IH OKAYS PLAN
TO DEEPEN PASS

Channel to Handle Ships
to 55 Feet Is Voted

International House's board of directors approved a resolution Wednesday calling for a two-stage program to deepen Southwest Pass in order to accommodate vessels drawing 55 feet as well as the development of a superport off the mouth of the Mississippi River.

In urging the board of directors to adopt the resolution, Erik F. Johnsen, IH president, said the depth of Southwest Pass is only 40 feet and, as a consequence, many deeper draft ships cannot enter the river.

Pointing to a graph illustrating the world trend to deep draft vessels, Johnsen, who is in the shipping business, said that in 1972, 77 percent of the ships on order as well as those existing will not be able to or cannot proceed fully loaded up a 40-foot deep channel.

FIGURE TO RISE

He warned that by 1992 that figure will have risen to 90 percent.

With a deepening of the pass to 55 feet, 85 to 90 percent of the ships sailing now could proceed fully loaded up the channel to New Orleans, Johnsen estimated.

The resolution, which passed unanimously, asserted that unless provision is made for the accommodation of deeper draft vessels, the Port of New Orleans "will very shortly lose its competitive position to other Gulf and East Coast ports."

It also called upon International House to recommend that a properly financed study of methods of deepening Southwest Pass be undertaken at once so that the port can be made competitive for vessels drawing 55 feet as promptly as possible during the time necessary to study and develop a superport off the mouth of the river for deeper draft vessels.

After the meeting, Johnsen said, "... I think we have to set some priorities based upon the wherewithal we have. It's nice to talk about all of these projects (such as the superport), but the cheapest project, in my estimate, and one that is more likely to fit within the pocketbook of what we could do, would be to deepen the pass."

Once the project is begun, it could be completed very quickly, the IH president asserted. He said once the dredging is authorized "I would guess ... it would be maybe a year or a year and a half to complete the pass deepening."

Johnsen added that the U.S. Corps of Engineers in Vicksburg, Miss., is working on a model of Southwest Pass in order to determine the best method of deepening the pass.

He emphasized that the deepening of Southwest Pass will not be done in lieu of the superport. Rather, he said, the two projects will be complementary.

NEXT STEP

With passage of the resolution, Johnsen said, the next step for International House will be to find out from Louisiana's congressional delegation and from the port where IH can help and where the legislators feel they can help in getting the fund appropriated for deepening the pass, located some 100 miles downriver from New Orleans.

Johnsen said he fears the project is now too far down on the list of priorities for federal funding, and he added that unless pressure is brought to bear on the proper authorities, it may be anywhere from eight to 10 years before the pass can be deepened.

In other business, John Potharst Jr., Cecil Keeny and Jerome Goldman were named to fill vacancies on the board.

The meeting was held at International House, 607 Gravier.

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