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OFFICE OF
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INVESTIGATIONS

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Ferry Safety Investigation Interim Factual Statement

Sydney Ferries Corporation RiverCat *BETTY CUTHBERT* Loss of Steering Control and Collision

11 January 2006



The Office of Transport Safety Investigations (OTSI) is an independent NSW agency whose purpose is to improve transport safety through the investigation of accidents and incidents in the rail, bus and ferry industries.

Established on 1 January 2004 by the *Transport Administration Act 1988*, the Office is responsible for determining the causes and contributing factors of accidents and to make recommendations for the implementation of remedial safety action to prevent recurrence.

OTSI investigations are conducted under powers conferred by the *Rail Safety Act 2002* and the *Passenger Transport Act 1990*. OTSI investigators normally seek to obtain information cooperatively when conducting an accident investigation. However, where it is necessary to do so, OTSI investigators may exercise statutory powers to interview persons, enter premises and examine and retain physical and documentary evidence. Where OTSI investigators exercise their powers of compulsion, information so obtained cannot be used by other agencies in any subsequent civil or criminal action against those persons providing information.

OTSI investigation reports are submitted to the Minister for Transport for tabling in both Houses of Parliament. Following tabling, OTSI reports are published on its website www.otsi.nsw.gov.au

OTSI's investigative responsibilities do not extend to overseeing the implementation of recommendations it makes in its investigation reports. OTSI monitors the extent to which its recommendations have been accepted and acted upon through consultation with the relevant Transport Safety Regulator.

Information about OTSI is available on its website or from its offices at

Level 21, 201 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000
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Sydney South NSW 1235

The Office of Transport Safety Investigations also provides a Confidential Safety Information Reporting facility for rail, bus and ferry industry employees. The CSIRS reporting telephone number is 1800 180 828.

Overview

On the morning of Wednesday 11 January 2005, the Sydney Ferries Rivercat *Betty Cuthbert* left the Balmain Shipyard to commence regular passenger services and subsequently picked up several passengers and an additional crew member at Circular Quay. It then proceeded to Abbotsford and Meadowbank without incident. On reaching the wharf at Homebush, the master commenced a turn to port and in the process felt that the starboard controller was stiffer and less responsive than normal.

The master decided it was not appropriate to continue the normal service and disembarked passengers at Homebush with the intention of returning to Balmain where the ferry could be inspected. Before commencing the return journey, the master and the general purpose hand went through a fault finding process, after which the master decided to set the starboard steering /propulsion (Schottel) unit to the 'centred' position, which meant that he was not dependent on this unit for steering. The ferry then commenced its journey to Balmain, obtaining forward thrust from the starboard propulsion unit and both thrust and steering from the port unit.

The master reported that on the return journey, the vessel handled normally until it reached a point adjacent to Spectacle Island where, at an approximate speed of 18 knots, it made an uncommanded turn to port and headed toward Fern Bay. The master attempted to regain control of the ferry by steering to starboard, but the vessel did not respond to these steering inputs, and struck a moored yacht before both engines were shut down. The ferry then collided with a moored motor vessel which became lodged between the two hulls of the ferry.

Water Police, NSW Maritime Authority investigators, a Boating Services Officer and representatives from Sydney Ferries attended the collision site.

The crew of the *Betty Cuthbert* was transferred to Circular Quay where a NSW Maritime Authority investigator was in attendance and the ferry was subsequently towed to Balmain Shipyard with the motor vessel still lodged between the two hulls.

No persons were injured as a result of the incident.

Investigation

An Office of Transport Safety Investigations investigator deployed to Sydney Ferries Control at Circular Quay and commenced a preliminary investigation. The Chief Investigator subsequently determined that the circumstances and nature of this incident warranted formal investigation by OTSI in accordance with Section 46BA of the *Passenger transport Act 1990*.

The purpose of the OTSI investigation is to:

- a. establish the factors, both primary and contributory, which caused the accident;
- b. ascertain whether this type of accident had been, or should have been, anticipated and the effectiveness of any strategies that were in place to manage the risks associated with a loss of control;
- c. assess the appropriateness of actions taken to operate the *Betty Cuthbert* following the initial indication that the vessel may have suffered a control failure or irregularity;
- d. make recommendations to prevent, or at the very least minimise the potential for, recurrence of this type of accident, and
- e. propose any course of action in relation to other matters arising from the investigation that would enhance the safety of ferry operations.

Report

The investigation will be conducted pursuant to Section 45A of the *Transport Administration Act 1988* and Section 46BA of the *Passenger Transport Act 1990*.

During the course of the investigation, Directly Involved / Interested Parties (DIP) will be consulted in relation to matters of fact and before the investigation is finalised, the draft report will be circulated to DIPs to provide an opportunity for them to contribute to the substance of the report. Those matters submitted by DIPs which are deemed by the Chief Investigator to contribute to the completeness of the report will be incorporated in it.

When the investigation report is completed, it will be submitted to the Minister for Transport for tabling in Parliament in accordance with Section 46D of the *Passenger Transport Act 1990*.

Copies of the investigation report will be provided to all DIPs and will be published on the OTSI website.