

PILOTAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Ref. : HQ/COM 928/19/1

Notes of Working Group Meeting

Date : 20 January 2010 (Wednesday)
Place : Conference Room A, 24/F, Harbour Building
Time : 10:00 a.m.

Present

Chairman: Mr. Raymond CHUNG	GM/VTS, Marine Department (MD)
Member: Capt. CHAN Lok-ching	HK Shipowners Association
Mr. Peter YIM	HK Liner Shipping Association (HKLSA)
Ms. Gloria CHOY	Containers Terminal Operators
Mr. CHENG Siu-lun	Oil Terminal Operators
Mr. NG Ming-fai	Dockyard Industry
Mr. Phileas FONG	Tug Operators
Capt. WU Kou-qing	Master Mariner
<i>(on behalf of Capt. LAM Wing-shing)</i>	
Capt. CHEN Yu-chi	HK Pilots Association (HKPA)
Mr. SIU Wai-lim	- ditto -
Secretary: Mr. John LEUNG	ADS/C&G, MD

In Attendance

Mr. NG Kin-man	Master Mariner
Capt. WU Ka-shun	South China Towing Co. Ltd.
Mr. Tom CHENG	SMO/PL, MD
Mr. YEUNG Kin-fuk	SASM/ANM, MD
Mr. NG Wing-hong	SSO/MISS, MD
Mr. HO Wing-hong	SS/MAI, MD
Mr. TANG Kwong-fai	S/MAI(3), MD
Mr. WONG Chan-kwong	MO/VTC(2), MD
Mr. Andrew NG	MO/Pilotage, MD

Absent with Apologies

Capt. David WATKINS
Mr. Edward CHIU

Master Mariner
Dry Bulk Cargo Operators

Opening Remarks

1. The Chairman welcomed all present. He said that this meeting was called to follow up on two items raised at the last PAC meeting held on 15.10.2009 (PACWG Paper No. 1/2010 and No. 2/2010) and to discuss a couple of new issues which occurred recently (PACWG Paper No. 3/2010 and No. 4/2010).

Discussion Items

PACWG Paper No. 1/2010 – “Government Mooring Buoy (GMB) Mooring Arrangement”

2. Mr. Andrew NG presented the paper to members in detail. The Chairman invited members to refer to the operation guidelines provided by a shipping company attached to the paper. Mr. SIU Wai-lim said that there had been a number of accidents related to mooring/unmooring operations since 2005. On average, 8 staff had injured in these accidents per year including a fatal one in 2007. He said that the coroner’s report of the fatal accident recommended that a vessel should be standstill during any mooring/unmooring operations. He pointed out that accidents could not be avoided even if the vessel was standstill as swell generated by passing vessels and small boats was uncontrollable by the mooring crew. He explained that for vessels over 140m, 3 mooring crews would be required to work together onboard the buoy because of the weight of the shackle.
3. Mr. TANG Kwong-fai said that the Marine Accident Investigation Section of MD had only made one more assessment related to mooring/unmooring

operation since the fatal accident in 2007. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi said that the relatively minor accidents had not been reported to MD but HKPA was keeping the records.

4. Mr. NG Wing-hong said that the mooring/unmooring operations included carrying and holding heavy objects and working on an unsteady surface. He opined that from the occupational safety and health's angle, the operations were prone to risk.
5. Mr. Tom CHENG said that the mooring operation in Hong Kong was single point mooring using anchor chain. He also said that from his research and contacts with the buoy component manufacturers, there were no suitable quick release components for the moment.
6. The Chairman suggested that relevant parties should study the mooring/unmooring operation in practice and discuss with HKPA to come up with short and long term solutions.
7. Mr. SIU Wai-lim said that from past experience, many accidents were caused by swell generated by vessels travelling at high speed, and HKPA had pinpointed certain locations which were more prone to accidents. He suggested that more advanced mooring buoys and components such as mooring cables, slip rope, etc. should be considered to replace the existing ones.
8. Mr. NG Kin-man said that a feasible solution might take a long time to come up with, and therefore measures to improve the procedures should be explored for more urgent needs. Capt. CHAN Lok-ching noted that the use of safety belt was not mentioned in the operation guidelines, and asked if safety belt could be used to prevent accidents. Capt. WU Ka-shun opined that there was scope for improvement for the procedures, the guidelines and the design of the buoys, and it would be useful if a site visit should be arranged as soon as possible so that interested parties could have a better understanding of the mooring/unmooring

operation.

9. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi said that the most recent accident was caused by swell generated by a passing-by ferry travelling at high speed. He asked how MD would follow up if vessels still travelled at high speed after MD had appealed for slowing down when there were mooring operations. Mr. Andrew NG said that MD had warned the master of the high-speed ferry concerned and his company's management, and reminded them to exercise due care in future. The Chairman replied that HKPA should report this kind of incidents to MD immediately for follow-up actions. MD would also advise local vessel operators in the coming safety seminar to give a wide berth and proceed at slow speed when mooring operation was taking place on GMB. Mr. NG Kin-man declared that he was working for a high speed ferry company, and said that it would be difficult to take actions against a vessel which did not slow down if it was travelling within statutory limit. Capt. CHEN asked if the speed limit could be further reduced. The Chairman replied that reducing the speed limit in the harbour would impact on all users of the harbour. He suggested that relevant parties should further discuss this if it was considered to be a justifiable measure.

10. After discussion, the meeting agreed that a site visit should be arranged for the relevant sections of MD and interested parties to observe the buoy mooring operation. After the site visit, HKPA and relevant sections of MD should further discuss the issue and make recommendations to PAC.

(MD officers from the Aids and Navigation and Mooring Unit, the Marine Industrial Safety Section, and the Marine Accident Investigation Section left the meeting at this juncture.)

PACWG Paper No. 2/2010 – “Introduction of higher powered tugs to the Port of Hong Kong”

11. Mr. Phileas FONG briefed members on the background of the paper, and invited members to offer their views on the proposal to introduce higher powered tugs for berthing and unberthing VLCS. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi opined that increase in demand for higher-powered tugs would be inevitable in future with the increase in the size of vessels calling at Hong Kong port. He said that for safety reason, HKPA would support the proposal.

12. Mr. Peter YIM said that for safety reason, HKLSA would support the proposal too. However, members of HKLSA were concerned about the tug charges which would inevitably be increased. He pointed out that for Yantian, Chiwan and Shekou in Shenzhen, only one tug operator in Chiwan deployed high-powered tugs over 5,000 bhp, and users were charged on a lump sum basis regardless the number or power of tugs used. Mr. Phileas FONG said that for regulatory reason, the tug operators in Shenzhen ports would avoid building tugs over 4,000 bhp, and the average number of tugs deployed in Hong Kong was actually less than that in Shenzhen.

13. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi said that if tugs over 5,000 bhp were introduced, they would only be deployed for vessels with heavy loading, and the berthing guidelines (BGL) would be amended accordingly. Mr. Peter YIM said that any proposed amendments to the BGL as a result of the introduction of high-powered tugs should be discussed at PAC. He also said that some VLCS were equipped with high power thrusters which should be taken into account when reviewing the BGL. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi confirmed that HKLSA would be consulted before any high-powered tugs were introduced. In reply to Mr. SIU Wai-lim, Mr. Phileas FONG said that the designed pulling power of the proposed high-powered tugs would be 65 tonnes and the average speed would be around 13 to 13.5 knots.

14. The Chairman concluded that the meeting supported the introduction of high-powered tugs for safety reasons, and agreed that discussion and agreement should be reached between HKPA and HKLSA before any amendments to BGL were made.

PACWG Paper No. 3/2010 – “Additional Requirements Imposed by Pilots”

15. Mr. Andrew NG presented the paper to members and described the two incidents in details. The Chairman said that paragraph 2 of Chapter 2 General Remarks of the BGL (Annex II to the paper) allowed HKPA some flexibility to deviate from the guidelines under abnormal or urgent conditions. He invited members to offer their comments on the issue.

16. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi pointed out that both incidents were actually complaints submitted to MD, and both complaints involved the same shipping agent.

17. Mr. Phileas FONG opined that extra tugs might be required under abnormal conditions and the flexibility provided in the existing guidelines was necessary. Capt. WU Ka-shun agreed that the guidelines were in order. However, there might be scope for improvement for communication between HKPA and the ship owner or the agent. He suggested that HKPA should inform the ship owner of the deviation from the BGL and its reasons in advance, and the ship owner could be required to sign an agreement. Capt. CHAN Lok-ching opined that both incidents were caused by communication problems. He agreed that sufficient information provided to the ship owner or the agent in advance should be able to avoid any dispute in future.

18. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi said that in both cases the ship owners had been informed in advance. He reiterated that the employment of additional tug was generally made in accordance with the prevailing circumstances and the safety of the ship was always the principal consideration. Mr. SIU Wai-lim said that the normal practice was that the pilot would discuss with the ship master if additional tugs

were required and additional tugs would only be ordered with mutual agreement by the pilot and the ship master. The Chairman suggested that HKPA should improve communication with the masters and shipping agents by providing them with more detailed information in the form of fax or email so that records could be kept.

19. After discussion, the meeting satisfied that paragraph 2 in Annex II to the paper was in order and no amendments would be necessary.

PACWG Paper No. 4/2010 – “Suspension of Ma Wan Night Transit for Bulker and Tanker”

20. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi briefed members on the background of the paper. He said that following the court ruling of the collision incident of “Yao Hai” and “N67” (“Yao Hai” case) on 15.1.2010, HKPA had announced suspension of Ma Wan night transit for bulker and tanker of any draft with LOA over 198m to 230m on the same day. He opined that two technical issues had arisen from the “Yao Hai” case. Firstly, it was noted that the tidal window at Ma Wan had not been observed strictly by the shipping companies. As a result, it was not uncommon that pilots were required to exercise flexibility to take some late arriving vessels through Ma Wan outside the tidal window. Secondly, the background lights from the buildings in Ma Wan had caused obstruction to the vision of eastbound vessels. He pointed out that the court had considered that part of waterway from Ma Wan west to Tap Shek Kok was a channel, while MD considered it an open water. He said that the transit would be resumed when the traffic management at Ma Wan had been improved.
21. In reply to Mr. Peter YIM, Capt. CHEN Yu-chi said that the suspension of night transit would start 30 minutes after sunset and end 30 minutes before sunrise.
22. The Chairman said that MD had received an email from HKPA on 15.1.2010 being informed of the new arrangement but without further information. He

pointed out that under paragraph 8 of the General Remarks in Chapter 2 of the BGL, the BGL were subject to change without notice. However, under normal condition and when it was not an emergency, any amendments to the BGL would be discussed and endorsed by PAC. He also pointed out that the transit of vessels up to 230m had been implemented since 2003. He said that some shipping companies were surprised by the arrangement and had contacted MD. He invited members to comment the arrangement.

23. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi agreed that the night transit of bulker and tanker up to 230m had been introduced since 2003. He pointed out that in the course of the collision trial, the court viewed part of the waterway North of Lantau as narrow channel which was different from MD. HKPA intended to propose measures earlier to avoid similar occurrence, but it was not possible to introduce the suspension right after the “Yao Hai” case as it was under legal proceedings at that time.
24. Capt. CHAN Lok-ching said that it would be unfair to other shipping companies if only some companies had not been following the tidal window guidelines. In the “Yao Hai” case, human error might be the main cause of the accident. The Chairman said that if a vessel had missed the tidal window, it could be directed to anchor. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi said that background lights only affected heavy loaded bulkers and tankers, but containers had higher sidelights so they were not affected.
26. Mr. Andrew NG proposed that if background lights were a critical factor in the issue concerned, tugs might be used to escort vessels until CP1. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi replied that the proposal would have to be studied further.
27. Capt CHAN Lok-ching said that the issue could be further discussed at the next PAC meeting, and meanwhile the service should be continued.

28. The Chairman concluded that the meeting had noted HKPA's reason for the temporary suspension and the views of the shipping industry. He asked if HKPA could resume the night transit until further discussion could be held at the next PAC meeting scheduled for 4 February 2010. Capt. CHEN Yu-chi said that it would not be acceptable to resume the transit before the issues he raised had been resolved.

Date of Next Meeting

29. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:30 p.m. The date of the next meeting would be announced in due course.