

A PRC registered dredger “粤高明工 1070” capsized and sank one nautical mile south east of Ninepin Group Islands on 2 December 2003

1. The Incident

- 1.1 In the morning of 2 December 2003 the PRC registered dredger "粤高明工 1070" was reported to have capsized and sunk in position 22° 14N 114° 22E, at approx. one nautical mile south east of Ninepin Group Islands. At time of the incident the dredger was in light ship condition proceeding under tow from Zhuhai (珠海) to Hui Dong(惠东).
- 1.2 The dredger was towed by two PRC fishing vessels “粤珠海 31024” and “粤珠海 31006”. The towing group was transiting the waters of Hong Kong near Ninepin Group Islands when the dredger capsized. Of the two PRC crew on board the dredger, one was rescued and the other was found missing after the incident. The missing crew was still missing at time of writing the report.

2. Findings

- 2.1 According to the license requirement, the fishing vessels were not permitted to engage in towing operation. The Zhuhai Maritime Safety Agency of PRC confirmed that both fishing vessels had been involved in illegal towing in this incident.
- 2.2 According to the operating condition of the dredger as stipulated in vessel's certificate, it was permitted only to operate in Class B areas, i.e. areas within inland river. The dredger was not permitted to go to sea areas of Hong Kong. The fitness of the dredger in engaging in a passage through unsheltered sea areas was in doubt.
- 2.3 The dredger was assessed to be in a stable condition and the stability of the dredger should be adequate at departure. On the date of the incident, prevailing wind and waves from the north-easterly direction were reported. The area near Ninepin Islands is exposed to the east as there is no island that can provide sheltering to vessels from wind and waves that approach from the east. The dredger when passing that area was therefore more susceptible to easterly wind and waves.

2.4 The investigation identified three possibilities which might have caused the dredger to capsize. These possibilities are:

- a. shifting of deck crane;
- b. collision with underwater object and subsequent flooding; or
- c. progressive flooding due to heavy seas shipped on deck entering the inside of the dredger.

However, due to scarce information and lack of corroborative evidence, which of these possibilities had actually contributed to the capsizing of the dredger cannot be ascertained.

3. The Lessons

3.1 The investigation revealed that the two crewmembers on board the dredger did not appear to have been monitoring the general safety of the vessel during the towing voyage. Both crewmembers were sleeping in the accommodation prior to the accident. Under such circumstance they would not be able to detect any abnormality at an earlier stage. When the dredger developed a dangerous situation, the crewmembers were taken by surprise and did not have time to respond or to get hold of any life-saving appliances, which had led to the lost of one crewmember.



Fig. 1 Location of accident