

Baltic States

Local Harbour Pilots?

As the result of an oil spill in the Baltic Sea, Denmark has decided to call a meeting in September of maritime ministers in neighbouring States. One issue on the agenda will be whether ships coursing the Baltic Sea will be required to carry local pilots, a move that will be more expensive for ship owners but could reduce accidents that result in environmental harm.

At the end of March 2001, a Cypriot-registered cargo ship, the *Tern*, rammed and ripped into an oil tanker, spilling about 2,700 tons of heavy fuel oil into the Baltic Sea, the largest release into that sea in 20 years. The greatest environmental damage immediately afterwards was to birds poisoned and suffocated by the oil, while the full

damage to flora and fauna is still unknown.

According to the report into the accident, both ships had known of each other's whereabouts, but had assumed that they would pass each other at a safe distance. The oil tanker the *Baltic Carrier* had a double hull, the purpose of which is to reduce the chance of tank puncture. However, the *Tern* directly rammed the tanker, making its safety hull useless.

Although no blame has been assigned to any one party, the Danish government has the legal right to fine or imprison companies or persons found guilty of gross neglect in maritime events that damage the environment. (MJ)

