

SYNOPSIS

At 1100 UTC on 28 May 2003, the container vessel *P&O Nedlloyd Vespucci* and the yacht *Wahkuna* collided in the English Channel in poor visibility. The MAIB was notified of the accident on 29 May, and an investigation started on the same day.

Each vessel had detected the other by radar when at a range of about 6 miles. The container ship was on a course of 255°(T) at a speed of 25 knots. The yacht was on the port bow of the container ship on a course of 012° (C) at a speed of 7.5 knots, and was due to pass about 8 cables ahead of the container ship.

The skipper of the yacht, however, incorrectly estimated from his radar display that *P&O Nedlloyd Vespucci* was passing 1.5 miles ahead of *Wahkuna*, and reduced speed by disengaging his engine. This action, which also resulted in a substantial alteration in the yacht's heading as it lost steerage, put the two vessels on a collision course. The actions of the yacht, the CPA of which now appeared as 2 cables to port on ARPA, concerned and confused the master of *P&O Nedlloyd Vespucci*, but he was reluctant to take any manoeuvring action because he was uncertain of what the yacht would do next.

Minutes later, the vessels collided and the bulbous bow of *P&O Nedlloyd Vespucci* struck the forward part of *Wahkuna*'s hull, demolishing the first 3m of her hull and dismasting her. Despite having sent a lookout to the port bridge wing, the master of the container ship was not aware that a collision had occurred, and continued on passage. The yacht crew had to abandon to a liferaft, where they stayed for 5.5 hours before being rescued.

Several factors contributed to the accident including:

- Misunderstanding by *Wahkuna*'s skipper of which of the Collision Regulations are applicable in fog.
- Over-confidence in the accuracy of ARPA by the master of the container ship
- Acceptance by the master of the container ship of a small passing distance
- The inability of the yacht skipper to use radar effectively
- The failure of both vessels to keep an effective radar lookout
- The high speed of the container vessel
- Poor bridge resource management.

A recommendation has been reiterated to the MCA with regard to the issue of guidance to assist in determining a safe speed in restricted visibility. Recommendations have also been made to the Royal Yachting Association and the British Marine Federation with a view to improving radar knowledge among yachtsmen. The manufacturer of the locating beacon has been advised to check new and existing beacons for similar faults.