

SYNOPSIS



The Swedish products tanker *Bro Axel*, and the Belgian registered fishing vessel *Noordhinder*, were involved in a near miss incident in the confines of Milford Haven on 5 December 2002. Subsequently, the avoiding action taken by the tanker resulted in her running aground.

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) was notified of the incident that day, and an investigation began immediately.

Bro Axel had left her berth at the Petroplus terminal and was outward bound for the port of Dublin. *Noordhinder* was inward bound after the completion of a fishing trip.

On executing the turn into the east channel, *Noordhinder's* skipper applied only 15° of helm which took her to the north side of the channel, the incorrect side for entering. At the same time, *Bro Axel*, which was also on the north side of the channel, the correct side for departing, was approaching the vicinity of the turn.

It was always the intention of *Noordhinder's* skipper to return to the south side of the channel when the turn was complete. However, *Bro Axel's* master was under the assumption that she would remain on the north side. When *Noordhinder* began to alter course to starboard to return to the correct side of the channel, this put her on a potential collision with *Bro Axel*.

Realising this to be the case, *Bro Axel's* master altered course to port to avoid a collision. When *Noordhinder's* skipper detected the alteration of course, he came full astern on the main engine. The result of both vessels' manoeuvres was that *Noordhinder* passed down *Bro Axel's* starboard side at a distance of approximately 10 metres.

When *Noordhinder* was approximately amidships to *Bro Axel*, *Bro Axel's* master ordered full astern on the main engines. However, his action was insufficient to prevent her from running aground.

There were no injuries, no damage to either vessel, and no pollution. However, the potential for a much more serious accident was evident.

This incident has raised various safety issues relating to the operation of MHPA port control, the use of escort vessels, emergency response training for the holders of Pilot Exemption Certificates (PECs), safety management of fishing vessels and, with regard to fishing vessels and merchant vessels, a discrepancy in the Pilotage Act.

As a result of these issues, appropriate recommendations have been made to Milford Haven Port Authority, the operators of each vessel, Ports Division of the Department for Transport and the UK Chamber of Shipping.