

**MARINE OCCURRENCE REPORT**

**GROUNDING**

**OF THE FISHING VESSEL "WESTERN OCEAN"  
ON FRANCIS ISLAND, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
13 APRIL 1996**

**REPORT NUMBER M96W0061**

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) investigated this occurrence for the purpose of advancing transportation safety. It is not the function of the Board to assign fault or determine civil or criminal liability.

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### **Summary**

At about 2330 on 13 April 1996, the fishing vessel "WESTERN OCEAN" was on a voyage from Sooke, British Columbia, to Ucluelet, British Columbia. As the vessel entered the harbour, the master, believing that the vessel was near Jenny Reef on the starboard side, altered course to port to bring the vessel back to the middle of the channel. The vessel ran aground on Francis Island about a minute later. The crew was rescued, uninjured, by an auxiliary Canadian Coast Guard boat. The vessel was a total loss.

*Ce rapport est également disponible en français.*

**Other Factual Information**

**Particulars of the Vessel**

|                  |                                      |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Name             | "WESTERN OCEAN"                      |
| Port of Registry | Vancouver, B.C.                      |
| Flag             | Canadian                             |
| Official Number  | 197702                               |
| Type             | Fishing vessel                       |
| Gross Tonnage    | 128                                  |
| Crew             | 4                                    |
| Length           | 24 m                                 |
| Built            | 1944, Tacoma, Washington, U.S.A.     |
| Propulsion       | Single-screw diesel engine, 446.7 kW |
| Owners           | Titan Fishing Ltd.<br>Sooke, B.C.    |

The "WESTERN OCEAN" was a wooden-hulled fishing vessel with the accommodation located forward. The vessel left Sooke at 1400 on 13 April 1996 with a crew of four. She then proceeded toward Ucluelet, B.C., to pick up ice. The master was experienced in the area, but this was his first trip on that vessel.

The weather was clear with a visibility of 15 nautical miles. The wind was from the south-east at about 15 to 20 knots and the sea was moderate. Shortly before 2400, the vessel proceeded through Carolina Channel. The master, who had the con, was navigating using the radar and echo-sounder. The heading marker of the radar had a 5- to 15-degree error to starboard. The bow of the ship still corresponded with the zero mark of the radar; however, the heading marker was to the right of this zero. Although he knew about the error, the master, who was new to the vessel, did not know how to correct it.

After passing buoys Y42 and Y43 uneventfully, the master observed shallow water on the echo-sounder. He reduced speed to two to three knots before proceeding.

As the vessel proceeded through the channel, the master, believing he was too close to Jenny Reef on the starboard side, altered course to port to bring the vessel back to the middle of the channel, and he increased the speed to full ahead. About a minute later, the vessel ran aground on Francis Island at full speed.

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<sup>1</sup> All time are PDT (Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) minus seven hours) unless otherwise stated.

A review of the chart of the area indicates that there is a five-metre shoal a few hundred metres south of Francis Island. After the master altered course to port, the heading marker on the radar was just off Francis Island. This meant that the vessel was then heading for the island, but this went unnoticed by the master.

Once aground, a distress call was broadcast and the crew boarded the liferaft. The swell kept the liferaft pinned to the vessel's side. The vessel was rolling violently, and the crew members became concerned that they would get caught underneath. Within five minutes of the crew abandoning the vessel, the CCG auxiliary "KNIGHT INLET" arrived on the scene. The rescue vessel supplied a knife which was used to cut the liferaft painter. The occupants of the liferaft were transferred aboard the rescue vessel shortly thereafter. No one was injured.

The master held a Fishing Master, Class III Certificate of Competency, issued in 1986. He had made some 30 to 40 trips in and out of Ucluelet Harbour, 10 of which as master, and only 2 of those in darkness.

The vessel was destroyed by the rough sea throwing her against the rock.

### **Analysis**

When the echo-sounder first showed a shallow depth, speed was reduced, but the vessel's position was not verified, nor was the situation assessed before the speed was increased to full ahead.

As there is no evidence of a voyage plan or any other navigational preparation which would have familiarized the operator with the depths of water and the navigation hazards in the Carolina Channel, it could not be determined if the route followed by the "WESTERN OCEAN" up to the time of the shoaling soundings was satisfactory and as intended.

Although the master did not know how to correct the error of the radar heading marker, he could have used other means, including radar distances, to plot and monitor the safe progress of the vessel, but he did not do so.

The sinking of the vessel precluded the examination of the echo-sounder setting; however, when the soundings showed shallow water, giving warning of dangerous water ahead, no attempt was made to verify the vessel's true position by radar so as to alter course toward the deeper water. The master's decision to alter course to port was based on the incorrect assumption that the vessel was near the north part of Jenny Reef.

The vessel carried a chart, but the master relied on his local knowledge, and he did not make appropriate reference to the chart.

There is no evidence that the vessel track was plotted or her position fixed during the approach to the harbour. Therefore, the set and drift of the current were undetected, and the master was unaware of the true position of the vessel. The south-easterly wind would account for the northerly drift experienced by the vessel toward the five-metre shoal.

### **Findings**

1. The "WESTERN OCEAN" drifted to the north of the Carolina Channel.
2. The shallow water observed by the master was not Jenny Reef; it was in fact a five-metre shoal south of Francis Island.
3. The master altered course to port based on scanty information and without first verifying the vessel's position. The heading marker of the radar was then just off Francis Island.
4. The radar had a known 5- to 15-degree error to starboard.
5. The vessel ran aground at full speed and was subsequently destroyed by wave action.

### **Causes and Contributing Factors**

The "WESTERN OCEAN" ran aground because the master altered course to port after having observed a shallow water area that he believed to be Jenny Reef. The shallow water area was in fact a five-meter shoal south of Francis Island.

The 5- to 15-degree error of the radar heading marker and the vessel's northerly drift may have contributed to the master's loss of situational awareness.

*This report concludes the Transportation Safety Board's investigation into this occurrence. Consequently, the Board, consisting of Chairperson Benoît Bouchard, and members Maurice Harquail, Charles Simpson and W.A. Tadros, authorized the release of this report on 23 April 1997.*