4.8 Excessive speed when approaching berth

It was morning with clear skies and NW winds at Beaufort scale 7. A 200 metre RoRo vessel had picked up the pilot. There had been a short pilot briefing where the bridge team were advised that that the vessel would berth starboard side at berth A which had a course of 285 degrees. The approach in the fairway was 090 degrees. This meant that the vessel had to make a large port alteration of 165 degrees to line up with the berth. The port had no breakwater and was open to the sea.

Two tugs standing by

The pilot had the conn and the vessel was sailing down the fairway on a 90 degree course and a speed of 9 knots over the ground. Two tugs were standing by but were not connected. At the position where the pilot decided to begin the alteration there were less than 500 metres of space between the quays in the port basin.

Wind pushed vessel away from berth

The pilot ordered the vessel to come around to port and stop the engines. The vessel was still making 9 knots. The vessel was sensitive to the wind because of the large hull and superstructure. This caused the NW wind to push the vessel away from the berth.

The vessel started to alter to port and was facing the berth at a 90 degree angle when it was only 50 metres away. The pilot realised the danger and ordered slow astern and hard to port, followed instantly with full to port on the bow thruster. As the speed was excessive for the bow thruster nothing happened.

Bow hit quay at speed

At the same time the Master realised that the vessel was not slowing down so he ordered the port anchor to be dropped and full astern on the engines. It was too late, and the bulbous bow hit the quay at a 90 degree angle.

After the contact the tugs were connected and berthed the vessel.

The vessel had to dry dock and repair the bulbous bow. The berth also needed extensive repairs.

What can we learn?

- The vessel was approaching at excessive speed. Maintaining a speed of 9 knots when starting to swing around and as close as 50 metres highlights that the berthing plan was not safe and that the bridge team had not planned it accordingly regarding wind and speed.

- The Master did not challenge the pilot until it was obvious that the vessel would make heavy contact with the quay. It is imperative during the pilot briefing that the approach is discussed in detail with the entire bridge team, so orders can be challenged if there is concern.

- Two tugs were standing by but were not connected. Once again, if the vessel had slowed down and had the tugs connected the berthing manoeuvre would have been controlled. If tugs have been ordered why not use them?