SYNOPSIS

At 0938 (UTC+8) on 8 April 2005, the German registered container ship *Washington Senator*, which was on passage from Shanghai to Hong Kong at a speed of 17 knots, and the UK registered container ship *Lykes Voyager*, which was on passage from Yantian to Vancouver at a speed of 19.5 knots, collided in the Taiwan Strait. No one was hurt but both ships were damaged and, although there was no pollution, a number of containers were lost overboard. After the collision, both ships sailed to Hong Kong for repairs.

The collision occurred about 4 minutes after *Lykes Voyager* altered course to starboard from 022º to 070º to avoid *Washington Senator*, and *Washington Senator* had altered course to port from about 242º to 190º in accordance with a passing arrangement her master assumed had been made with *Lykes Voyager*. The distance between the ships at the time of the alterations was about 2.5 miles, and visibility was less than 200m in fog. Shortly after each vessel had steadied on their respective headings, both masters realised that the ships had turned towards each other, and were on a collision course. Unfortunately, by that time, the distance had further reduced to the extent that the last-minute avoiding action taken by both ships was unable to prevent a collision.

The investigation identified several contributory factors, including:

- The passing arrangement agreed by the master of *Washington Senator* was made with an unidentified ship, not *Lykes Voyager*.

- The developing close-quarters situation between *Washington Senator* and *Lykes Voyager* could have been resolved solely by the early application of the COLREGS. However, the master of *Washington Senator* opted to contact *Lykes Voyager* on VHF radio.

- By the time *Washington Senator* established VHF communications with *Lykes Voyager*, the distance between the ships was less than 5 miles.

- Identification procedures were not followed during each VHF radio transmission, and the identity of the ship with which the passing agreement was made, which was probably one of many within VHF radio range, was not established.

- The avoiding action taken by *Lykes Voyager* was not taken until the ships had closed to about 2.5 miles. This was due to the inexperience of the third officer, who was focused by the threat posed by a nearby ship being overtaken, and because the master had been distracted.

- The performance of the master of *Lykes Voyager* was possibly affected by fatigue.

- When restricted visibility and large concentrations of fishing vessels were encountered, neither the master of *Washington Senator* nor *Lykes Voyager* considered it necessary to reduce speed below their required passage speeds.

- There is no guidance available to masters of ships which are unable to proceed at a speed which allows them to be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing state of visibility as required by Rule 6 of the COLREGS.

- Neither of the bridge teams made use of the available AIS information to monitor the actions of the other vessel when manoeuvring at close-quarters. This was probably due to several factors, including the absence of specific guidance or instruction from the ship managers, and the method in which AIS information was displayed.

Recommendations have been made to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing, the International Association of Marine Institutes (IAMI), the Association of Marine Educational and Training Institutes Asia-Pacific Regions (AMETIAP), and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) for the purpose of:

- Discouraging the use of VHF radio as a tool for collision avoidance.

- Providing additional guidance for determination of safe speed.

- Encouraging ship managers to monitor the application of safe speed.

- Highlighting the potential of AIS information when manoeuvring in a close-quarters situation.

- Advising ship managers of the advantages of displaying AIS information in a format in which it can be readily associated with radar and other sources of navigational information.

- Highlighting the importance of using ships' names and call signs in each transmission when communicating by radio.