

Safety Report

Lights, anchor, action!

Narrative

About 9:00pm, a 4.2 metre speed boat was navigating a downstream course in Wathumba Creek on Fraser Island. The master was seated at the vessel's stern operating the outboard motor's tiller control. His companion was positioned at the bow flashing a dolphin torch at the passing mangrove trees. A bright fluorescent light was switched on in front of the master. The vessel was travelling on the plane at about 20 knots. She was not exhibiting any navigation lights.

Unbeknown to the master of the speed boat, a second unmanned speed boat about 3.6 metres in length was anchored further downstream towards the middle of the channel about 20 metres from the creek's bank. This vessel was anchored fore and aft so that she was positioned perpendicular to the bank. The second vessel was not exhibiting an all-round white anchor light.

About 9:15pm, the first speed boat smashed into the middle of the anchored boat. Impact caused severe damage to the anchored boat. Fortunately no one suffered serious injury.

Lessons

- 1. Good masters always consider the rules of the *International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972* (the Colregs). In this instance, the rules about look-out, safe speed and lights are particularly relevant.**
- 2. The glare produced by the fluorescent light would have severely diminished the master's night vision. The glare from the dolphin torch and the presence of the passenger at the bow may also have limited the master's ability to see ahead of his vessel. Good masters recognise the adverse effect of bright lighting on their night vision, and the presence of obstructions.**
- 3. The vessel's speed of about 20 knots was too fast for the circumstances. The master's ability to take proper and effective action to avoid a collision was impaired by the back scatter from the light and the torch. Good masters reduce speed according to the state of visibility.**
- 4. Power driven vessel less than 12 metres in length when underway must exhibit navigation lights. This may be port and starboard side lights and an all-round white light. Even power driven vessels less than 7 metres whose speed does not exceed 7 knots must exhibit, at the very least, an all-round white light.**
- 5. Vessels at anchor must exhibit an all-round white light where it can best be seen. This includes vessels less than 7 metres in length when anchored in or near a narrow channel, an anchorage or where other vessels normally navigate.**

Safety Reports are prepared by the Investigations Unit, Executive Services and Compliance Branch, Maritime Safety Queensland. Safety reports are intended to draw the attention of the marine community to the lessons arising out of investigations into marine accidents. Consequently, the reports do not assign fault or blame nor do they determine liability.

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