



GOOD CATCH from The American Club

Voyage Planning Problems Lead to Grounding and Loss of Ship

Description

A general cargo vessel (95 meters in length) was underway on an international voyage passing along the coast of Scotland. With only a required crew of eight, the Master and Chief Mate alternated standing navigation watch on the bridge.

Per the company safety management system (SMS) procedures, the Chief Mate was responsible to develop the voyage plan and the Master was responsible to approve it. However for this voyage, the Master drafted the voyage plan while the Chief Mate finished supervising cargo operations. The voyage plan was created on the vessel's Electronic Chart Display and Information System (ECDIS). Since the Master had prepared the plan, it had not been reviewed by the Chief Mate to ensure it was safe. Contrary to all guidance, he developed the voyage plan using a small scale chart which masked or hid detailed features, hazards and warnings that are visible on a more appropriately scaled chart.

Making matters worse, the safety contours in the ECDIS were set at 5 meters and never changed even though the draft of the vessel on that voyage was 5.6 meters. The ECDIS alarms had all been silenced and the "look ahead" function defining the area vector and sector for the ECDIS to monitor, had been deactivated.

Due to worsening weather and following seas, the Master altered the voyage plan in the ECDIS after the vessel was underway. He did that by changing the track lines but again did not use an appropriate large scale chart. Inadvertently, he routed the vessel directly over a charted shoal that was clearly marked on the large-scale chart, but not visible on the small scale chart that was used. Since he modified his own initial voyage plan, there was no second set of eyes that reviewed it for any errors or issues.



Actual Damages

When the vessel struck the shoal, numerous empty ballast water tanks were holed and quickly began flooding. With a damaged ship that was hard aground in bad weather and at risk of sinking, the Master decided to abandon the vessel and the entire crew had to be rescued by helicopter.

The damage to the vessel was so extensive that the ship was declared a constructive total loss.

Prevention

- ★ Good voyage planning requires attention to detail and use of large scale charts, whether paper or electronic.
- ★ A key part of voyage planning is an independent review, no matter who prepares it, to catch any errors that could jeopardize the vessel's safety if left undetected.
- ★ Changes to a voyage plan deserve the same required oversight as the initial voyage plan and that oversight can be critically important.
- ★ Treat the inherent ECDIS alarms and features as critical safety nets instead of silencing or deactivating them.

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 catch an error in a voyage plan or an ECDIS setting... **that's a Good Catch, too!**



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