

SAFER SAILING WITH ATDI

The UK maritime community will benefit from the replacement of 3 national distress and safety communications services.

Leading software solutions provider SunGard Public Sector Limited was awarded the contract to replace the UK's Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) existing Medium Frequency / High Frequency (MF/HF) radio-telephony and Digital Selective Calling (DSC) services, and its Very High Frequency (VHF) DSC service.

Recognising ATDI's expertise in radio-communications SunGard appointed ATDI to plan and model the MCA's new radio systems using their flagship radio propagation tool, ICS Telecom.

Seafarers operating commercial shipping to fishermen and weekend sailors will continue to benefit from the services in waters from the Scillies to Shetland.

"One of the many challenges," says ATDI managing director Cyprien de Cosson, "was to establish whether it was possible to operate comparable or improved services to the mariner, whilst also rationalising the number of MCA shore stations required to provide those services".

The MCA's legacy radio-communications infrastructure supporting the global maritime distress and safety system (GMDSS) is being replaced with more modern technology. The existing services consists of a number of MF/HF and VHF stations around the UK which provide distress watch, radio-telephony and digital selective calling. The newer equipment allows the services to be more integrated and efficient, overcoming the need for very high redundancy in stations, as a result of how the original infrastructure was designed.

ATDI plotted the optimised coverage for ship to shore telephony, shore to ship telephony, ship to shore distress watch and ship to shore digital selective calling.

As with all projects, the link budget is a factor in how a system is being built, but Cyprien also notes some technical difficulties: "The coverage is very much limited by man-made noise in the environment of the receiver and atmospheric noise from the sky. The noise environments are very different on the ship and shore, so there are separate budgets for each link direction."

The MCA says the new services will be more efficient than the old, which were approaching the end of their operating lives and will ensure that the UK continues to comply with its international obligations for the provision of distress and safety communication services. In addition, the agency says: "It demonstrates that the MCA is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing its status as a world class organisation which embraces and develops new technologies."



Cyprien comments: "It is always very gratifying to be working in this kind of environment. Both SunGard and the MCA strive for excellence creating demanding standards, and ATDI always relishes the task of meeting them."