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| The Lord WinstonHouse of LordsLondonSW1A 0PW |

19 March 2025

Dear Lord Winston,

Thank you for your question during my statement on Thursday 13 March, regarding speed limits in shipping lanes.

The substantive answer to your question is ‘no’, there are no speed limits for vessels at sea, whilst on passage. The manoeuvring behaviours of vessels at sea are governed by the International Regulations for the Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 (COLREGs) which are transposed into UK law by way of Statutory Instrument.

These rules define the requirements to proceed at a safe speed which is adapted to the prevailing circumstances and conditions. This requirement is outlined specifically in Rule 6: Safe Speed, which states:

“Every vessel shall at all times proceed at a safe speed so that she can take proper and effective action to avoid collisions and be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions”.

In determining a safe speed, Rule 6 states that the following factors shall be among those taken into account:

1. The state of visibility.
2. The traffic density including concentrations of fishing vessels or any other vessels.
3. The manoeuvrability of the vessel with special reference to stopping distance and turning ability in the prevailing conditions.
4. At night the presence of background light such as from shore lights or from back scatter of her own lights.
5. The state of wind, sea and current, and the proximity of navigational hazards.
6. The draught in relation to the available depth of water.
7. Various other considerations related to the efficiency and effectiveness of the radar equipment being used onboard the vessel, not listed in full here.

It is therefore incumbent on the Master and Officer of the Watch to ensure that their speed has been properly adjusted for the conditions which prevail at any given time. Such adjustments will vary as the conditions can vary also. When operating in or near areas of restricted visibility Rule 19 (the rule which governs the Conduct of Vessels in Restricted Visibility) also provides outline requirements for safe speed to supplement Rule 6 as above which applies to all vessels and all times. Specific speed limits do exist however within a Statutory Harbour Authority’s area (SHA). Within these areas an SHA can use its legal powers to set and enforce a speed limit designed to maintain safety within the SHA limits. Vessels operating within and SHA must not exceed those speed limits.

In the case of the collision between the Solong and the Stena Immaculate, the collision occurred outside of any port limits or vessel traffic service, meaning that no speed limits were applicable to either vessel.

I hope that you find this response helpful.

I am copying this letter to all Noble Lords who contributed to this debate, and will place a copy of this letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely,



**Peter, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill**

**MINISTER OF STATE FOR RAIL**