

Synopsis

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) was notified of the accident on 4 February 1999 and an investigation started the same day.

Baltic Champ, a 1,660 GT Panamanian registered general cargo vessel, dragged her anchor and grounded off Kirkwall in west-south-westerly winds, gusting between 60 and 70 knots.

The master, who was alone on watch, failed to detect the vessel drifting astern in sufficient time to prevent her grounding. Although *Lloyd's Open Form* was eventually agreed with the master of the anchor handling tug *Havila Chieftain*, *Baltic Champ* refloated on the next tide and her master manoeuvred her clear before a tow could be established. Damage was sustained to her hull, but there were no injuries and no pollution.

Contributory causes included the prevailing weather conditions, the close proximity of a leeshore, an undue reliance on the officer of the watch to detect immediately any drift, an inadequate length of cable used to anchor the vessel, and inadequate monitoring of the vessel's position.

A risk of further damage and oil pollution could have been reduced had a tow been prepared immediately after the tug's arrival. This would have required, at that time, either *Havila Chieftain's* master agreeing to a towing contract or *Baltic Champ's* master agreeing to *Lloyd's Open Form*. Had a coastguard emergency towing vessel (ETV) been available, the coastguard would have been free to negotiate a towing contract.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is recommended to review its dedicated United Kingdom emergency towage cover, taking into account the desirability of securing a towing contract in deteriorating situations where one cannot be agreed by commercially interested parties.