



## **SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB**

**A Report on the  
TECHNICAL SEMINAR  
held at the Royal British Legion Club, Southampton  
on  
Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2005**

### **NAVIGATIONAL CONTROL OF THE WEST SOLENT**

**“A CAUSE FOR CONCERN”.**



*“Attilio Ievoli” alongside at Fawley Marine Terminal.  
L.O.A. 115.5m, 4450 Gross, 1982 Nett.*

# NAVIGATIONAL CONTROL OF THE WEST SOLENT

## “ A CAUSE FOR CONCERN”.

**Captain Simon Harwood**, Captain of The Southampton Master Mariners' Club welcomed those in attendance and explained that, since the demise of the Technical Committee some six years ago, the annual seminar had been the responsibility of Mr. Walter Weyndling and tonight's Chairman - Captain Reg Kelso. Sadly, Walter died last year and Captain Harwood invited the assembly to stand in memory of our friend and colleague. Then, after giving a brief outline of the substance of the seminar Captain Harwood introduced the Chairman.

Captain Kelso opened by commenting on the decision by the Master of "ATTILIO IEVOLI" to disregard his standing instructions and depart via the Western Solent and Needles Channel. Tonight, however, will concentrate on the two major recommendations made by The Marine Accident Investigation Branch in their report of its investigation into the grounding of the chemical tanker on Lymington Banks.

1. The Department of Transport is recommended to take action, working as necessary with the Competent Harbour Authorities of Southampton, Cowes, Lymington and Yarmouth IoW, to ensure *"The establishment of an effective regime for the control and direction of all commercial shipping of 500gt or above using the Western Solent or Needles Channel. Such action should include the provision of appropriate VTS coverage, a suitable pilotage service and improved survey of navigable waters"*

2. The Corporation of Trinity House is recommended to *"Review the buoyage in the west Solent in order to better define the available deep water route"*

The Department of Transport and Trinity House will be responding to the MAIB in the near future - and the Department is currently meeting with many of those likely to be involved in implementing the recommendations - so the Club has deemed it inadvisable to invite representatives of those parties to join the panel but their participation, from the floor, will be welcome.

In introducing the first speaker the Chairman said that **Captain Ian Stirling** first transited the Western Solent/Needles Channel in 1951 aboard the Solent based ketch "MOYANA" and, more recently, one month ago as "Marine Adviser" aboard the cruise ship "SAGA RUBY".

Captain Stirling opened by refuting the belief that the grounding of "Attilio Ievoli" was an isolated incident; he had personal experience of 3 of the "numerous incidents" in the Western Solent. Although impressed by the quality of the MAIB report he felt that there was a minor inaccuracy in relation to the Harbour Revision Order sought by ABP some years ago. ABP did not offer a "pilotage service".

However, in the case of four pilots whose pilotage certificates were due for renewal by ABP in 1988 the pilots found that The West Solent was included in their "area". This allowed them to operate on their own as Company "choice" pilots without any involvement by ABP. The only vessels catered for were "QE2", "VISTAFJORD" (very occasionally) and P&O's "VICTORIA". The pilots involved were of the opinion that by including the West Solent in a limited number of certificates ABP felt that they were providing a service for the purposes of the Harbour Revision Order hearing in 1995.

Three of that number have now retired and many large vessels - including QE2 - no longer use the Needles due to a change in the configuration of the channel. Large vessels are, on occasions, forced to abort their turn at the West Brambles and, for them, the area off Lymington is their last opportunity to swing and regain their track. Referring to the grounding of the chemical tanker, Captain Stirling said that it was obvious that there was evidence of crew neglect. The channel is wide, there was little recreational traffic and no commercial traffic but the vessel had steered well to starboard of her safe course. He saw no real necessity for additional buoys between Lepe and Hurst. He outlined instances of other vessels grounding after disembarking their pilot at East Lepe and suggested that fatigue - of Masters and Watchkeeping Officers - was a contributory

factor in these accidents. He did, however, see a case for "some sort of VTS" in the Hurst area. He ended by saying that he would not dispute the viewpoint expressed in the MAIB report that the current situation was "a cause for concern"

Introducing **Captain Geoff Stokes** the Chairman said that prior to joining The Coastguard and Maritime Agency Captain Stokes had been a Dover Harbour pilot and that tonight he would comment on the MCA's role as the competent VTS authority for The United Kingdom.

In outlining the Agency's involvement with hydrography, pilotage, VTS and the various inter-related legal aspects Captain Stokes said that the area under discussion had been surveyed "recently" and that a survey of the Needles Channel was scheduled for this year. He stressed that the MCA set the standards for VTS and Competent Harbour Authorities (in accordance with IMO and IALA requirements) but it was the port's decision on what to offer after the completion of an appropriate risk assessment.

The Agency currently operates the Channel Navigation Service at Dover and is discussing VTS organisation in the Severn Estuary, East Solent and Sunk areas. Discussions with Competent Harbour Authorities were ongoing

Finally, the Chairman introduced **Captain Nigel Hunt** and said that as a former Yarmouth IoW Harbour Master Captain Hunt's statement would "support the MAIB recommendations"

Giving details of his career background Captain Hunt said that he had sailed the Solent since his early teens, served some 22 years in the Merchant Navy with two years in command of "exempt" ships allowing him to bring his command through the Needles Channel without a pilot, been Harbour Master at Yarmouth IoW 1988 to 1990 before serving nine years at Warsash Maritime College in ship simulators and manned model ship handling facilities. Currently he runs his own marine consultancy specialising in Marine risk analysis, navigation audits and safety training. He reminded the seminar that up until October 1st 1988 the West Solent was an area of compulsory pilotage for most vessels with the pilots licensed by Trinity House. Currently, the area lies without the jurisdiction of ABP Southampton, it does not have a pilotage service and it is not covered by a shore based traffic monitoring systems. In consequence Southampton VTS has no authority to "organise" the movement of vessels in the West Solent. The area is classed as UK internal waters so vessels may transit by the right of "innocent passage" granted by the UN Convention of The Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Captain Hunt reminded the seminar that, in 1995, the Port of Southampton applied for a Harbour Revision Order to extend its jurisdiction to include the West Solent (in order to improve the safety of navigation and to provide a pilotage service) but, following a public enquiry, this application was rejected. Had the application been successful ABP would have, at that time, assumed full responsibility for (compulsory) pilotage, VTS coverage of the area, buoyage and hydrographic surveying of the area under discussion.

Increased awareness of environmental issues has altered the public's willingness to accept risks and the effects of adverse publicity following a serious incident in the West Solent should not be underestimated. The foreshore on both sides of the area is a Special Protection Area, a Special Area of Conservation, or both. Seafaring skills are often an unknown quantity aboard calling ships and the compulsory presence of a well-rested pilot with local knowledge would contribute massively to safety of navigation.

It was time to revisit the decision taken in 1995 to deny ABP the opportunity to extend its port limits to embrace the West Solent.

After a short break the seminar reconvened and the Chairman invited questions and comment from the floor. Captain Downer asked if alcohol had played any part in the stranding of "Attilio Ievoli" and was assured that this was not the case

Mr. Graham Butler, Chairman of Lymington Harbour Authority asked if it was the ABP viewpoint that there could be no involvement in VTS without statutory overall control and it was the view of the panel that this was the case (See comment by Captain Young).

Mr Reg Pretty, Chief Officer of an aggregate vessel operating in the west Solent/Needles Channel was of the opinion that the buoyage etc. was satisfactory and saw little reason for significant change.

Mr Don Alexander, RYCA asked if the random entry of potentially unsafe commercial traffic could be restricted and the consensus was that this could not be achieved.

Mr Paul King, RYA asked if compulsory pilotage alone could be reintroduced and whether this would be effective in dealing with the problem. The viewpoint was that this was neither possible nor desirable.

Captain Kelso reported that some years ago he had raised concerns about a Russian flag vessel - almost certainly without P&I club insurance cover -entering via the Needle and bunkering off Yarmouth. He sailed very close to this vessel and her lack of maintenance was very evident. Despite protracted correspondence with the relevant authorities he was unable to gain any assurance that a competent authority checked on the ability of such vessels to meet any claims in respect of oil fuel contamination etc. within the West Solent area.

Captain George Lang WMC outlined the commercial pressures exerted on today's Masters and Watchkeepers resulting in fatigue and poor watchkeeping practice. Falling standards of competency were a cause for grave concern.

After some protracted discussion about the need for additions or changes to the navigational marks in the West Solent, Ms. Kathy Hossain , Trinity House said that prior to the publication of the MAIB report the Corporation had undertaken a consultation process to establish the adequacy, or otherwise, of navigational marks throughout the area. A copy of "Review of Trinity House Aids to Navigation in the Western Solent" was made available.

Further discussion centred on the reasons for the withdrawal of compulsory pilotage and the benefits of high intensity daylight lights as leading marks.

Mr Graham Butler referred to the Inspector's report on the 1995 Harbour Revision Order and said that it appears that it is open to ABP to extend its area of VTS cover and also provide pilotage services outside the current area of ABP control. There had also been some discussions relating to the reinstatement of Lymington Buoy.

Captain Steven Young, ABP Southampton Harbourmaster said that ABP was broadly supportive of the recommendations but that ABP had no plans to extend into the West Solent although discussions with the Department of Transport were ongoing. He agreed that there was provision in pending Parliamentary legislation which would allow Competent Harbour Authorities to extend their pilotage areas.

ABP had records relating to some 40 "significant" incidents in the area - 15 since 1995 - and he referred to the "Esso Bahamas" passing within metres of Gurnard Rocks after machinery failure, The "QE2" touched Lymington Banks in 1991 and "Victoria" repeated this in 1994. In 1994/5 there were 3700 commercial movements through the West Solent and, in 2004, some 3000 - of which 2000 were over pilotage length - (60.9m). There were 1000 pilotage acts equating to 10% of the port total.

Captain Young was adamant that it was not down to ABP to recommend to vessels that they do not use open waters but, since 1995, ABP had, as a result of several risk assessments implemented more safety strictures relating to escort towage etc. They did not consider pilotage as being the panacea but more as part of an overall package incorporating VTS coverage and improved survey procedures of navigable waters. Indeed, to introduce pilotage in isolation might well be counter productive in terms of safety insofar as the area would undoubtedly attract larger and larger ships with a resulting increase in risk.

There being no further questions Captain Kelso invited Captain Harwood to sum up and to thank those who had made such a very significant contribution to an interesting evening.

Captain Harwood said that it appeared that the majority of those present was agreed that there was indeed "Cause for Concern" in respect of the subject under discussion.

Something must be done to improve the situation and possibly the reintroduction of compulsory pilotage - as a first step - might be effective but he welcomed the support given to the MAIB proposals by ABP and agreed that pilotage could only be part of an overall package incorporating VTS supervision and hydrographic surveying. The reluctance of the smaller ports to become involved in the cost implications of these changes is entirely understandable.

Captain Harwood closed by thanking the speakers and the participants expressed their appreciation with applause.