

Press conference notes 20 October 2009, 10.30 am

Release of the ATSB's preliminary factual report into the Collision between *Ella's Pink Lady* and *Silver Yang* on 9 September 2009

At about 0151 local time on 9 September 2009, 15 nautical miles east of Point Lookout on North Stradbroke Island, the Australian registered, single-handed yacht *Ella's Pink Lady* collided with the 63,800 tonne, Hong Kong registered bulk carrier *Silver Yang*.

At the time of the collision, *Silver Yang* was northbound en route to China with a load of coal. *Ella's Pink Lady* was heading southeast en route to Sydney via Lord Howe Island. *Ella's Pink Lady* was making good a speed of 7 knots and the ship a speed of 9 knots. The weather conditions and visibility at the time were good

Approximately 26 minutes before the collision, *Silver Yang's* bridge watch keeper reported observing one green light to port, at a range of about 4 miles, it was *Ella's Pink Lady*. He continued to monitor the vessel's position in relation to his own.

At 0146, 5 minutes before the collision, the skipper of the yacht had checked her radar and noted that there was a vessel about 6 miles off her starboard quarter, almost right astern of the yacht. She could not see it visually, but she monitored its progress on the radar for about 1 minute. Once she had determined that it did not present a collision risk, she set the radar guard-rings, set her alarm clocks and went to bed for a catnap. However, the ship she was observing was not *Silver Yang*, which was now about 1 mile to the south-southeast of her position.

About 3 minutes before the collision, *Silver Yang's* bridge watch keeper altered the ship's heading by 10° to starboard and then almost immediately applied hard-to-starboard rudder about 30 seconds before the collision in an attempt to avoid *Ella's Pink Lady*. However his efforts were unsuccessful and *Ella's Pink Lady's* bow collided with *Silver Yang's* port side mid section.

The collision woke *Ella's Pink Lady's* skipper. She climbed out of the cabin, grabbed the tiller and tried to steer the yacht. She looked upwards and thought that it was likely that the yacht's rigging would become entangled with the ship and dismast her vessel, so she returned to the cabin. A few seconds later, the mast came crashing down.

Ella's Pink Lady's skipper called *Silver Yang* on VHF channel 16 and, over a series of short conversations, the ship's watch keeper confirmed that neither the yacht nor its crew needed any assistance. Because of the English speaking ability of the ship's bridge watch keeper, the conversations were difficult. He then resumed the voyage.

Ella's Pink Lady's skipper used the yacht's satellite telephone to call her parents. She spoke to her father and told him what had happened. While she was talking to

her father, her mother telephoned the Australian Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) in Canberra and reported the collision. The RCC then telephoned *Ella's Pink Lady* directly to confirm what assistance the skipper required. She confirmed that she was fine, the yacht was seaworthy, and that when she had the mast and rigging on board and appropriately tied down, she would motor towards Southport, Queensland. The RCC reported the incident to the Queensland water police and both the RCC and the police continued to monitor *Ella's Pink Lady's* progress.

The skipper of *Ella's Pink Lady* was able to cut the headsail free, retrieve the damaged rigging on board and motor the damaged yacht to Southport, Queensland. Queensland water police met and escorted her for the final part of her voyage back to port.

The ATSB commenced a safety investigation on 9 September when it was notified of the incident. Two investigators went to the gold Coast to meet the yacht when it arrived later that day. Investigators interviewed the skipper, her family and support team members and evidence was collected from them and Queensland authorities.

Further evidence was also collected from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). Because the ship was en route to China, the ATSB have not been able to interview its crew. To enable the initial investigation to be carried out, the ATSB requested the assistance of the Hong Kong Marine Department to obtain evidence from the ship when it reached China.

The evidence from *Silver Yang* was received from the Hong Kong authorities last week and included statements from the relevant crew members, various documents and the information from the ship's Voyage Data Recorder, or "Black Box", which is now being analysed by our investigators.

A number of safety issues were identified in the course of preparing this preliminary report. A draft copy of the report was hand-delivered to *Ella's Pink Lady's* skipper and her family and support crew on 9 October. Investigators also provided a comprehensive face-to-face briefing on the investigation and facilitated a visit to the bridge of a large tanker berthed in Sydney. This was to give the skipper an understanding of the limitations of shipboard equipment, the difficulties ships' crews have in detecting small vessels and the actions a ship's officer may take following a collision or near miss.

On 15 October, the ATSB further briefed the skipper and her support team on some possible limitations in relation to her onboard Automatic Identification System (a tracking system used by ships for collision avoidance).

The ATSB is confident that all relevant matters identified in the investigation have been brought to the attention of *Ella's Pink Lady's* skipper and support team in a timely way to assist in their risk management and preparations for *Ella's Pink Lady's* voyage.

The investigation continues and a final report is planned for release in approximately six months. In the event that any further safety issues are identified, they will be brought to the attention of the skipper's support crew, who remain in regular contact with her. Based on the evidence obtained, the ATSB investigation will be focusing on several areas including:

- the electronic detectability of the yacht
- the lookout being kept on board both vessels
- adherence to the International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea (COLREGS)
- collision risk assessment
- actions taken following the collision
- human factors issues associated with the incident.

The International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea (COLREGS), or "rules of the road" observed by every vessel, requires both vessels in a potential collision situation to take appropriate steps to avoid the collision. If the collision does occur, it means that there must be contributing safety factors relating to the operation of both vessels.

This collision highlights the ATSB's ongoing concerns about collisions involving trading ships and smaller vessels with 35 investigations into such collisions since 1990. Most concerning for the ATSB is that 20 ships did not stop following the collision, which did not happen in this instance. The ATSB has already done a considerable amount of work to address the safety issues we have identified in these collisions and we are actively working both within Australia and internationally, to address the issue of ships failing to stop and render assistance.