will facilitate global recruitment to properly reflect its global remit.

Under the current set up, the National Member for IALA is CIL, and they pay membership fees of around €18,000 annually which are not expected to increase once the new organisation comes into being.

#### [Content of the Convention on the International Organization for Marine Aids to Navigation](#)

The Convention was laid before the Oireachtas on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November last. I'd like to briefly set out its contents.

The make-up, membership, operations and functions of the proposed intergovernmental organisation are set out over twenty-two articles in a standard manner. These differ in only minor ways from the articles set out in the current Constitution of IALA which the Convention is designed to replace. There is also an annex to the Convention, setting out transitional arrangements once the Convention enters into force. This includes, for example, arrangements to allow lighthouse authorities to continue as associate members of IALA while awaiting their respective state to ratify the Convention.

The detailed functioning of the new organisation will be set out, as they are currently for IALA, in a set of General and Financial Regulations to be agreed this autumn. Again, these are not expected to differ significantly from the current ones.

It is important to understand that standards and guidelines adopted by IALA are **not** mandatory, unlike for example those of the International Maritime Organization and this is **not** set to change in the new Organization set up by the Convention.

In fact perhaps the most significant change will be who is the member of the new Organization, currently CIL is the National Member of IALA whereas Ireland, or in practice, my department, will be the member of the new IGO. On a practical level however, my Department will delegate most of the work to CIL, as indeed the Convention envisages in its Article 8.4.

#### [Conclusion](#)

Ireland has played a significant role in the setting of global navigation standards to date and hopes to continue to do so in the new Organization. This Organization will come into being regardless of

whether we ratify this Convention but if we do, we will be a full, voting member and indeed a founding member of the Organization, and this properly reflects our history with IALA and our commitment to the safety of global navigation.

With your agreement I will be proposing to the Dáil that it agree the contents of the Convention. Should it do so, the deposition of our instrument of ratification should take place shortly thereafter.

Thank you.

[delivery time circa 9 minutes]