

# Court Finds Inexplicable Change In Drift Put Wahine On Masela Reef

## Ship's Master Took All Reasonable Precautions To Cope With Difficulties

The troopship Wahine was stranded on Masela Island on August 15 because of an inexplicable variation in the set of the expected westerly drift. The ship's master, Captain F. D. Johnson, took all reasonable precautions to cope with the drift.

This is the decision of the Court of Inquiry which investigated the stranding. The decision was released yesterday by the Minister of Marine, Mr. Goosman.

The court, in the absence of any negligent act or omission by the master or his crew, or of any culpable error of judgment, ordered the immediate return of the certificates of the master and chief officer.

The decision of the court is as follows:

"The court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons stated in the annex, that the cause of the stranding was an inexplicable variation in the set of the expected westerly drift which (the evidence also showed) the master took all reasonable precautions to cope with."

The annex to the report is:

1. The vessel was properly manned and equipped with every navigational aid required by the law relating to shipping generally and in particular by the latest international convention of 1948 and it carried the requisite certificate of the highest grade.

### Absence of Radar.

2. The absence of radar was not a contributing factor to the stranding though if radar had been fitted and used it would have assisted the master in determining the ship's position from time to time.

3. The radar equipment which had been on loan to the ship by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research for experimental purposes only was returned to that department at its request at the end of July, 1950, 13 months before the Wahine sailed on its last voyage.

4. Clear evidence was adduced before the court of the precautions taken by the master and his officers to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the conditions likely to prevail during the voyage and in addition they made a close study of all charts, information and sailing directions supplied, and the master had resort to the most up-to-date hydrographic charts relating to the particular waters and for that period of the year.

5. The ship's compasses were adjusted shortly before the vessel left New Zealand waters and azimuths were taken at frequent intervals to check the error of the compasses.

### Abandoning of Ship.

6. The decision of the master to abandon the vessel after all passengers and crew had been safely transferred to another vessel was a wise and prudent one, and the court considers that the conduct of the master and all on board was worthy of the highest commendation in all the circumstances.

7. Radio communication between the vessel and other stations worked efficiently throughout the voyage.

8. The prompt response and efficient assistance by the master of the Stanvac Karachi was a matter for the highest commendation and this Dominion's extreme gratitude.

9. In the absence of any negligent act or omission by the master or his crew or of any culpable error of judgment, the court orders the immediate return of the certificates of the master and chief officer which they deposited with the court at the start of the inquiry.

10. The court makes no order as to the cost of the whole or any part of the inquiry.

Mr. Goosman said Mr. McLachlan, S.M., and Captains A. J. Enright and J. A. Hughan, who conducted the inquiry had said that the evidence was given by all the witnesses with extreme candour and in a helpful and co-operative way.

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