

Marine meteorological services for ships – Visibility reports

Written by Wu Chung-wai December 2012

Hong Kong is one of the busiest international container ports in the world with over 1000 sea-going vessels and river-trade vessels arriving at and departing from Hong Kong every day. To ensure safe navigation within our busy port, all shipmasters are required to comply with international regulations for preventing collisions at sea due to low visibility.

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) and the Marine Department work together to keep a visibility watch for the territory and the coastal waters of Hong Kong. Whenever the visibility in the Victoria Harbour or its approaches is restricted by fog, mist or haze with visibility lower than 3.7 km (2 nautical miles), hourly visibility reports will be broadcast by the Hong Kong Vessel Traffic Centre operated by the Marine Department on VHF on the hour until the visibility improves to higher than 3.7 km. These visibility reports will also be shown on the visibility map on the HKO website (http://www.hko.gov.hk/vis/vis_index.shtml).

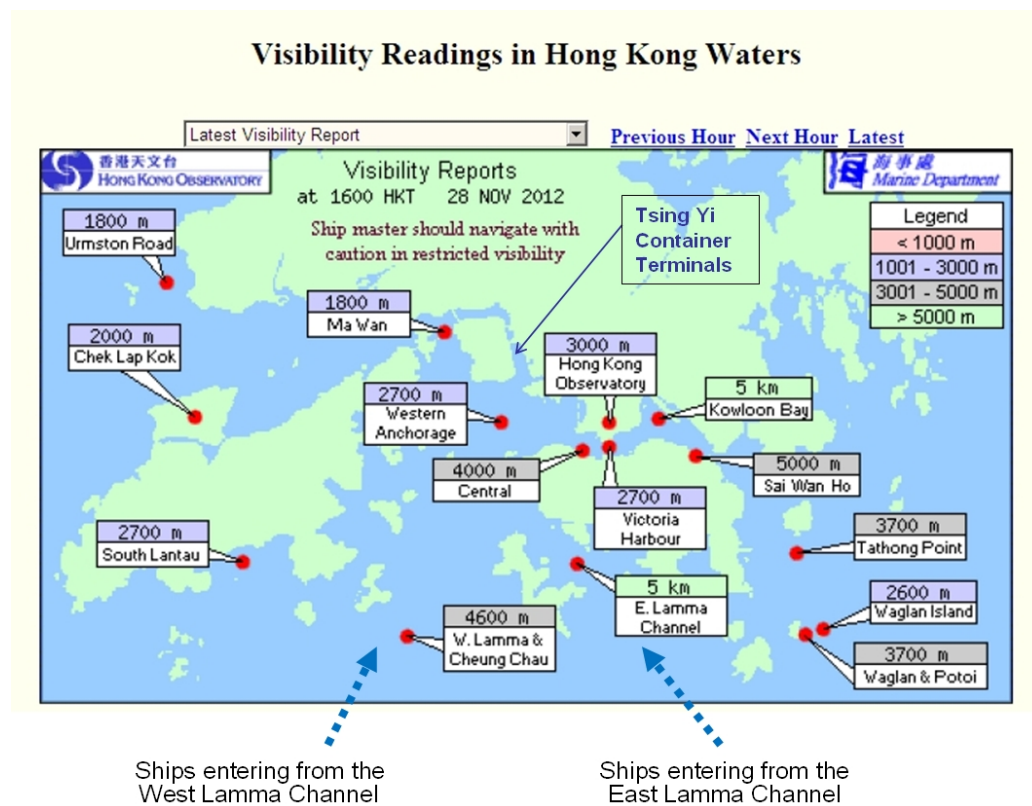


Fig 1 Visibility readings in Hong Kong Waters on 28 Nov 2012

It is a common route for ocean-going cargo ships entering Hong Kong via the West Lamma Channel or East Lamma Channel to the container terminals at Kwai Chung or Tsing Yi. On some occasions, the visibility may have significant spatial variation along the route of the ships. For example, the visibility was 5 km at East Lamma Channel but down to around 1800 m near the container terminals at Tsing Yi on 28 Nov 2012 (Fig 1). In this case, shipmasters could make reference to our visibility reports to proceed at a safe speed according to the conditions of low visibility and have their ships' engines ready for immediate manoeuvre when they are approaching the harbour from the south.