

SYNOPSIS



On 10 March 2008, the Swedish registered tanker *Astral* dragged her anchor in severe weather and grounded on the Princessa Shoal, east of the Isle of Wight. *Astral* sustained indentations to her hull and extensive damage to her rudder and steering gear; there was no pollution and the vessel remained watertight.

Astral had anchored at the Nab Anchorage, 0.9 mile south of the Princessa shoal on 7 March to await a berth at Fawley Marine Terminal to discharge a cargo of diesel oil.

On 9 March, increasingly severe weather forecasts were received predicting gale force winds from the south. Later that evening the duty Vessel Traffic Services Officer (VTSO), monitoring the anchored vessels' positions by radar, advised all the vessels at anchor of the weather forecast and recommended that their engines should be available if required.

During the early morning of 10 March the weather deteriorated as the wind increased to southerly force 10. At 0650 *Astral* started to drag anchor to the north. The officer of the watch (OOW) alerted the master at 0710 and requested the main engines, which were on 10 minutes notice, to be made ready for use. The master arrived on the bridge 7 minutes after being called and dispatched the anchor party forward. The engines were available for use at 0721 and the master applied power ahead, however the vessel continued to drag northward and grounded on the Princessa Shoal at 0725. *Astral* continued to drag and drift northward until her anchor held at 0855. The vessel was taken under tow at 0958 by the tug *Anglian Earl*.

The managers of *Astral* have taken action to improve anchoring procedures on their vessels, and to conduct an additional pre-employment assessment of all officers recruited via manning agencies. The local harbour authorities have taken action to improve the information available to seafarers about the tenability of anchorages in their harbour areas and approaches.

Recommendations have been made to the operators, to conduct checks to ensure their staff are familiar with, and comply with, their new procedures; to the ICS and NI to bring the lessons from the accident to the attention of their members; and to the local harbour authorities to provide guidance to the VTSOs on the style and conduct of their communication, to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding by non-native English speakers.