

Investigation Report No. 402/15

Date: 26 April 2017

Very Serious marine casualty

Fatal accident on board the charter yacht DESDEMONA on 21 September 2015 in the area of the approach to Rostock-Warnemünde between fairway buoys 9 and 11

1 Summary

An accident with subsequent loss of life occurred on the German-flagged sailing yacht DESDEMONA while en route from Gedser to Rostock-Warnemünde on 21 September 2015.

The DESDEMONA is a charter yacht and her port of registry is Lübeck. The four-person crew had chartered the yacht for the period 19–25 September 2015 for a sailing trip on the Baltic Sea.

On the day of the accident, the DESDEMONA sailed out of the Danish port of Gedser at about 1000 under engine power and then proceeded toward Rostock under sail in wind forces of 4–5 Bft.

She passed the Rostock approach shortly before 1300 and then continued close to the green buoy line of the Warnemünde navigational channel outside the fairway. A decision was made on board to strike the sails while in harbour mode and sail into Warnemünde under engine power.

At about 1330, a crew member who wanted to assist with taking in the sails suddenly fell overboard between fairway buoys 9 and 11. In all likelihood, the fall was due to a violent movement of the yacht caused by a swell. Despite the rescue effort immediately initiated by the other three crew members, it was not possible to haul the casualty back on board. Similar to the remaining crew members, the casualty was neither wearing a lifejacket nor was he secured by a line.

The casualty lost consciousness shortly after falling into the water and drowned in the Baltic Sea. The emergency services were alerted at about 1345. They arrived at the scene only a few minutes later but were unable to find the sailor.

On 1 October 2015, the body of the sailor was found drifting lifeless in the Baltic Sea some four nautical miles north-east of the scene of the accident by an operational vessel of the German Navy and recovered by the crew of the summoned WSP boat WARNOW.

2 Safety Recommendation(s)

The following safety recommendations do not attribute a presumption of blame or liability in respect of type, number or sequence.

Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (BMVI)

2.1 Statutory requirement to carry lifejackets

The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation recommends that the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (BMVI) examine the legal options for extending the legal requirement to carry lifejackets to all seagoing pleasure craft, i.e. regardless of classification as a charter boat.

2.2 Statutory requirement to use lifejackets

The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation recommends that the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (BMVI) examine the legal options for introducing a requirement to use lifejackets on seagoing pleasure craft.