

## Incidents at sea

Departmental investigation  
into the collision between  
the Panamanian bulk carrier

ETERNAL WIND

and the fishing vessel

MELINA T

50 miles eastward of  
Point Cartwright on 5 April 1998



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# Summary

On the morning of 5 April 1998, the fishing vessel *Melina T* was proceeding on a westerly course at full speed, about 7½ knots, headed back to its base at Mooloolaba. One of the deckhands was on watch in the wheelhouse and the steering was in the automatic mode.

The Panamanian bulk carrier *Eternal Wind* was proceeding due north at 13 knots, on passage from Port Kembla to Niihama, Japan, with a cargo of coal. At 0800, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate took over the watch from the Mate, who had instructed the AB watchkeeper to take temperature and atmosphere readings of the cargo hold. The wind was from the south-east at force 5, which was generating a moderate to rough sea on a low swell, and the visibility was good.

At 0815, the two vessels collided, the bow planks of the fishing vessel being sprung by the impact, causing the fishing vessel to flood. *Eternal Wind* turned about to stand by *Melina T*, and took the four-man crew aboard when they had to abandon their vessel.

*Melina T* sank at 1027 and *Eternal Wind* diverted from its passage to land the four fishermen off Point Cartwright, where the men were disembarked to a water police launch. *Eternal Wind* then continued on its voyage to Japan.

The Master, officers and crew of *Eternal Wind* were interviewed when the vessel loaded at Hay point, Queensland on the subsequent voyage.

# Sources of Information

Skipper and deckhands, *Melina T*

Master, Mate, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate and watch ratings, *Eternal Wind*

Australian Customs Service, Port Kembla

Brisbane Radio, (Telstra)

Maritime Safety Authority of New Zealand

Sunshine Coast Water Police, Mooloolaba

## Acknowledgement

Photograph of Eternal Wind - World Marine Co. Ltd., Tokyo

Photograph of Melina T - D A Kellian

# Narrative

## Melina T

*Melina T* was a white painted, carvel built, wooden fishing vessel with an overall length of 20 m and a beam of 6.2 m. It had a single deckhouse, located forward, housing a wheelhouse and galley/messroom, the level of the former being three steps higher than the level of the latter. It also had a single mast, with one derrick, located at the after end of the deckhouse. Sleeping accommodation for four crewmembers was below the wheelhouse and forecastle, accessed from the wheelhouse.

Navigation equipment included a magnetic compass, autopilot, a 48-mile range JRC radar, GPS and a JRC navigation plotter. The steering wheel was located on the starboard side of the wheelhouse, a chair being provided for the helmsman.

The vessel was powered by twin 270 HP, 3406 caterpillar diesel engines, driving two propellers and providing a speed of eight knots.

Originally a Tasmanian fishing vessel, *Melina T* was bought by a New Zealand partnership and operated out of New Zealand. In August 1996, the vessel recrossed the Tasman Sea, entered with Customs at Brisbane and, still under New Zealand ownership, operated out of Mooloolaba for Fortuna Australia. The Skipper, a part owner of the vessel, continued to employ New Zealander deckhands. Documentation for a change to Australian registration, as a Class 3B fishing vessel under ownership of Fortuna Fishing P/L, Mooloolaba, was lodged with the Queensland Authorities on 19 March 1998.

The vessel operated as a long-liner, fishing for tuna and “broad-bill” swordfish, using a single line, up to 40 miles in length, with 1000 hooks on 13 m tracer lines. The line would be set in the evening, along a temperature gradient (where the fish congregate to feed) and marked with seven radio/light beacons, to assist location. The vessel would then be stopped and, with NUC lights exhibited, allowed to drift during the night. A lookout would be posted if the vessel was close to a shipping lane or in rough seas, otherwise all four crew members would sleep. The line would be hauled during the morning, extending into the early afternoon if the catch was good.

## The incident

*Melina T* sailed from Mooloolaba on Tuesday 31 March 1998. On board were the Skipper, two of the regular deckhands and a relief deckhand. The watchkeeping routine whilst cruising was for each one of them to stand a three hour watch, in rotation, and for a deckhand on watch to inform the Skipper whenever another vessel was sighted. The Skipper bunked down on the port side of the wheelhouse, so as to be instantly available.

The Skipper cruised for two days, seeking a likely area in which to set the line and an exploratory “half-line” was set on the Thursday evening. However, when they hauled the line on the Friday morning, it produced only one tuna and one “broad-bill” swordfish, so they set off again to continue the search.

On the Saturday morning, the Skipper discovered oil leaking from the crankshaft seal of one of the engines. Although the leak was not too heavy and he could have recycled the oil, because the fishing was poor, he decided to cut losses and head back to Mooloolaba, so as to be able to get a replacement seal before Easter. After making one or two radio telephone calls, he made contact with the company owner’s son, who agreed with his decision to return to port.

From the approximate position 25° 50′ South : 157° East, *Melina T* was set on a course of 265° for Mooloolaba at full speed, 7 – 8 knots. The Skipper stood the 1900 – 2200 watch that evening and the deckhands stood the night watches.

The relief deckhand was called at 0650 on the Sunday (5 April) morning and, after making himself a cup of tea in the galley, took over the watch at 0700. At this time the wind was from the south-east at 20-25 knots, the sea moderate with waves of 2m – 2½ m, the visibility was around 4 – 5 miles. No other vessels were in sight, the radar was switched off and the port side door of the wheelhouse was shut. He drank his tea and smoked a cigarette, then went to the engine room, to check the engines, after which he returned to the wheelhouse and sat in the helmsman’s seat.

The Skipper awoke shortly after the relief deckhand had returned to the wheelhouse and he lay where he was, talking to the deckhand, for about half an hour. He then got up, checked the navigation plotter and

had a quick look around, then went into the galley area, where he washed his face, before going to the engine room to check the engine oil and water levels and the refrigerator. His checks completed, he returned to the galley and put the kettle on to boil, to make tea.

The deckhand maintained his watch, alternating his attention between looking out for other ships and checking on the oil pressure and temperature gauges for the engines. *Melina T* was yawing through about 20°, but the GPS indicated the course made good as being 261° and the speed between 7½ and 8 knots. Some time after the Skipper had left the wheelhouse, the deckhand observed a northbound ship bearing about 60° on the port bow at a distance which he judged to be between 1½ and 2 miles.

The Skipper, having made tea, took a cup to the deckhand, then returned to the messroom, sat down to drink his own tea and to read a book. The deckhand followed the Skipper into the messroom, collected his “makings” and returned to the wheelhouse, where he sat in the chair and rolled a cigarette. Suddenly, he sensed a shadow on the port side and, looking up, saw the bow of a ship only metres off. He jumped up from the chair, switched to manual steering and put the wheel hard over to starboard. *Melina T* started to turn to starboard, but was picked up by the swell and the port bow made hard contact with the starboard side of the other vessel, about 40 m back from its bow.

Both the Skipper and the deckhand were thrown to the deck by the impact. The Skipper scrambled to his feet, went up into the wheelhouse and put the engines out of gear. The deckhand, lying on the deck, looked down into the bunk space to check on the other two deckhands, and saw daylight through the bow, the impact having sprung the planking from the stem post. The two off-watch deckhands were woken by collision, the one sleeping on the port side being thrown from his bunk; they both scrambled up into the wheelhouse.

The other vessel passed up the port side of *Melina T* and the fishing vessel was drawn back in towards the other vessel, near its stern, coming in contact with it a second time and being spun around through 360°. As soon as the other vessel had passed clear, the Skipper organised the deckhands to checking for damage and flooding, also to preparing the inflatable liferaft for launching. He then went to the engine room to start the bilge pumps and organised one of the deckhands to get the portable transfer pump operating.

With damage control under way, the Skipper called the other vessel on VHF channel 16 and received an immediate response and learned that the vessel was the *Eternal Wind*. He told them that *Melina T* was flooding, asked them to stand by and also to broadcast a MAYDAY message on his behalf.

Initially, the rate of flooding was not too fast, but the hull was well open at the stem and *Melina T* settled slowly by the bow, flooding the bunk space. The force of the impact had also sprung the planks from the bulkhead between the bunk space and the engine room and the engine room also started to flood. The Skipper and deckhands tried plugging the gaps at the sides of the bulkhead with rags, towels and clothing, but the securing nails, which were closer to the engine room side of the bulkhead, prevented this from being done effectively.

The skipper then called the ship again on VHF, to ascertain whether it had broadcast a MAYDAY message. Learning that it had not, he started to broadcast one himself on 2182 kHz, but then became aware of the ship, which by this time was headed back towards *Melina T*, broadcasting on VHF 16. The Brisbane Radio operator responded to the ship's message, so the Skipper made contact with Brisbane Radio himself and discussed the situation with the operator.

The pumps were unable to cope with the ingress of water and *Melina T* settled lower in the water as the engine room flooded. The Skipper concluded that they would have to abandon ship and informed both the ship and Brisbane Radio accordingly. He activated the seven fishing line radio beacons, lashed them together and set them adrift as a marker, then organised the deckhands to an orderly disembarkation into the inflatable liferaft. One of the deckhands collected the oars from the dinghy, to make rowing easier.

The ship did not close the liferaft, and the fishermen had to paddle the liferaft to the ship. When they arrived at the ship, the swell made it too dangerous for them to get close, so the Skipper called to those on deck to ask the Captain to make a lee. The ship then moved off, turned and came back, a pilot ladder rigged on the starboard quarter. Again the fishermen had to paddle towards the ship and, when they were close enough, one of the ship's crew threw them a lifebuoy and line, which were used to pull the liferaft alongside and to the bottom of the ladder. The fishermen then climbed the free hanging ladder to the deck, the skipper going up last. The ship's crew then retrieved the liferaft and three of the lifejackets.

The Skipper then asked to be taken to the bridge, where he contacted Brisbane Radio on VHF and informed the operator that he and his crew were all now safely aboard *Eternal Wind*. He then discussed with the ship's Captain where the best place would be to land the four men and they agreed upon a rendezvous with the Brisbane pilot launch off Point Cartwright

The ship remained standing by *Melina T* for about 30 minutes, then the Captain set course for Point Cartwright. The four fishermen watched the fishing vessel astern until it sank, at about 1026. Using the ship's VHF radio, the Skipper made contact with the water police at Mooloolaba and arranged a rendezvous with the police launch, which was used to take the four fishermen off *Eternal Wind*.

While on board *Eternal Wind*, the Skipper tried to ascertain why the vessel had collided with *Meline T* and was told that the fishing vessel was not seen until just before the collision.

## **Eternal Wind**

*Eternal Wind* is a Panamanian registered, 71,372 tonnes deadweight, seven hold bulk carrier, having an overall length of 224.89 m, a beam of 32.2 m, a moulded depth of 18.6 m and a summer load draught of 13.472 m. Delivered from the Namura Shipbuilding Yard at Imari, Japan in June 1997, the vessel is owned by Ganta Shipping S A of Panama and operated by World Marine Co Ltd of Tokyo under charter to Shinea Kaiun Kaisha Ltd of Tokyo.

Manned by a crew of 21 Filipinos, the vessel is powered by a single, 9033 kW 6 cylinder B&W diesel engine and has a service speed of 14 knots.

*Eternal Wind* sailed from Port Kembla, NSW, where it had loaded a cargo of coal for Niihama, Japan, at 1600 on 3 April 1998. The draught was 12.88 m forward and 13.28 m aft. The three Mates maintained the traditional 4 on, 8 off sea watches, with an AB assigned to each of the three watches, the ABs being assigned other, general duties during daylight hours.

At 0315 on 5 April, the vessel was 24 miles to the east of Point Lookout, east of Brisbane, proceeding on a course of 000° True and making good a speed of 13.3 knots. Although within radar range of the land and although one of the radars is always in use, the watchkeepers relied on the GPS navigator for positions, the

ship's position being plotted on the navigation chart every hour, on the hour.

The Mate took over the bridge watch at 0400 and, as the AB lookout was keen to study for a watchkeeping licence, he permitted the AB to plot the hourly positions on the chart and to write up the deck log. Sunrise that morning was at 0556. The Master visited the bridge at 0720 and, after a brief discussion with the Mate, left to go for breakfast in the saloon. No. 2 radar was being used throughout the watch, as a support to the visual lookout. In line with the on-board policy, No. 1 radar was switched on at 0745, so that that radar would be in operation for the next watch.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate and the 8-12 AB arrived on the bridge at 0750, in compliance with the Master's Standing Orders. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate, who had first gone to sea as an Ordinary Seaman in 1983, had obtained his 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate's licence in August 1993 and had joined *Eternal Wind*, his second ship as 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate, on 8 June 1997.

The AB received instructions from the Mate to check the cargo hold temperatures and atmospheres, so he returned to his cabin and changed into working gear.

At the watch hand-over, the Mate informed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate that the course being steered, in autopilot, was 000° True and pointed out two ships that were visible. One ship was about six points on the port bow, distance 13½ miles, going the same way at a greater speed than *Eternal Wind*, the other, a bulk carrier, was four points on the starboard bow at a distance of four miles and going south. The wind was from the south-east at force 5, the sea rough with a moderate swell and the sky was partly cloudy. There was quite a strong reflected glare on the sea, from the sun, forward of the starboard beam.

Before taking over the watch, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate checked for shipping using the No.1 radar, which had been set up on gyro stabilized, centred relative display and on the 24-mile range. He changed down to the 12-mile range, then back up to the 24-mile range, and just two targets were indicated on the screen, the two ships that had been pointed out to him by the Mate. He also checked the horizon, using binoculars, and saw no other vessels.

The 4-8 watch AB left the bridge at 0802, after writing up the deck log and the Mate left the bridge at 0805, to go to the saloon, shortly after which the southbound vessel passed abeam to starboard. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate

remained in the fore part of the wheelhouse and again checked for targets on the 12-mile range on the radar, adjusting the clutter control slightly; he observed only the one target, out on the starboard beam.

At 0810, after again scanning the horizon with binoculars, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate moved to behind the chart table, where he wrote down the position from the GPS navigator, in preparation for working out the compass error. He then moved to the cupboard on the port side of the wheelhouse and took the azimuth mirror from its box. Carrying the azimuth mirror, he walked across, behind the chart table, to the starboard side, then forward towards the starboard side wheelhouse door.

As he arrived at the door, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate saw a fishing vessel, just a few metres off the starboard bow, heading across the ship. He placed the azimuth mirror on the window ledge, ran to the steering console, switched to manual steering mode and put the wheel hard to port. *Eternal Wind* responded immediately but, after the heading had changed only about 15°, the fishing vessel collided with the ship abreast the after end of No.1 hatch.

The 8-12 watch AB was at the hold sampling points on the centre line between hatches 6 and 7 when he heard a scraping sound. He looked up and saw the mast of a small vessel passing very close to starboard, so he left off what he was doing and went to the bridge, where he took over at the wheel.

The Master, Mate and 1st Engineer were all seated in the saloon, the Mate having just started eating his breakfast, when there was a knock, followed by a scraping sound. The Master stood up and, looking through the starboard side window, saw a white mast pass close by. He moved quickly to the after window and saw a white fishing vessel right astern, headed directly at *Eternal Wind*, so he hurried to the bridge.

As soon as he arrived on the bridge, the Master asked the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate what had happened and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate informed him that the ship had hit a fishing vessel. The Master ordered “stand-by” on the engines, at a time recorded at 0817, then “stop” at 0818, immediately followed by “hard to starboard” to the helmsman and instructions to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate to plot the position. The position, provided by the GPS navigator, was 26° 20′S 153° 59′E.

While bringing *Eternal Wind* around to head back towards the fishing vessel, the Master called the fishing

vessel on VHF channel 16, but received no immediate response. However, after two or three minutes the fishing vessel called the ship and asked for assistance, saying that there were no injuries, but the vessel was taking water.

At 0835, the ship was contacted by Brisbane Radio. The Master informed the operator that *Eternal Wind* was manoeuvring to the fishing vessel *Melina T* and standing by to take off the crew. The operator asked to be kept informed.

*Eternal Wind* closed the fishing vessel, but the sea was too rough to contemplate sending away a lifeboat, so the Master stood off at a distance of about half a mile.

Shortly before 0900, the Skipper of the fishing vessel called on VHF 16 to say that they were abandoning the vessel and would paddle the liferaft towards the ship. Not wanting to risk the possibility of the fishing vessel drifting on to *Eternal Wind*, the Master did not manoeuvre towards the liferaft, but waited for the liferaft to come alongside. Also, he could see fishing buoys in the water and was concerned that nets might foul the propeller.

The Mate organised the deck crew to rig a pilot ladder and net on the port side, but when the liferaft eventually arrived close to the ship, the swell prevented it from coming alongside. The Master then manoeuvred the ship to provide a better lee and the deck crew transferred the pilot ladder to the starboard quarter. As the liferaft approached for the second time, the Mate threw them a lifebuoy attached to a heaving line and the deck crew used this to pull the liferaft to the bottom of the pilot ladder.

All four fishermen were safely on board at 0944 and then the deck crew retrieved the liferaft. The Mate escorted the Skipper to the bridge, where, after brief introductions, the Skipper used the VHF to contact Brisbane Radio, to inform the operator that he and his crew were safely aboard the ship.

The Master then discussed with the Skipper the best place for landing the four men and they agreed that a rendezvous with the Brisbane pilot launch off Point Cartwright was the best option. The Master then contacted the ship's owners, in Japan, who agreed to the deviation.

Course and full speed for Point Cartwright were set at 1015 and, at 1027, those on the bridge observed the

fishing vessel sink.

*Eternal Wind* anchored off Point Cartwright at 1400 and the four fishermen disembarked to a police launch at 1450, after which the Master was informed by the police that the ship was clear to continue its voyage to Japan.

The Master and the 4-8 and 8-12 watchkeepers were interviewed on 2 May 1998, when the vessel loaded at Hay Point, Queensland, during the subsequent voyage.



**Melina T**  
Hull concealed by swell



**Melina T**  
In reflected glare



**Melina T**  
Sprung stem

# Comment and Analysis

*Eternal Wind* and *Melina T* collided in daylight, when the visibility was good and when there was a person on watch on each vessel. The two vessels were crossing virtually at right angles, with *Eternal Wind*, having *Melina T* on the starboard bow, the give-way vessel.

## Reconstruction

Examination of *Eternal Wind's* course recorder chart indicates the recorder's clock was approximately three minutes slow on GMT, the time on which it was set.

From the GPS log, *Eternal Wind* was making good a course of  $359\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  at a speed of 13 knots, while according to the temporary deckhand, *Melina T* was making good a course of  $261^{\circ}$  at a speed of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  - 8 knots, which was also as indicated by GPS. From the course recorder chart, the only course alteration made by *Eternal Wind* between 0800 and the time of the collision was a rapid swing to port, commenced at  $0814\frac{1}{2}$ . The two vessels would therefore have been approaching each other on reasonably steady bearings, *Melina T* bearing  $027\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  from *Eternal Wind* and *Eternal Wind* bearing  $207\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  from *Melina T*.

The course recorder chart indicates that from 0800, *Eternal Wind's* heading varied between  $004^{\circ}$  and  $357^{\circ}$ , with an oscillation period varying between four and six minutes, however, the starboard swing that commenced at 0812 went to  $005^{\circ}$  at  $0813\frac{1}{2}$ . The vessel then swung slowly back to port to a heading of  $002\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  at  $0814\frac{1}{2}$ . Thus from the time that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate took over the watch at 0800 until he went behind the chart table at 0810, *Melina T* would have been between  $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  and  $30\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  on the starboard bow.

At 0800, at the hand-over of the watch, *Melina T* would have been at a distance of 4 miles from *Eternal Wind* and, at 0805, when the Mate left the bridge, the distance would have been 2.7 miles. At 0810, when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate moved to behind the chart table, *Melina T* would have been only 1.35 miles away.

The deckhand aboard *Melina T* stated that when he first observed *Eternal Wind* it was at a distance of between  $1\frac{1}{2}$  and 2 miles, which provides a maximum time of eight minutes before the collision occurred.

With a height of gunwale above the water of about 2 m, except at the bow, where it increased to about 3 m,

*Melina T*'s hull would have been hidden from view when lying between the 2-2½m waves running at the time. However, the deckhouse would have been visible to other ships all the time and the 20 m fishing vessel would have been in full view when on top of a wave.

### **Consideration of actions aboard *Eternal Wind***

At 0800, there were three persons on the bridge of *Eternal Wind*, the Mate, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate and the 4-8 AB. The AB had been occupied writing up the deck log and plotting the position on the navigation chart, he had not been engaged in keeping a lookout after 0730 and, when interviewed, could not recall seeing any other vessels at all at that time.

The Mate, who had been keeping his own lookout, at hand-over of the watch pointed out two vessels to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate, one northbound 13½ miles to the west, the other four points on the starboard bow and southbound. Although *Melina T* would have been on the visible horizon of 8.5 miles at 0744 and had closed to a distance of four miles at 0800, the Mate had not seen the fishing vessel.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate, in taking over the watch, checked the horizon, using binoculars, and the radar, both on the 24 and 12 mile ranges, for other shipping. Visually he saw only the two ships handed over by the Mate, which he stated at interview were the only two targets indicated on the radar. He too did not see *Melina T*, which was at the same distance off as the southbound vessel and approximately midway between it and the ship's head. Neither did he see the fishing vessel during the following 10 minutes, in which time it closed to a distance of 1.35 miles.

It is evident that the lookout being kept aboard *Eternal Wind* was not effective.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate claimed that the reason for his not seeing *Melina T* was that he was blinded by the reflected glare of the sun. The strong glare was evident in a video film of the rescue, shot by one of the *Eternal Wind* crewmembers, but despite this, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate was not wearing sunglasses. At 0800, the sun was on an azimuth of 067½° (six points on the starboard bow) at an altitude of 26° 20' and at 0810 on an azimuth of 066½° at an altitude of 28° 25'. *Melina T* would have been 40° off the sun, towards the bow, and the glare/dazzle should not have been too problematic in that direction.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate had used the radar for checking whether any other vessels were around, and had correctly changed down to a lower range. He had also followed the Master's Standing Orders to "Always scan horizon with binoculars". The indications are that the officers aboard *Eternal Wind* placed an over-reliance on the radar for the purpose of keeping a lookout.

Wooden fishing vessels, also ocean-going yachts, may not always provide a good radar target and the radar echo, which may only be intermittent even in just a moderate sea, can easily be lost amongst sea-clutter. A target-free radar screen should not be an excuse to relax the maintaining of a proper visual lookout. Also, when scanning the horizon with binoculars it is possible to overlook a small object between the observer and the horizon, thus it is imperative that lookouts scan the whole sea surface.

Although the seaman assigned to the 8-12 watch had reported to the bridge at 0750, the Mate had detailed him to obtain cargo hold temperature and atmosphere readings. Whereas it is now generally accepted, where environment and traffic conditions permit, for the officer of the watch to keep his own lookout during daylight hours, a seaman should be within easy call to proceed to the bridge if needed. The seaman should always be called to the bridge whenever the officer is engaged in navigational duties that preclude him from maintaining a full-time lookout. Had the seaman been retained on the bridge until after such time as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate had calculated the compass error, *Melina T* may have been seen in sufficient time to prevent the collision.

The investigation was unable to identify the two vessels stated, by the Mate and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate, to be visible and indicated on the radar at 0800. It is possible a southbound vessel (which was not seen by *Melina T*) inbound to a first Australian port, may have chosen not to report to AUSREP. A northbound vessel, however, would in all probability have been proceeding from an Australian port and should, therefore, have been recorded in the AUSREP system. A vessel that was identified as being in the area at the time was the northbound Panamanian bulk carrier *Amapola*, which, at 0800, would have been in approximate position 26° 31' S : 154° 04' E. That places the vessel 8½ miles from *Eternal Wind*, three points on the starboard quarter; yet this vessel does not appear to have been seen by either the Mate or the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate.

## Consideration of actions aboard *Melina T*

At the time of the incident the relief deckhand was on watch, and had been so since 0700. His duties were those of lookout, monitoring the engine oil pressure gauges and occasional visits to the engine room to visually check the engines.

He first saw *Eternal Wind* when it had closed to a distance of 1½-2 miles, by which time the vessel should have been visible to him for at least 10 minutes. During the interview conducted by the investigating officer, he stated that after the initial sighting, when he looked for the vessel later, the vessel was no longer visible, that it must then have been abaft the port beam. This information was not provided in his initial statements and, even though *Melina T* was said to be yawing through as much as 20°, this was not sufficient to bring *Eternal Wind*, on a bearing of 207½°, abaft the beam.

It is evident that the deckhand did not monitor *Eternal Wind* after the initial sighting and was, therefore, unaware of the developing situation until just before the collision.

Under the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, *Melina T* was the “stand-on” vessel. However, also under the regulations, those on *Melina T* had a responsibility to monitor the situation, to assess any risk of collision and, when the risk of collision became evident, to take such action as was necessary to avoid collision.

The Skipper’s standing instructions to his deckhands, when on watch, were that he was to be notified of all sightings of other vessels. Although the relief deckhand had sailed with him for a three-month period on an earlier occasion, at which time he had informed the deckhand of the reporting requirement, he had not done so on this occasion. Whether the deckhand had in fact remembered those instructions, he had not informed the Skipper when *Eternal Wind* was sighted.

According to those on *Eternal Wind*, at 0800 a southbound bulk carrier was four points on the starboard bow at a distance of four miles. *Melina T* would have had to cross about one mile ahead of such a vessel at about 0752, but that vessel apparently went unnoticed.

The Skipper stated that after getting up from his bunk and before going to the galley area to wash his face,

he looked out of the wheelhouse window. No time estimate was given for this action, but it must have been close to 0800, at which time *Eternal Wind* should have been visible. The Skipper could have only given a cursory glance through the window, he certainly could not have searched the horizon.

Although the visibility was good, the Skipper was aware that *Melina T* would be crossing the main north-south shipping lane that morning and likely to encounter traffic. Therefore, it would have been prudent for him to have instructed the deck hands to have the radar switched on, to aid assessment of possible collision.

After the collision, the Skipper organised the deckhands in assessing the damage, in preparing to abandon ship and in efforts to stem the flooding. All accounted well for themselves, both in those tasks and in rowing the liferaft to *Eternal Wind*.

The crew's efforts to stem the flooding into the engine room were thwarted by the placement of the nails securing the hull planking to the transverse bulkhead. The force of the collision had sprung the planking from the bulkhead, allowing the passage of water into the engine room as the bunk space flooded. The crew tried plugging the gaps, but the nails had been driven in close to the engine room side of the bulkhead, preventing the packing materials from being pushed in. In all probability, *Melina T* would not have foundered had the crew been able to prevent the engine room from flooding.

## **Qualifications**

The Skipper of *Melina T* held a Basic Seafarers Fire Fighting certificate, Radar and Restricted Radio Telephone Operator certificates, a Commercial Launchmaster certificate and a Second Class Diesel Trawler Engineer certificate, all issued in New Zealand. Although he had passed the written and oral examinations for a New Zealand Coastal Master certificate in 1989, at the time of the incident he had not been issued with a certificate. However, this was rectified in August 1998, the Maritime Safety Authority of New Zealand issuing him with a New Zealand Coastal Master certificate, back-dated to 1 December 1989.

The relief deckhand also held New Zealand certificates as Qualified Fishing Deckhand and Commercial Launchmaster; he understood the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea and his

obligations under those regulations.

# Conclusions

These conclusions identify the different factors contributing to the incident and should not be read as apportioning blame or liability to any particular organisation or individual.

- The lookout being kept aboard *Eternal Wind* was ineffective in that *Melina T* was not seen in sufficient time to prevent collision.
- The watch officer aboard *Eternal Wind* ceased to keep a lookout when he set about checking the error on the compass.
- The 8-12 seaman watchkeeper aboard *Eternal Wind* had been assigned duties on the main deck and was not available to keep a lookout while the watch-officer was engaged in other navigational duties.
- The officers aboard *Eternal Wind* placed an over-reliance on radar for lookout purposes in open waters.
- The lookout being kept aboard *Melina T* was ineffective in that *Eternal Wind* was not seen until it had closed to two miles distance and a watch on the vessel was not then maintained to ascertain whether risk of collision existed.
- The Skipper of *Melina T* had not reacquainted the relief deckhand with his standing instructions that he was to be told whenever another vessel was sighted.

It is further considered that the positioning of the nails securing the hull planking to the athwartship bulkhead, being close to the engine room side of the bulkhead, prevented effective plugging of the gaps and contributed to the foundering of *Melina T*.

# Submissions

Under sub-regulation 16(3) of the Navigation (Marine Casualty) Regulations, if a report, or part of a report, relates to a person's affairs to a material extent, the Inspector must, if it is reasonable to do so, give that person a copy of the report or the relevant part of the report. Sub-regulation 16(4) provides that such a person may provide written comments or information relating to the report.

The final draft of the report, or parts of the report, was sent to the following:

Skipper and three deckhands, *Melina T*

Company Management, Master, Mate, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate and watch AB's, *Eternal Wind*

A submission was received from the Skipper, *Melina T* and the report was amended to reflect the information provided regarding his qualifications. The Master, *Eternal Wind*, acknowledged receipt of the draft report, but was unable to provide further information on other shipping in the area at the time of the collision.

# Details of Eternal Wind

<b>IMO No.</b>	9162019
<b>Flag</b>	Panama
<b>Classification Society</b>	NK
<b>Ship type</b>	Bulk Carrier
<b>Owner</b>	Ganta Shipping S A
<b>Year of build</b>	1997
<b>Builder</b>	Namura Shipbuilding Co Ltd Imari, Japan
<b>Gross tonnage</b>	37,663
<b>Net tonnage</b>	24,166
<b>Summer Deadweight</b>	71,372
<b>Length overall</b>	224.89 m
<b>Beam</b>	32.2 m
<b>Draught</b>	13.472 m
<b>Main engine</b>	6 cylinder B&W diesel
<b>Engine power</b>	9033 kW
<b>Crew</b>	21 Filipino

# Details of Melina T

<b>Official No.</b>	875995
<b>Flag</b>	Australian
<b>Owner</b>	Fortuna Fishing Pty Ltd, Mooloolaba, Australia
<b>Length overall</b>	20 m
<b>Beam</b>	6.2 m
<b>Construction</b>	Timber, carvel built.
<b>Engines</b>	Twin 270 HP Caterpillar diesel engines
<b>Crews</b>	4 New Zealanders