

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S., Cuba Agree On Efforts To Improve Maritime Navigation Safety

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Ernice Gilbert **March 21, 2016**



Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis, the Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, and Col. Candido Alfredo Regalado Gomez, Chief of Cuba's National Office of Hydrography and Geodesy (O.N.H.G.), have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to improve maritime navigation safety and related areas of mutual interest to protect lives and property at sea, a press release the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (N.O.A.A.) issued on Monday has revealed.

"NOAA has a strong interest in both improving navigational safety and in protecting the marine environment in the heavily travelled and vibrant waters between our two countries in the Straits of Florida," said Russell Callender, Ph.D., assistant N.O.A.A. administrator

for the National Ocean Service. “We welcome this agreement and the progress it represents.”

“Improved navigation services are important for commercial mariners and individual boaters alike,” said Ambassador DeLaurentis, “and it is particularly important as authorized trade and authorized travel increase between the two countries.”

The MOU calls for cooperation in the areas of hydrography, oceanography, geodesy and related services of mutual interest. One of the major focuses will be to improve maritime navigation safety including efforts to ensure the accuracy of both electronic and paper charts, eliminate charting overlaps and fill in gaps in navigational chart coverage, according to the release.

“This MOU will allow us to fill gaps in essential navigational data, working on a practical level with our Cuban counterparts,” said Kathryn Ries, deputy director of NOAA’s Office of Coast Survey. “The U.S. works with hydrographic offices of all nations that have waters adjacent to the United States and our territories, and this agreement improves the exchange of charting information with Cuba as well.”

In February 2015, less than two months after President Obama announced the United States’ new approach toward Cuba, N.O.A.A. and O.N.H.G., through a set of reciprocal exchanges, launched what became a year-long effort to formulate the technical exchange that is a normal course of affairs between most of the other maritime nations of the world. Both agencies are working on plans for monitoring and forecasting tides and currents for ports and improving positioning networks among other related scientific and technical activities. The MOU is the first step in what is expected to be a long-term collaboration between the two countries.

In addition to aligning each country’s navigational charts, N.O.A.A. and O.N.H.G. are sharing data for the creation of a new international chart (known in mariner’s parlance as “INT chart”) 4149, which will cover south Florida, the Bahamas, and north Cuba. N.O.A.A. plans to publish the new chart this year, the release says.

N.O.A.A.’s Office of Coast Survey, originally [formed by President Thomas Jefferson in 1807](#), maintains the nation’s [nautical charts](#), surveys the coastal seafloor, responds to national maritime emergencies, and searches for underwater obstructions and wreckage.

Feature Image: Aerial shot of Varadero Beach Resort, Cuba.