Fatal man overboard accident on the Hong Kong registered bulk carrier “SUNNY HORIZON” in position 21°29.8’N 123°17.0’E on 11 August 2017

1. The incident

1.1 At about 1505 hours on 11 August 2017, an accident of man overboard happened on board the Hong Kong registered bulk carrier “SUNNY HORIZON” (the vessel) during her voyage from Ningde, China to Surigao, the Philippines. The carpenter fell into the sea and disappeared afterwards at about 140 nautical miles east of Taiwan (21°29.8’N 123°17.0’E).

1.2 Upon completion of cargo cleansing for No. 2 cargo hold, an able bodied seaman and an ordinary seaman assisted in closing hatch covers. At the same time, the bosun operated No. 2 crane to place the crane hook back to its designated stowage position. To assist the operation of the bosun, the carpenter held a rope tied to the crane hook of the crane and stood by the shipside handrail on the port main deck. The crane hook swung heavily due to rolling of the vessel and the carpenter tried to stop the hook swinging by fastening the rope to the handrail nearby. However, the carpenter was tangled with the rope which pulled him overboard. Search and rescue operation lasted for 53 hours and the carpenter still went missing. The vessel continued her voyage to the Philippines afterwards.

1.3 The investigation revealed that heavy swinging of the crane hook caused by the rolling of the vessel was the main contributory factor to the accident. The investigation also identified that the carpenter was probably a lack of situation awareness and failed to keep his body clear from the rope. The investigation also revealed that the lifting operation carried out on open deck under bad weather condition had not been properly considered and planned in advance.
2. Lessons learnt

2.1 Lifting operation should be avoided under adverse weather. If the lifting operation is unavoidable, a full risk assessment should be conducted before the operation. The risk assessment should include the factors such as the weather and sea conditions, measures of downgrading the risk level of the lifting operation and measures to be taken to avoid dangerous swinging of the crane hook and/or the lifting object.

2.2 The training for the crew to follow “Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen” in lifting operations should be enhanced.