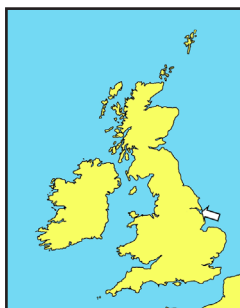


SYNOPSIS



Between 0420 and 0450 on 18 February 2008, the UK registered cargo vessel *Sea Mithril* grounded in the River Trent on three occasions. A river pilot was embarked and the visibility had reduced to about 20m by dense fog. The groundings occurred after the vessel had been manoeuvred by the master, to increase the passing distance from vessels moored alongside at Flixborough. After touching the river bottom for the third time, *Sea Mithril* moored alongside Grove Wharf at 0510. There were no injuries to the crew and no pollution, but the vessel sustained material damage to one of her azimuth propulsion pods.

The investigation highlighted a number of factors which contributed to the ship's groundings, including:

- The master was the helmsman because he was the only person able to control the ship's azimuth propulsion system when in hand-steering.
- The master was unable to maintain a command overview of the vessel's passage.
- The master relied totally on the pilot for the safe navigation of his vessel.
- Communication and co-ordination between the master and pilot prior to the groundings was poor.
- The pilot was not supported by the bridge organisation, which became dysfunctional after restricted visibility was encountered.
- Flaws in the bridge organisation and available support were not identified by the master or the pilot.

To prevent a similar accident in the future, the MAIB has issued a flyer to industry reminding vessel owners and masters of the need to have sufficient persons on board their vessel who are competent to control the propulsion and steering systems fitted, and emphasising the requirement for embarked pilots to be adequately supported by bridge teams. ABP Humber has conducted a survey of visiting vessels in order to gather information on key aspects impacting on the conduct of pilotage in its waters. A recommendation has been made to the United Kingdom Maritime Pilots' Association (UKMPA), British Ports Association (BPA) and United Kingdom Major Ports Group (UKMPG) which calls for similar surveys at other UK ports.

Recommendations have been made to the UKMPG, BPA, UKMPA and all UK Competent Harbour Authorities with the aim of ensuring that vessels which are unable to provide adequate support to embarked pilots are identified. A recommendation to the ship's manager is aimed at improving passage planning and ensuring crew nominated as helmsmen on ships fitted with azimuth propulsion systems receive appropriate training.