



Bundesstelle für Seeunfalluntersuchung
Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation

Investigation Report 301/21

Very Serious Marine Casualty

Foundering of the fishing vessel RAMONA in the mouth of the River Elbe on 21 September 2021

20 December 2022

This investigation was conducted in conformity with the Law to improve safety of shipping by investigating marine casualties and other incidents (Maritime Safety Investigation Law – SUG). According to said Law, the sole objective of this investigation is to prevent future accidents. This investigation does not serve to ascertain fault, liability or claims (Article 9(2) SUG).

This report should not be used in court proceedings or proceedings of the Maritime Board. Reference is made to Article 34(4) SUG.

The German text shall prevail in the interpretation of this investigation report.

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Table of Acronyms Used

AIS	Automatic identification system
BG Verkehr	German Social Accident Insurance Institution for Commercial Transport, Postal Logistics and Telecommunication
BSH	Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency
DGzRS	German Maritime Search and Rescue Association
FV	Fishing vessel
MRCC	Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre
SK	Rescue cruiser
SOLAS	International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea
UTC	Universal time coordinated
VDR	Voyage data recorder
VTS	Vessel traffic service
WSA	Federal Waterways and Shipping Office
WSP	Waterway police

1 SUMMARY

At about 0530¹ on 21 September 2021, the German-flagged fishing vessel RAMONA set sail from Cuxhaven for the Heligoland Bight. There were five people on board: two crew members and three scientists from the Thünen Institute of Sea Fisheries Bremerhaven.

At about 0900, the skipper noticed that planks in the fore section were coming loose and the vessel was making water. The water ingress was so heavy that the skipper made a distress call at 0921 and instructed everyone to put on their survival suit and climb into the liferaft carried on the vessel, which had been activated in the meantime.

The fishing vessel HOFFNUNG took everyone on board a short time later. The DGzRS rescue cruiser ANNELIESE KRAMER attempted to deploy bilge pumps. However, the RAMONA took on water too quickly and foundered at 1026.

The vessel was to be raised in the days that followed. However, since the tide was causing the wreck to move constantly on the seabed, the hull disintegrated so quickly that on 19 October 2021, WSA Elbe-Nordsee in Cuxhaven decided not to salvage the vessel.

This makes an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) – which it has a statutory duty to carry out in this case – far more complicated. The BSU's enquiries and interviews were ultimately unable to clarify the cause of this marine casualty.

¹ All times shown in this report are CEST (UTC + 2 hours).

2 FACTUAL INFORMATION

2.1 Photograph of the Fishing Vessel RAMONA



Figure 1: RAMONA already in the process of foundering.²

2.2 Ship particulars: Fishing vessel RAMONA

Name of ship:	RAMONA
Type of ship:	Fishing vessel
Flag:	Germany
Port of registry:	Cuxhaven
Fisheries code:	CUX9
Call sign:	DFNZ
Year built:	1961
Shipyard:	Hans Dodegge in Neuhaus an der Oste
Length overall:	15.05 m
Breadth overall:	5.00 m
Draught (max.):	1.90 m
Gross tonnage:	33
Engine rating:	147 kW
Main engine:	Caterpillar
(Service) Speed:	8 kts
Hull material:	Timber
Minimum safe manning:	2

² Source: DGzRS.

2.3 Voyage particulars: Fishing vessel RAMONA

Port of departure: Cuxhaven, Germany
 Planned port of call: Cuxhaven, Germany
 Type of voyage: Coastal fishing and research
 Draught at time of accident: n/a
 Manning: 2
 Fellow passengers: 3

2.4 Marine casualty or incident information

Type of marine casualty: Very serious marine casualty;
 vessel foundered due to water ingress
 Date/Time: The skipper reports water ingress to the VTS at about
 0921 on 21 September 2021
 The vessel has foundered by about 1026 on
 21 September 2021
 Location: Northern light buoy 8 Großer Vogelsand
 Latitude/Longitude: ϕ 54°01.3'N λ 008°26.3'E (position at which the
 vessel foundered)
 Ship operation and voyage segment: Sailing (interruption of fishing operations)
 Place on board: Bow
 Consequences: Fishing vessel foundered; nobody suffered injuries;
 water pollution due to escaping operating fluids
 (mainly diesel)

Extract from Navigational Chart DE103 (INT 1412), BSH

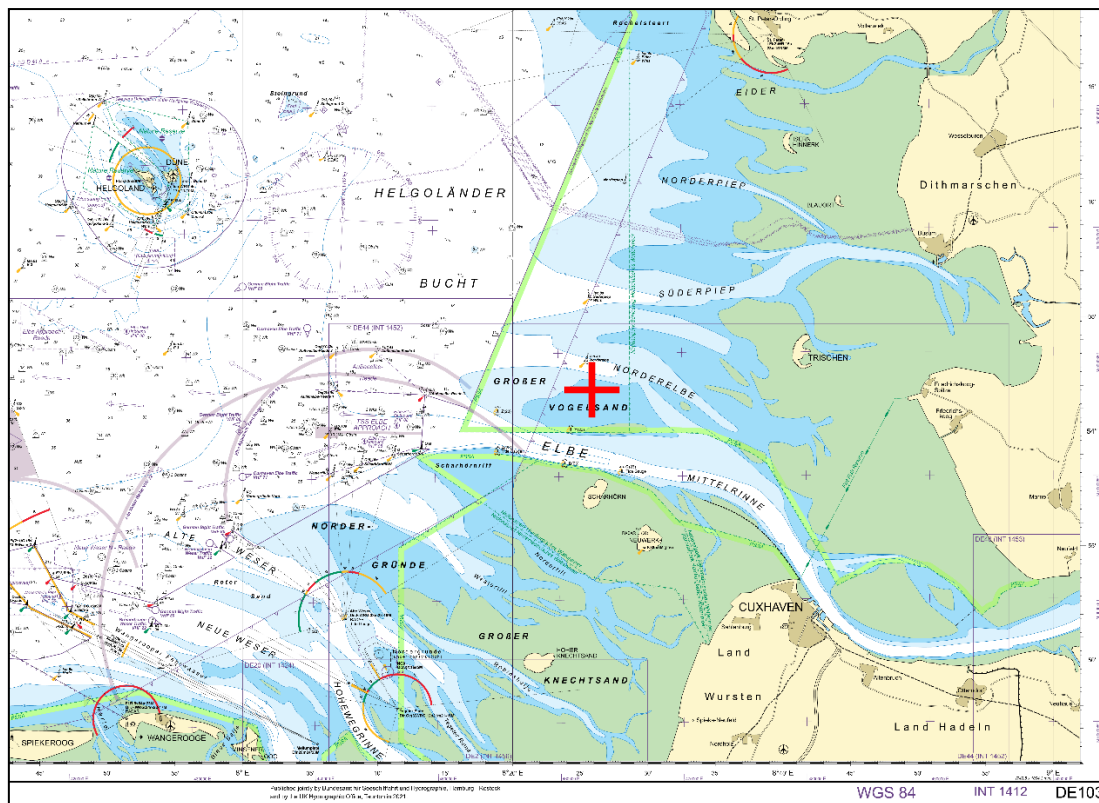


Figure 2: Scene of the accident

2.5 Shore authority involvement and emergency response

Agencies involved: MRCC Bremen, DGzRS, WSP Hamburg, VTS Cuxhaven, WSA Elbe-Nordsee, FV HOFFNUNG

Resources used: SK ANNELIESE KRAMER, WSP boat SYLT, sounding vessel VOGELSAND, FV HOFFNUNG

Actions taken: All five people rescued from the liferaft by the crew of the FV HOFFNUNG; publication of a temporary notice to mariners by WSA Elbe-Nordsee for the purpose of warning shipping of the dangers posed by the wreck of the fishing vessel

3 COURSE OF THE ACCIDENT AND INVESTIGATION

3.1 Course of the accident

At about 0530 on 21 September 2021, the German-flagged fishing vessel RAMONA set sail from Cuxhaven for the Heligoland Bight. There were five people on board: two crew members and three scientists from the Thünen Institute of Sea Fisheries Bremerhaven. Since the swell was continuously increasing, everyone on board decided to sail back so as to make further hauls³ in calmer waters for scientific evaluation.

At about 0900, the skipper noticed that planks in the fore section were coming loose and the vessel was making water. The water ingress was so heavy that the skipper made a distress call at 0921 and instructed everyone to put on their survival suit and climb into the liferaft carried on the vessel, which had been activated in the meantime.

Shortly afterwards, everyone was taken on board and transported to Cuxhaven by the fishing vessel HOFFNUNG, which was the first to arrive at the accident position. The DGzRS rescue cruiser ANNELIESE KRAMER, which had also reached the scene of the accident in the meantime, attempted to deploy bilge pumps but the RAMONA took on water too quickly and foundered at 1026 in a water depth of about 7 m.

The vessel was to be raised in the days that followed. A salvage order was issued against the owner. However, since the tide was causing the wreck to move constantly on the seabed, the hull disintegrated so quickly that on 19 October 2021, WSA Elbe-Nordsee in Cuxhaven decided not to salvage the vessel.

³ In German today colloquial for: to bring a filled trawl net on board.

3.2 Investigation

3.2.1 Course of the voyage

Figure 3 shows the protruding planks on the bow of the RAMONA. The image is unfortunately not available in better quality but the BSU is nonetheless grateful to the crew of the rescue cruiser ANNELIESE KRAMER for having the presence of mind to take photographs during this emergency. Accordingly, pointers as to the cause of the accident were at least available for the investigation.



Figure 3: Loose planks at the bow of the RAMONA⁴

Figure 4 below shows the course of the vessel's voyage recorded by the MarineTraffic AIS portal. The voyage begins at about 0530 in the morning with the departure from the port of Cuxhaven and ends with the last AIS signal at 1008. The rescue cruiser

⁴ Source: DGzRS.

ANNELIESE KRAMER confirmed that the FV RAMONA had completely foundered by 1026.



Figure 4: Course of the RAMONA's voyage and scene of the accident⁵

The BSU was informed about the foundering of the fishing vessel RAMONA on 21 September 2021. The investigation team approached the skipper shortly afterwards and also contacted the agencies involved in crisis management to find out about the accident and subsequent emergency measures. The investigation team sighted the vessel's file at the Ship Safety Division (BG Verkehr) for information on the fishing vessel's technical condition, survey results in this respect and current certificates. The BSU also contacted the engineering firm instructed to organise and carry out the salvage to obtain information on the progress of related activities.

3.2.2 Witness statements/enquiries into the cause of the damage

None of the five people on board the fishing vessel was able to explain how the damage to the bow occurred. In particular, no collision with a buoy or other floating object such as a partially submerged container was observed. The recorded AIS track confirms there was no encounter with a buoy. WSA Elbe-Nordsee stated that there was reportedly no knowledge of any floating containers at the time of the accident.

⁵ Source: www.marinetraffic.com.

An allision with the pier when the vessel was casting off in Cuxhaven was also denied. To substantiate this statement, the WSP inspected the pier on behalf of the BSU and found no damage or even traces of paint that could have indicated that the RAMONA had an allision with the pier.

3.2.3 Last call at a shipyard

The files of the Ship Safety Division (BG Verkehr) show that the last survey of the RAMONA took place during a call at a shipyard prior to the accident on 6 June 2019. No deficiencies were found. *Inter alia*, the shipyard repaired the aft section of the wooden hull.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Due to the total loss of the fishing vessel, the BSU was unable to determine the cause of the damage that occurred. It appears likely that there must have been a barely noticeable collision with an obstacle in the water, which caused the planks on the bow to loosen, followed by rapid and heavy water ingress. It seems rather improbable that the RAMONA struck an obstacle while casting off in Cuxhaven such that she remained afloat for another three hours with the unnoticed damage. However, it is possible that a minor allision occurred when she cast off, causing the planks at the bow to loosen almost unnoticeably and then continue to loosen more and more over the hours that followed due to the swell, until the water ingress became so heavy that it was noticeable.

Despite the fortuitous reality that the DGzRS took photographs of the distressed fishing vessel, the one photograph that actually shows the damage on the bow is so blurred that it is impossible to draw any conclusions from it. Inconspicuous flecks of a different colour can be seen on the loose planks, which look like minor damage and paint abrasions and could thus point to an allision. However, these flecks of colour may have been caused by other influences that are not connected with the accident under investigation. Since evidence of either possibility could not be found, the cause of the accident must ultimately remain open due to the lack of other findings.

The conduct of the skipper, who calmly and prudently took the right action when he noticed that the RAMONA had suffered water ingress that he could no longer compensate for with on-board resources, should be emphasised. It is thanks to his prudent decisions that nobody suffered any injuries.

In summary, the BSU sees no reason to issue safety recommendations.

5 SOURCES

- Enquiries of the waterway police (WSP)
- Written statements by the ship's command
- Witness testimony
- Navigational charts and ship particulars, Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency (BSH)
- Information from WSA Elbe-Nordsee
- Documentation (ship files) from the Ship Safety Division
- AIS recordings from www.marinetraffic.com