



## SYNOPSIS

On the evening of 25 February 2008 the product carrier, *Sichem Melbourne*, sustained damage and damaged mooring structures as she departed her berth at Coryton Oil Refinery on the River Thames estuary. Fortunately, her broadside contact with a mooring dolphin prevented *Sichem Melbourne* from striking an oil tanker which was discharging on a neighbouring jetty.

At departure, *Sichem Melbourne* was laying port side to Coryton Number 3 jetty, heading downstream, stern towards the last of the ebb tide, with a light wind onto the ship's starboard quarter. A Port of London Authority (PLA) pilot boarded to conduct the navigation of the vessel during the departure. Following a brief exchange between the vessel's master and the pilot, the vessel's moorings were singled up. The pilot made a comment to the master that an hour of ebb tide remained and that, consequently, they should use the bow spring in letting go. The pilot did not fully explain how he intended to move the vessel clear of the jetty.

The pilot, who was stationed on the port bridge wing with the master, gave instructions to come ahead on the forward springs with hard port rudder, with the intention of creating a "wedge" of water between the ship and jetty, before coming astern into the river and current. When an angle of about 7° had developed between the ship's stern and the jetty, the master applied bow thrust to starboard to prevent her bow leaning against the jetty. Soon after this the bow spring was cast off before the pilot was ready, allowing the ship to move forward before the current. Combined effects of increased starboard bow thrust and wind on the starboard quarter caused the ship's port quarter to fall back and scour the jetty before she cleared the structure. Once clear of the jetty the pilot attempted to retrieve his original plan of getting the stern outwards by applying port wheel and more ahead power. The master, however, was under the impression that the pilot was trying to lift the vessel bodily into the river, and applied more starboard thrust to assist. The following tidal stream prevented transverse lifting of the ship and she was carried down onto other mooring structures.

During attempts to recover the situation, numerous, rapid, ahead/astern movements were placed on the main engine, resulting in the engine's safety management system shutting down the main engine. Fortunately, the engine was quickly restarted, allowing the vessel to clear a tanker which was berthed on an adjoining jetty.

*Sichem Melbourne* was diverted to Southend anchorage where she was inspected for damage by a classification society surveyor, before being allowed to sail.

The MAIB investigation identified contributing factors to the accident:

- There was an inadequate exchange of information between master and pilot before commencing unmooring operations.
- Interaction and communications between members of the bridge team were poor.
- Much of the conversation between the crew was conducted in the Russian language. This effectively excluded the pilot from the bridge team.

Recommendations have been made to all UK Competent Harbour Authorities, and EMS Ship Management (India) Pvt. Ltd, with the aim of improving: port procedures; pilot/master interaction; bridge team management and pilot monitoring. A recommendation has also been made to the terminal operator regarding its marine risk assessment.