

Harbours Department Report

Mike Pryce, Manager

March 2000

1. Harbour Navigation Aids

All navigation aids are operating satisfactorily.

1.1 Wave Rider Buoy

CentrePort Ltd has requested that Council consider the provision of a waverider-buoy to give swell height information at the harbour entrance. This will be primarily for use by fast-ferries whose operating ability is determined by significant wave height, but also for the general information of other harbour users. Information on potential costs and cost-recovery arrangements from fast-ferry operators is being sought.

1.2 Power to Somes/Matiu Island Lighthouse

As previously reported, the Department of Conservation-owned underwater power supply cable to Somes/Matiu Island failed some months ago, and power supply is presently via diesel generators.

Various issues have resulted in some indecision on the part of the Department of Conservation as to whether or renew the power cable or not.

As a prudent interim measure, back-up batteries have been fitted to the navigation light at minimal cost in order to reduce total reliance on the diesel generators.

2. Oil Pollution Response

Five pollution reports were received. Only one actual oil slick required action when, on 20 March, an aircraft reported an oil slick in Cook Strait nine miles south of the airport. Of unknown origin, it dispersed naturally under favourable wind and tide conditions. The fast-ferry *Condor Vitesse* was diverted slightly in order to sail through the area to check the slick, with the possibility of the vessel using its waterjets to help to break-up the slick if it was still persisting.

2.1 Chatham Islands

On 10 March the Wellington-based fishing vessel *Seafresh 1* caught fire near the Chatham Islands. The fire was extinguished and the vessel was towed to an anchorage in Hanson Bay, on the eastern side of the main island.

On the morning of 17 March the vessel suddenly took in water and sank with about eighty-five tonnes of diesel oil on board. A large oil slick raised fears about the fishery stocks of the Chatham Islands. At very short notice, I was requested by the Maritime Safety Authority to form part of their Tier 3 Response Team, and flew direct to the Chatham Islands early that afternoon.

Operations were based in the offices of the Chatham Islands Council in Waitangi, (in use as the Incident Command Centre, and ably supported by their General Manager, Terry Melville). Action was taken to place a protective harbour boom across the entrance to the Te Whanga lagoon, to rig a local fishing vessel with spray booms for dispersant spraying and to temporarily plug tank vent pipes on the sunken ship which were leaking oil. After the oil pollution threat was stabilised, I returned from the Chathams on 22 March after an interesting experience.

Subsequently the wreck was found to have the invasive Asian seaweed undaria on the hull, and on 26 March the Ministry of Fisheries declared the vessel a risk under Biosecurity legislation and instructed the owner to raise and remove the wreck within thirty days.

3. **Extended “Harbour” Limits.**

Present harbour bylaws only apply to the gazetted harbour limits of Wellington, Porirua and Kapiti. The recently reviewed legislation gives Regional Councils the ability to extend the areas under their control out to twelve miles around the entire regional coastline. In the case of Wellington Regional Council, the area could extend from Otaki on the west coast, round through Cook Strait and up to north of Castle Point on the east coast.

Harbour limits determine the area in which Council has jurisdiction to manage navigation and safety and enforce Council’s bylaws.

The majority of the high intensity boat activity currently occurs within these existing harbour limits. If the compulsory carriage of lifejackets were made mandatory by Council bylaws, the present harbour limits would mean that boats launching from beaches in significant parts of the Region would not be covered by the policy.

Discussions with Maritime Safety Authority staff have confirmed that in order to control the coastal area off the beaches it would be simpler to align the harbour limits to the offshore boundary.

Another advantage to Council would be that during an oil spill the Harbour Master could exercise powers to control all vessels. Under the present Maritime Transport Act, the Regional On-Scene Commander can only control New Zealand vessels outside harbour limits.

Council is already responsible for Tier 2 oil pollution response in regional coastal waters out to twelve miles.

Prior to introducing new harbour bylaws, Council may wish to consider the issue of the extension of harbour limits.

4. **Departmental Activities**

On 10 February the “Equipex 2000” training exercise was held on Glasgow Wharf, with a very good attendance of our regional oil spill response support group. Deputy Harbourmaster, Patrick Atwood, demonstrated the operation of various oil recovery devices (skimmers and oliophilic rope mops).

On 3 March, I gave a presentation to a Maritime Safety Authority staff conference at Masterton on the maritime roles of Regional Councils.

On 8 March, a function for our Honorary Launch Wardens was held at our offices at Queens Wharf. This was a tangible “thank you” to them for the volunteer work they do for us, and also provided a valuable source of informal feedback on developing problems, etc.

5. **General Events/Information**

Councillors may have noted from media reports that Marlborough District Council is considering a modification of their harbour bylaws in an attempt to address the issue of fast ferry wash. In the Tory Channel and Queen Charlotte Sound area, ferry wash has been claimed to be causing adverse environmental effects and to be posing a danger to small craft.

The stripped-hulk of the 41-metre steel-hulled fishing vessel *Sarfaq* has been moored at Miramar Wharf in Evans Bay since July 1998. There are proposals by the owner to allow interested groups to scuttle the vessel as a fish reef and/or dive site at one of two locations. On 2 March a meeting and inspection with interested parties was held on board *Sarfaq* at Miramar Wharf in order to ascertain what oil-removal, cleaning and other work needed to be done before the vessel could be considered as being suitable for scuttling.

On the evening of 10 March, the wooden-hulled harbour cruise launch *Sweet Georgia* suffered an engine fire whilst on a cruise in Evans Bay with about sixty persons on board. They were quickly evacuated onto other vessels without injury. Deputy Harbourmaster, Patrick Atwood, and Harbour Ranger, Greg Meikle, attended the incident when the vessel was near the shoreline north of Greta Point. Greg Meikle assisted the fire service by shutting-down the still-running engine on *Sweet Georgia*, and then assisted the wharf police when the police launch towed the powerless *Sweet Georgia* back across the harbour to its berth. He also inspected the engine room of the vessel for leaks when it was safely back in its berth.

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