

Collision between crew boat and anchored barge

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A member has reported an incident in which there was a collision between a crew boat and an anchored barge.

The incident occurred following bunkering, when a crew boat departed the bunkering barge to return to the in-field flotel. The Master got the vessel underway and planned to follow the regular route back – this was approximately two nautical miles distance and the vessel had already completed the same passage three times during the course of the evening. The vessel was running at reduced speed due to the prevailing poor weather conditions.

On approaching the flotel, it was noted that a survey vessel was operating in the vicinity. Having worked in the vicinity of the survey vessel for some time, the Master was aware of the minimum clearance distance required, and decided to alter course to starboard to maximise passing distance with the survey vessel.

The Master made the necessary alteration to provide the survey vessel with sufficient sea room; however this deviation took it away from the route followed on the three previous occasions. Unknown to the Master, a barge had been anchored in the vicinity of the flotel whilst the crew boat was out of the field, and the crew boat only returned to the field during the hours of darkness. The barge's new anchor position had not been properly communicated within the field and, based on subsequent witness statements, the barge was also reported as being unlit at the time of the incident.

Shortly after altering course, to give the survey vessel sufficient sea room, the crew boat collided with the barge. All three crew members were thrown out of their seats and suffered serious impact injuries; one suffered a broken shoulder and dislocated arm, one suffered multiple cuts and severe bruising, however, the third crew member suffered serious injuries to his face and neck, requiring immediate medical evacuation ashore for intensive medical care. The crew boat had no passengers on board at the time.

The investigation remains ongoing. However, the following information can be shared:

- Following anchoring operations (approximately five hours before), the barge's lighting system was reported as working.

However immediately after the incident the Masters of the involved vessel and the first vessel on scene afterwards both stated the lighting system was not operational. This was corroborated by personnel from the flotel;

- No communications or navigation warnings had been issued by field supervisors following the barge's movement into the area. The anchoring

operation was conducted whilst the crew boat was in another part of the field and, by the time she returned in the evening, it was too dark to have visually sighted the barge

- Whilst the vessel radar was operating correctly and in use at the time, the adverse weather conditions may have reduced its effectiveness and detection range
- The crew boat may have been travelling at a speed not appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions, although there were no in-field speed restrictions in place at the time

Whilst noting that the key causal factors and lessons learnt are still being investigated, some of the key lessons learnt were:

- There should be full compliance with all requirements of the Collision Regulations (COLREGs) at all times and in all conditions
- Changes should be properly managed, planned, controlled and communicated through a management of change process.

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