

SYNOPSIS



During the morning of 18 May 2001, a Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) surveyor reported to the MAIB that the ro-ro ferry *P&OSL Canterbury*, had suffered flooding of her forward machinery space while entering Dover Harbour the previous day. The MAIB began an investigation immediately.

At 0948 on 17 May 2001, *P&OSL Canterbury* sailed from Calais, France, for Dover with 151 passengers, 116 crew, 41 freight vehicles and 37 other vehicles on board. Her entry into Dover Harbour was delayed but, at 1242, preparations began for Dover arrival. At 1244 a 'high bilge' alarm activated, indicating a high level of water in a catering stores space bilge. The necessary bilge valves were opened and the port emergency bilge pump started from the machinery control room (MCR).

At 1245 another 'high bilge' alarm activated, this time for the forward machinery space. An engineer left the MCR to investigate, while the remaining watchkeeping engineer changed over bilge suction remotely, to pump from the forward machinery space using the port emergency bilge pump. This emergency bilge pump is in the forward machinery space, a comparatively small watertight space below the main vehicle deck.

The engineer found the forward machinery space filling with water. Other staff were called to assist. The flooding continued until the starter for the port emergency bilge pump's motor became affected by the floodwater. Another bilge pump was started, and at that stage, the level of the floodwater appeared to stabilise. There was no immediate threat to the vessel's safety.

The vessel entered harbour, berthed safely and all passengers and cargo were disembarked. Divers were employed to blank off the single overboard discharge from the forward machinery space, and salvage pumps were used to pump out the space.

Investigation found that a test valve on the discharge line from the emergency bilge pumps had been left open. Also, the overboard discharge valve from this line had no non-return capability. This arrangement allowed water to backflow from the sea when the pump was prepared to pump the bilges.

Since this incident, the owners have fitted a non-return valve to the overboard discharge line from the emergency bilge pumps. They have also supplemented onboard instructions for using the pumps' test line.

The MAIB recommends that the owners reposition the starters for the emergency bilge pumps so that they cannot be affected by flooding. They are also recommended to consider connecting the emergency bilge pumps' test line to a holding tank, or similar, so that it need not discharge to the bilges.

The MCA is recommended to address, as a matter of urgency, the delay in approving the stability information of this and possibly other UK-flagged ro-ro vessels.