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ATS/2008/C1e

email

From: Executive Secretary

Date: 18 January 2008

To: Antarctic Treaty Parties and ATCM Observers
and Experts

Subject: Location of the wreck of M/S Explorer

My most recent report on the sinking of the M/S Explorer was contained in Circular No. 31 of 5 December 2007. The wreck is lying at a depth of more than 1000 meter, but thanks to the expertise of the UK Royal Navy, it appears to have been found. Enclosed please find for your information a letter from the UK Representative to the ATCM, Ms. Jane Rumble, with a report from the Royal Navy vessel HMS Endurance on the location of the wreck.

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18 January 2008

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Dear Jan,

LOCATION OF THE WRECK OF THE M/S EXPLORER

I attach a report from the UK Royal Navy vessel HMS *Endurance* on the location of the wreck of the M/S *Explorer*, which sank in the Bransfield Strait on 23 November 2007.

I should be grateful if you would circulate this letter and the attached report to all Antarctic Treaty contacts as soon as possible for their information. The information contained in the attached report will be released to the media by the UK Royal Navy within the next few days.

Should we receive any further information, particularly in relation to the scale of the observed small fuel oil slick, we will also pass this to you for onward circulation.

With all best wishes,

Jane.

Jane Rumble
Head of Polar Regions Unit

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REPORT FROM HMS ENDURANCE REGARDING LOCATION OF WRECK OF M/S EXPLORER

Summary

HMS ENDURANCE located the wreck of M/S EXPLORER on 17 Jan 08. The wreck appears intact and is located at 62° 24.2929' south 57° 11.7748' west, at a depth of approx 1,130m. A small amount of fuel oil slick was observed, but it was not possible to assess the scale of the leakage due to sea state conditions. (HMS Endurance will endeavour to return to the site in benign conditions to carry out this task).

Background

1. HMS *Endurance* is in Antarctica undertaking hydrographic survey and mapping work; providing support to the scientific work of the British Antarctic Survey and carrying out other tasking to deliver the UK's responsibilities under the Antarctic Treaty. HMS *Endurance* has also undertaken a search for the wreck of the M/S *Explorer* to ascertain its position, assess the likely condition of the vessel on the seabed and observe any ongoing fuel seepage or other evidence of pollution.
2. Using the ship's multibeam echosounder, HMS *Endurance* surveyed a 10km x 5km search box, orientated 060/240 around the datum of the wreck, with search lines spaced at 750m within this. The ship drove this search pattern over the datum point, progressing North East to achieve full insonification of the seabed.
3. The seabed in the search area was flat and featureless. However, a contact was detected in 1,130m depth of water on a bearing of 097 and a range of 4373m from the reported sinking position of the vessel. When compared to the reported sinking position of M/S *Explorer* this was broadly consistent with the direction of the prevailing current. The contact was subsequently closely investigated utilising the highest resolution possible from the sonar system.
4. After processing and examination the contact had the dimensions Length 127m, Breadth 50m and Height 10m. The length of this was similar to M/S *Explorer* at 122m, indicating that it was likely that the vessel remains intact, lying on its side. It was clear that the width of the contact was considerably greater than the beam of the vessel but this could be due to the vessel not lying upright on the seabed, compression of the structure on impact and most likely through expansion of the contact by smearing as the sonar beamwidth is greater than the size of contact being detected.
5. Due to the flat and featureless nature of the seabed in the vicinity, the absence of other similar contacts and the intact nature of the sonar image it is highly likely that this is the wreck of M/S *Explorer*. Additionally the scour that normally builds up around wrecks after a period of time on the seabed was absent, suggesting that this was a new feature.
6. Figure 1 shows the contact protruding 10 metres above the general depth in the area. It should be noted that due to the depth of water the resolution of the sonar image is not sufficient to accurately pick out the detail of any features on the contact. The general form and size is however consistent with M/S *Explorer*.

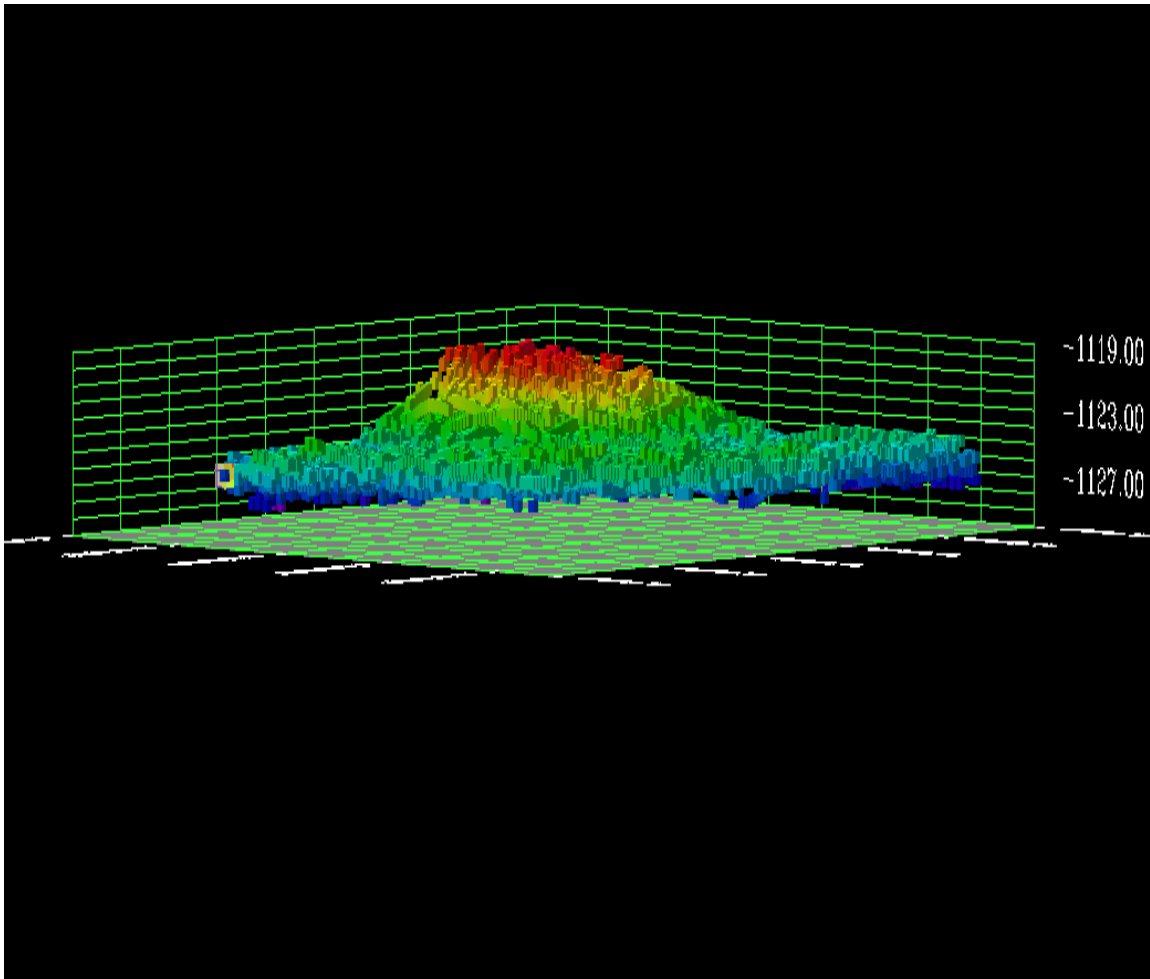


Figure 1

7. The location of the vessel obviously presents no hazard to shipping. At the time of investigation, a small amount of fuel oil slick was observed on the sea surface, close to the contact location. Further investigation was not possible due to sea state. HMS *Endurance* will endeavour to return to the site in benign conditions to assess the scale of the leakage. No debris was seen in the water and no debris has been observed on any of the land in the vicinity of the wreck visited by personnel from HMS *Endurance*.

HMS Endurance
18 January 2008
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