



Bundesstelle für Seeunfalluntersuchung Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation

Federal Higher Authority subordinated to the Ministry of
Transport and Digital Infrastructure

Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation • P.O. Box 30 12 20 • 20305 Hamburg

Office Building

Bernhard-Nocht-Str. 78
20359 Hamburg
Tel.: + 49 (0) 40 31 90 – 83 11
Fax: + 49 (0) 40 31 90 – 83 40
posteingang-bsu@bsh.de
<http://www.bsu-bund.de>

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+ 49 40 31 90 – 83 21

email: posteingang-bsu@bsh.de

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The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) published the summary investigation report No 20/17 on 6 November 2019. The report deals with the failure of the main engine of the bulk carrier CAPE LEONIDAS and the thus necessary emergency anchoring manoeuvre on 17 January 2017.

This report is available on

https://www.bsu-bund.de/EN/Publications/Publications_node.html

for download.

Incident – Failure of the main engine and subsequent emergency anchoring maneuver of the bulk carrier CAPE LEONIDAS on the river Elbe.

From around 0330 CET onwards on 17 January 2017, the bulk carrier CAPE LEONIDAS, sailing of the river Elbe heading to Hamburg, experienced problems with the main engine. At about 0414, the main engine finally failed. The ship, sailing with about 12 knots at that time, inevitably lost speed gradually afterwards but could easily be steered for a longer period even without propulsion. At about 0501, CAPE LEONIDAS's speed had slowed down to approximately 4 knots. Since the steerability deteriorated significantly, an emergency anchoring manoeuvre was now unavoidable. Accordingly, the starboard anchor was dropped and the entire chain length deployed at 0507.

In the ensuing hours, the ship's pilot, acting extremely prudent, managed to shift the ship towards the south to a deeper position in the Elbe in a distance of about 0,8 nm with the assistance of six tugs ordered to proceed to the distressed ship, in order to anchor and wait for the next high tide. Thus, an imminent grounding could be avoided. On the emergency anchoring position, the ship's crew was able to make the main engine ready for operation again. After the onset of the high tide in the late afternoon, the CAPE LEONIDAS was thus able to head towards her designated berth in the port of Hamburg with precautionary tug assistance.

There was growing evidence in the preliminary investigation, suggesting that the changeover of the fuel supply to low Sulphur fuel, stipulated for entering a Sulphur Emission Control Area in the North Sea, two days before the engine failure led to problems of the fuel supply system. The BSU commissioned an external expert in order to examine this more closely and identify a possible connection with the subsequent engine failure. His very informative expertise, referring – inter alia – to laboratory examinations of the fuels used and a defective injection nozzle, conformed the aforementioned connection.

The investigation into the engine failure on board the CAPE LEONIDAS has once more confirmed the fundamental insight that technical measures relating to the operation and/or design of ships, which contribute to enhancing environmental protection and are the result of relevant international agreements and regulations, lead to new risks in terms of safe ship operation which in turn can result in major hazards for ship crews and the environment. This means it is all the more important that the specific and any possible new risks arising from the introduction of new technologies, as well as any associated precautionary measures requiring consideration, be given the requisite attention when organizing the safe operation of ships and, in particular, when educating and training seamen.

All investigation reports, safety recommendations and other information published by the BSU are available on

<https://www.bsu-bund.de/EN/Publications>.

Ulf Kaspera
Director