It was announced on 21 June that exactEarth Europe Limited, a UK subsidiary of exactEarth Ltd, a leading provider of Satellite AIS data services, recently successfully concluded the main part of its South Africa Safety Initiative for Small Vessels (OASIS) project – a small vessel tracking trial with the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), part-funded by the UK Space Agency (UKSA) under its International Partnership Space Programme (IPSP).

A key aspect of SAMSA’s mandate is to ensure safety of life at sea, including small vessels in the fisheries, leisure marine and workboat sectors. These vessels, particularly artisanal fishing boats, typically operate without a tracking system onboard, making it difficult for the authorities to locate them if they are involved in an accident at sea. With IPSP funding, exactEarth Europe and its IPSP partners SRT Marine Technology (SRT - UK) and Marine Data Solutions (MDSol - South Africa), were able to carry out extensive sea trials in South Africa of their cost effective Advanced Class B Satellite Enabled AIS (ABSEA) Identifier – designed specifically to support long and short range small vessel tracking.

The ABSEA Identifier is battery-powered and can easily be fitted onto very small boats. It transmits standard Class B AIS position reports that can be detected by coastal AIS systems, but it is also enhanced to maximise its ability to be detected by exactEarth’s satellite AIS constellation. This ensures a boat can be tracked both inshore and offshore and those locations where coastal AIS is not available, it is understood.

Both the Identifier’s satellite and coastal position reports are provided as standard AIS messages for integration into third-party maritime domain awareness systems, as well as being viewable in exactEarth’s ShipView data visualisation tool.

Following the success of the trial in South Africa, SAMSA is now assessing its options for the operational use of ABSEA. In the meantime, and under a grant extension from the UKSA, exactEarth Europe, SRT, MDSol and SAMSA are currently conducting a second, smaller trial with the Namibian Directorate of Maritime Affairs on their Atlantic coast, where they share similar small vessel safety concerns with SAMSA. This trial should be concluded by September, 2016, it has been reported.

Commented Peter Mabson, CEO of exactEarth: ‘The extensive trial activity being conducted in South Africa under the OASIS project is a very important
step in the validation and introduction of our small vessel tracking solution. The work on the project to deploy this product in a real world environment and to get critical feedback from a range of actual users who face these real world issues is invaluable as a major step in the market introduction process for this exciting new capability.

We would sincerely like to thank SAMSA for their support and feedback related to the project and to UKSA for providing the funding and oversight for this important activity. We also look forward to taking this activity to the next level as an operational capability in South Africa and to thereby make a meaningful contribution to the improvement of maritime safety.’

Added Captain Karl Otto, Executive Head, Centre for Sea Watch & Response, SAMSA: ‘The OASIS project, through the use of the Identifiers, provided very valuable information to SAMSA related to the capability of detecting, tracking and monitoring of small vessels in the trial areas. A debt of gratitude goes to the UK Space Agency as sponsor for this trial in South Africa, and to SRT Marine (UK) as well.

‘Also, our thanks goes to exactEarth Europe for making the trial a reality, to Marine Data Solutions for their full support and to our SAMSA colleagues who participated in and supported the concept of the project in the trial areas. The trial proved to be very beneficial in addressing the problem of detecting and identifying small boats along the coastline, primarily for SAMSA’s maritime safety purposes.’

About exactEarth Ltd
exactEarth is a leading provider of global maritime vessel data for ship tracking and maritime situational awareness solutions. Since its establishment in 2009, exactEarth has pioneered a powerful new method of maritime surveillance called Satellite-AIS (S-AIS) and has delivered to its clients a view of maritime behaviours across the world’s oceans unrestricted by terrestrial limitations.

exactEarth has deployed an operational data processing supply chain involving a constellation of satellites, receiving ground stations, patented decoding algorithms and advanced “big data” processing and distribution facilities. This ground-breaking system provides a comprehensive picture of the location of AIS equipped maritime vessels throughout the world and allows exactEarth to deliver data and information services characterized by high performance, reliability, security and simplicity to large international markets. More information can be found at: www.exactearth.com
About SAMSA
The South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA see also www.samsa.org.za) is accountable to the Minister of Transport, and was established in 1998 under the terms of the South African Maritime Safety Authority Act 5. Its vision is “The Authority championing South Africa’s global maritime ambitions” and its mission is “to promote South Africa’s maritime interests and development and position the country as an international maritime centre while ensuring maritime safety, health and environmental protection”.

SAMSA delivers four main outputs consistent with its mandate and responsibilities:

- Safety and environment protection standards for responsible maritime transport operations.
- An infrastructure for monitoring and enforcing compliance with safety and environment protection standards.
- The capability to respond to marine pollution incidents and other maritime emergencies.
- The capability to detect, locate and rescue people in maritime distress situations.