

SYNOPSIS

Narrative



At 2100 BST on 9 August 2006, the Antigua and Barbuda registered general cargo vessel *Thunder* anchored in the Wild Road anchorage off the port of Mostyn. Three shackles of cable were veered in 24m of water. The wind was gusting to 29 knots and a tidal stream of 2.5 knots was running. Overnight the vessel dragged her anchor, and in the early morning of the following day, during the last of the ebb tide, she grounded.

The vessel had navigated the Mostyn Outer Channel without an appropriate navigational chart. The master achieved this using a set of GPS waypoints and the position of a 'preferred' anchorage which had been sent to him in an email by the ship's Mostyn agent. The master had changed his original plan of anchoring close to the North Rhyl buoy, at the entrance to the Mostyn Outer Channel, based upon information received from the agent that provided details of the preferred anchorage.

The master was not called by the OOW overnight. When he arrived on the bridge at 0800 the following morning he discovered that the vessel was lying aground on a sandbank 2.5 cables south-east of the preferred anchorage. There was no damage sustained by the vessel, no injuries to the crew and no pollution. The master did not report that his vessel had grounded. During the forenoon, the Mostyn harbourmaster received a report from Liverpool Coastguard that a vessel was aground in his area. He checked the position of *Thunder* on AIS and, content that she was lying in the Wild Road anchorage, took no further action.

During the next high water, the master was unable to manoeuvre the vessel clear of the bank, and the prevailing wind and tide caused her to drag further inshore. The vessel was now lying in the statutory harbour authority (SHA) area of the Dee Conservancy and was in danger of becoming neaped¹. At 1625 on 10 August, *Thunder* was observed by the Dee Conservancy harbourmaster stranded off the Point of Ayr; this was the first official recognition that the vessel had grounded.

When he was made aware of the accident, the Mostyn harbourmaster spoke to the master of *Thunder* and advised him of the most effective way to manoeuvre clear of the bank at the next high water, shortly after midnight.

Thunder floated free at 0010 on 11 August. Once clear of the shallow water, a Mostyn pilot boarded the vessel and familiarised the master with channel lights and marks. He provided the master with a local chart, and advice on where to anchor. Due to deteriorating weather conditions, the pilot left the vessel shortly afterwards.

Analysis

The master was aware that an appropriate chart was not available on board. Although he had requested its supply from the Mostyn agent and the cargo operator, he did not notify the company marine superintendent, whose responsibility it was to ensure provision of nautical publications.

¹ Neaped – As the tidal range reduces towards Neap tides, there is insufficient water at High Water to refloat the vessel.

The Mostyn agent had taken it upon himself to send the waypoints for the approach channel, the position of a preferred anchorage and a pilot boarding area to the master. He had not consulted the harbourmaster about their accuracy or reliability.

The Port of Mostyn port passage plan includes an area known as the Outer Channel, not currently part of a CHA or an SHA. In 2001, a risk assessment identified the need for compulsory Pilotage in this approach channel which has not yet been implemented. The port operates information only VTS within its CHA limits, but has no control or monitoring function over vessels in the Outer Channel which at 'South Hoyle' is a 'one way only' channel for larger vessels. The port passage plan failed to: manage shipping movements in the Outer Channel, define minimum under keel clearance for vessels, and examine the suitability of the Wild Road anchorage and promulgate the information.

To support the requirement for compulsory pilotage, identified by risk assessment and by Trinity House, a draft harbour revision order (HRO) was promoted by Mostyn Docks Limited in 2001. Opposition to the HRO, and the subsequent delay, saw final submission in 2003 which, together with a draft HRO submitted by the EA, resulted in a public inquiry in 2005, the results of which are still awaited.

Recommendations

The Port of Mostyn has been recommended to reinstate its recommended pilotage service from the North Rhyl buoy to the port; promulgate a comprehensive port passage plan; and ensure that all charts and hydrographic publications are amended to reflect the revised procedures. The emergency response procedures for marine accidents should be reviewed, ensuring that the necessary actions for each emergency are identified.

Reederei Erwin Strahlmann has been recommended to revise its SMS to include guidance for masters on anchoring and maintaining a safe navigational watch while at anchor.

The MCA has been recommended to conduct a PMSC verification check on the Port of Mostyn.

The Secretary of State for Transport has been recommended, in considering his decisions on the Harbour Revision Orders, to take into account the need to clarify the status of the Mostyn Outer Channel.