

1. SUMMARY

(All times in the Report are GMT except where otherwise noted)

MFV WILHELMINA J, a 26 metre United Kingdom registered beam trawler, left Portsmouth on the 9 April 1991 to trawl for scallops in the English Channel in the vicinity of fishing grounds known as Horseshoe Bank. She had a crew of six. At approximately 0200 hrs on 10 April WILHELMINA J was in collision, in thick fog, with MV ZULFIKAR, a 142 metre 8714 gross tons Cyprus registered cargo ship. The vessel was on a passage from Eemshaven (Germany) to Port Said (Egypt). The collision happened about three miles west of the termination of the southwest bound lane of the Dover Strait Traffic Separation Scheme.

At 0345 hrs, on the advice of his Sub-Managers, the Master of ZULFIKAR reported the collision to HM Coastguard. An extensive search operation was mounted involving fishing vessels, merchant ships, warships, two RNLI lifeboats and a Coastguard rescue helicopter. Two empty life-rafts, lifebuoys and flotsam from WILHELMINA J were found. An Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon was also picked up but it had not transmitted. A new wreck was detected on the seabed, which was later identified as that of WILHELMINA J. The search was finally terminated at 1200 hrs on 11 April. No survivors or bodies had been found.

On 2 July the wreck of WILHELMINA J was raised so that a search for bodies and an inspection of the wreck could be made. The bodies of the Skipper and the Engineer were found inside the wreck, but the bodies of the other four crew members have not been found. The wreck of WILHELMINA J was returned to the seabed.

The proximate cause of the collision was a failure by ZULFIKAR and a possible failure by WILHELMINA J, to obtain early radar warning of the risk of collision and take avoiding action. ZULFIKAR was not keeping a proper radar lookout and made an incorrect assumption on the basis of scanty radar information.