



# GOOD CATCH from **The American Club**

## Too busy to ask for help?

### Description

A general cargo vessel was outbound in a traffic separation scheme (TSS) just after midnight. The pilot had recently departed the vessel and the captain had returned to his stateroom to get some sleep. A young third mate was on watch and an AB was also on the bridge as lookout. It was dark out and the weather was cold but clear. There were several other ocean-going ships inbound and outbound as well as several towing vessels pulling barges. Two smaller fishing vessels were in the area just outside of the TSS. It was not immediately clear to the Third whether the fishing vessels were transiting or actively fishing. As an additional complication, there were a lot of background lights from shore that made it challenging to identify vessel running lights and navigation aids.



*Independent Maritime Consulting, LLC (IMC) Photo*

The Third was busy monitoring his vessel's progress and tracking all of the other vessels. He was constantly moving between the Electronic Chart Display and Information System (ECDIS) and positions on the bridge where he could see the other vessels. The lookout was trying his best to be helpful and was calling out the positions of other vessels. One other outbound ship in the TSS was slowly overtaking them. A towing vessel inbound in the TSS was moving at 3 kts and was being overtaken by another ship that was also inbound. The towing vessel appeared to be shifting slightly closer to the outer edge of the TSS. The Third was concerned about the fishing vessels as his vessel was approaching their position. He was trying to plot their course but the fishing vessels seemed to be turning frequently. He was also concerned about the vessel overtaking them as it looked like it would be in a position to pass them about the same time they would be near the fishing vessels.

With so much activity and so many concerns, the Third missed a plotted turn. The ship traveled into the inbound lane of the TSS and collided with an inbound vessel. The Third realized too late that a collision was imminent and turned hard to starboard to try to avoid the inbound ship, but he could tell he would be unsuccessful. He sounded the danger signal and collision alarm right before the collision. The lookout had been on the opposite bridge wing and had been entirely focused on the fishing vessels.

The investigation determined that the Third was not distracted and was not fatigued. However, he was overwhelmed by the volume of traffic and the developing situation and was struggling with the background lights. The investigators indicated that he should have called the captain well before the collision. When interviewed as part of the investigation, the young third mate had indicated a reluctance to call the captain because he knew the captain had just gone to bed and because he felt that calling the captain would reflect poorly on him and his competence as a watchstander.

### Actual Damage

The damage to each of the two vessels was limited to above the waterline. Repair costs exceeded \$125K for one vessel and \$85K for the other. There were no injuries other than to the young mate's self-esteem.



## Potential Damages

Both vessels slowed to a stop immediately following the collision and soon after moved into a nearby anchorage while assessing the damage. Both vessels were fortunate that the other traffic in the TSS was able to slow and avoid them following the collision. There was a high potential of an additional collision or a vessel grounding while trying to avoid one of the involved vessels. Good awareness by the other vessels prevented that from happening.

## Prevention

- ★ Despite their experience level, watchstanders should not hesitate to call the captain and ask for assistance as soon as they start to feel overwhelmed or as soon as an unfolding situation begins to look complex.
- ★ Captains should recognize when the waterway and other traffic have the potential to create a complex navigation situation and provide assistance to the watchstanders.
- ★ Captains should also work to establish an atmosphere on the vessel where asking for assistance is not viewed as a failure or skill deficiency but is viewed as the correct and responsible action.

When you identify a hazard before something goes wrong...

**it's a Good Catch.**

When you stop an operation before something bad happens...

**it's a Good Catch.**

When you recognize that a situation is becoming complex and ask for assistance...

**that's a Good Catch, too!**



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