



Updating shipping routes & waterway maps helps boost the Guyanese economy



Seabed mapping equipment in operation.

Guyana's economy is reliant upon its maritime shipping routes and internal waterways. The country has three large rivers that discharge into the Atlantic Ocean.

CHOGM THEME

A more sustainable future

PROJECT TITLE

Commonwealth Marine Economies programme

COUNTRY

Guyana

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

UK Hydrographic Office

These rivers deposit significant amounts of sediment both within the estuaries and along the coast. Over 90 per cent of the population live along the coast and waterways, which form the foundation of the country's economy. River transport to the coast is critical for moving agricultural produce and raw materials from Guyana's interior for export. However, with a dynamic seabed that is prone to rapid change, Guyana was faced with high dredging costs and the ships and boats that transport cargo along the water ways to the coast and beyond did not have access to the information required to navigate quickly and safely. Guyana's waterways were last mapped in 1964 by the British Royal Navy. In 2016, a visit to Guyana by HMS Mersey (equipped with seabed mapping equipment) demonstrated clearly that measurements of the main shipping

channel into Georgetown Port did not match what were on the charts.

Mapping Guyana's waterways

In 2018, the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme, through its delivery partner the UK Hydrographic Office, partnered with the Guyana Maritime Agency to update the maps and depth charts of Guyana's coast and water ways. The programme provided essential scanning equipment, as well as much needed capacity building and training. Over the course of two years, Guyana's maps and charts have been updated and for the first time in its history, Guyana's Maritime Administration (MARAD) has the capacity to undertake sea bed mapping and continue to update their maps and charts without external assistance.



Due to the contribution of CME up-to-date charts are now available to help navigation.

The benefits to shipping agencies are significant. Greg Quinn, the British High Commissioner to Guyana, has observed that insurance costs for shipping appear to have fallen and some shipping agencies feel more confident about using bigger vessels. The Director of MARAD confirmed that:

‘Captains have been purchasing the new charts and as a result are more confident about using larger ships now. They have a better understanding of the river beds’

Claudette Rogers

There are other notable results too. MARAD tracking data shows a significant increase in cargo on the Essequibo and Demerara rivers which implies that more trade is taking place. Also, the time and costs associated with dredging have been greatly reduced. In describing the situation before the project, Trevor Benn, the CEO and Commissioner of the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission said, “Dredging was needed on a daily basis [but] without having the equipment to pinpoint exactly where the dredging was required.” These days, the Maritime Agency can rapidly and accurately identify where dredging is required. In addition, the time required to complete a dredging exercise has been reduced from three weeks to five days which significantly reduces costs.

Making shipping quicker and safer

Updating the charts has also reduced the risk of shipping lane closures. “In the past, when boats sank, the whole area would have to be avoided because the Maritime Agency and captains didn’t know exactly where the wreck had come to rest,” said Troy Clarke, from the Maritime Agency. “Now we can map exactly where (the wreck) is in under 24 hours and warn mariners (of the hazard).”

The discovery of significant oil and gas reserves off the coast of Guyana in 2017 also makes this Commonwealth Marine Economies intervention particularly timely. Last year, more than 100 oil and gas support vessels used Georgetown Port,

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Guyana’s largest maritime facility. The Maritime Agency anticipates shipping to increase significantly as oil and gas production scales up. Today, the new maps and charts are guiding the ships that provide the infrastructure support to Guyana’s offshore oil platforms.

The new seabed mapping capability will also benefit the planned development of a new deep-water port. For over a decade, discussions over potential sites have halted progress. However, the Maritime Agency was recently contacted by private sector investors who want to use Guyana’s new equipment and skills to map out potential sites. Hopefully, this will lead to a clear path forward and an economic agreement. This will benefit Guyana’s maritime economy in the future and allow them to take advantage of the significant potential of the country’s abundant natural resources.



The ship the team works from to map the seabed.