1. The incident

1.1 On 3 April 2012, a Hong Kong registered general cargo/log carrier New Lucky VII (the vessel), fully laden with logs cargo inside cargo holds and on deck, encountered gusty wind of over 60 knots together with boisterous seas at the Sea West of islands of Okinawa and Amami Oshima, Japan when she was en-route from New Guinea to Jingjiang, China.

1.2 At about 0730LT, the severe weather caused the vessel to heel heavily to port side and it capsized within 20 minutes. Subsequently, she sank at position 28°15.753’N 128°06.834’E, about 55 nautical miles west of Amami Oshima.

1.3 All of the 17 crewmembers on board the vessel fell into the sea. 11 of them were eventually rescued by the Japanese Coast Guard on 5 April 2012. However, the remaining six crewmembers are still missing.

1.4 The investigation into the accident revealed the following main contributing factors:

a) The vessel encountered a gusty wind of over 60 knots in boisterous seas;

b) The master of the vessel had not ensured his vessel’s level of stability was sufficient before proceeding to the sea;

c) The master of the vessel had not ensured that all lifesaving appliances on board were in working order and/or ready for immediate use before the voyage; and

d) The shore management company could not be contacted by the master in emergency and the safety alertness of the shore management was low (there was no immediate effective actions taken to ensure the safety and whereabouts of the vessel after losing regular contact with her). The search and rescue operation was therefore delayed.

2. Lessons learnt

2.1 Procedures for safe operation of ships should be effectively implemented;

2.2 Stability of vessel should meet the statutory requirements at all times;

2.3 Voyage planning should take into account all relevant requirements stipulated in
SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 34 - Safe navigation and avoidance of dangerous situations;

2.4 Operational readiness of all lifesaving appliances on board should comply with SOLAS Chapter III Regulation 20.2;

2.5 Emergency preparedness in dealing with emergency situations of all responsible officers on board and management staff ashore should meet the relevant requirements stipulated in Section 8 in Part A of the ISM Code; and

2.6 Vessels carrying stowed logs on deck should be equipped with sufficient additional buoyancy so as to avoid overloading and loss of stability at sea due to the increased weight of the timber deck cargo.