

LP BULLETIN

Friday 11 April 2008

Bulletin 575 - 4/08 - Preventing collisions - Worldwide

An accident investigation report, by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, into a collision between a geared bulk carrier and a coastal fishing vessel is a reminder of a number of safety-critical issues common in collision cases.

There are many factors to consider in most collision cases and liability often rests with more than one party. This bulletin focuses on only two aspects of this particular collision, as follows:

Passage planning - The passage plan in use on the bulk carrier had been prepared by the second officer, and checked by the master. Neither the master nor the second officer appropriately considered all of the warnings noted on the charts, or in the Australia Pilot, when they planned for an intended track that would see the ship passing only eight miles to seaward of Cape Banks. The warning on the navigational chart states:

“During the period November to June extensive lobster fishing takes place on the continental shelf between Cape Jaffa and Cape Nelson in shore of the 150m (80fm) isobath. Mariners are requested to pass at least ten miles to seaward of Cape Banks.”

If the passage plan had been prepared taking these warnings into account, the ship would have passed at least two miles to seaward of the anchored fishing vessel it collided with. Furthermore, had the officer on watch at the time of the collision been more aware of the likelihood of encountering fishing vessels in the area, he may have been more alert to their presence.

Although better passage planning would not have prevented the collision, this incident is an example of the importance of properly reading and understanding chart features and warnings, and information contained in pilot books.

Maintaining a proper lookout - Although not relevant to this case, the bridge is found, on many ships, to be equipped with desktop computers and music stations. Tempting distractions such as these may take the attention of the watchkeeper away from his duties, or hinder his ability to do them properly, and can easily form a contributing factor in the cause of an accident.

Likewise, personal devices such as mp3 players (where the user wears headphones) should certainly be banned from use by watchkeeping officers on duty. Watching a movie on a laptop during a tedious watch may help to pass the time but can result in grave consequences.

Watchkeeping officers on a coastal passage must be vigilant to the presence of small craft, particularly given their poor radar reflection. While it is a requirement of the international collision regulations to maintain a proper lookout at all times, it is common practice for fishing vessels to be anchored with everybody on board asleep.

Logbook entries should reflect watchkeeping activities, and is a legal document which can be used to prove proper watchkeeping. A logbook recording very few position fixes over a watch on a coastal passage should raise suspicion as to the activities of the officer on watch.

Source of information: UK P&I Club Loss Prevention Department
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