

SYNOPSIS



Narrative

At 1946 UTC on 11 January 2005, the Italian registered ro-ro passenger ferry *Sardinia Vera* ran aground in the approach channel to the port of Newhaven on the south coast of England. The position of the grounding was in the charted deep water channel about 20 metres to starboard of the centreline, a position where the master should have been able to expect sufficient depth of water to navigate safely. The vessel re-floated at 2131 UTC with the rising tide and proceeded to sea stern first, where safety checks were completed before re-entering harbour to berth safely at 2223 UTC. There were no injuries or pollution, and the vessel did not sustain any damage.

The grounding on 11 January brought to 13 the number of reportable accidents involving the two Transmanche Ferries vessels in the port of Newhaven in less than 4 years. Ten of the accidents and incidents were groundings or near groundings, and three were collisions and contacts involving the other ferry, *Dieppe*. As a consequence, MAIB took the opportunity to probe more deeply the management of safety at Newhaven as it pertained to the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry operation.

Analysis

Newhaven channel is prone to heavy silting. On 11 January 2005, bad weather over the preceding week had caused a significant increase in the rate of silting, especially on the eastern side of the channel. The harbourmaster had been unable to carry out either the routine monthly, or post bad weather hydrographic surveys due to defective surveying equipment, and consequently accurate depths in the channel were not known. No control measures were implemented to mitigate the risk of unknown depth, save that the master attempted to navigate in what he assessed to be the deeper side of the channel. In this, he was hampered by a lack of suitable fixed navigation aids at Newhaven.

The MAIB had only been aware of five of the earlier groundings, investigating one fully and two to Preliminary Examination level. However, most of the other groundings appeared to have had similar causal factors. The MAIB had not been aware of the collisions and contact accidents involving *Dieppe*, but from data collected, the vessel's high windage and vulnerability to strong crosswinds in the approach channel appear to have been significant contributory factors.

Despite having been accredited with implementing the Port Marine Safety Code, the investigation found that Newhaven Ports and Properties (NPP) was apparently unable or unwilling to ensure an adequate level of safety was maintained, as it pertained to the Transmanche Ferry operation in the port. Specifically, the board of NPP appeared not to have assimilated its statutory responsibility for safety of navigation in the port,