1. The incident

1.1 On 9 October 2017, a Hong Kong registered bulk carrier, “Emerald Star” (the vessel) with 26 Indian crew including the master, was fully loaded with 55,000 metric tonnes of nickel ore in Buli, East Halmahera of Indonesia and departed to Lianyungang, China. The weather was fine at that time. The cargo in cargo holds was inspected and found normal on 11 October 2017.

1.2 However, at about 1530 hours on 12 October 2017, the vessel was close to the centre of a tropical depression (TD) with a distance about 21 nautical miles. At around 1700 hours, the TD was upgraded to a tropical storm and was named as “KHANUN” with maximum wind force 8.

1.3 At about 2230 hours, the vessel started rolling heavily. At 0055 hours on 13 October 2017, the vessel listed to port at an angle of about 5°. The vessel continued worsening to port side. Finally, at about 0140 hours, she capsized and sank at approximate position 19°03’N, 124°52’E. Sixteen crew were rescued by two vessels in the vicinity. When the search and rescue operation stood down on 18 October 2017, ten crew including the master were still missing.

2. Lessons learnt

2.1 The management company should review and enhance the safety management system for loading bulk cargo which may liquefy, in particular the following aspects, so as to ensure that the masters of their ships will follow strictly:

a) the requirements of IMSBC Code;

b) all relevant shipboard procedures for safe handling of cargo and avoiding adverse weather;

c) the requirement of delivery of a new moisture content certificate by shipper if there is significant rain or snow during loading of bulk cargo;

d) the instruction for immediate actions including abandon ship, when the stability is endangered by cargo liquefaction; and

e) the requirement of monitoring the weather and sea conditions by all available equipment on board so as to verify the collected data and seeking shelter to avoid encountering any adverse weather.