



PRELIMINARY REPORT

MARINE

DCA16MM001

The information in this report is preliminary and will be supplemented or corrected during the course of the investigation.



El Faro (Photo by Tote Services)

On Thursday, October 1, 2015, about 07:15 a.m. eastern daylight time, the US Coast Guard received distress alerts from the 737-foot-long roll-on/roll-off cargo ship *El Faro*. The US-flagged ship, owned by Sea Star Line, LLC, and operated by TOTE Services (TOTE), was 36 nautical miles northeast of Acklins and Crooked Islands, Bahamas, and close to the eye of Hurricane Joaquin. The ship was en route from Jacksonville, Florida, to San Juan, Puerto Rico, with a cargo of containers and vehicles. Just minutes before the distress alerts, the *El Faro* master had called TOTE's designated person ashore and reported that the ship was experiencing some flooding. He said the crew had controlled the ingress of water but the ship was listing 15 degrees and had lost propulsion. The Coast Guard and TOTE were unable to reestablish communication with the ship. Twenty-eight US crewmembers and five Polish workers were on board.

The Coast Guard deployed helicopters and search vessels to the ship's last known position, but the search was hampered by hurricane-force conditions on scene. On Sunday,

October 4, a damaged lifeboat, two damaged liferafts, and a deceased crewmember wearing an immersion suit were found. On Monday, October 5, a debris field and oil slick were found, and the Coast Guard determined that the *El Faro* was lost and declared the event a major marine casualty. The Coast Guard suspended the unsuccessful search for survivors at sundown on Wednesday, October 7.

On Tuesday, October 6, the National Transportation Safety Board launched a full team to Jacksonville to lead the federal investigation in cooperation with the Coast Guard, the American Bureau of Shipping (the *El Faro*'s classification society), and TOTE as parties. The US Navy Salvage and Diving division of the Naval Sea Systems Command was contracted to locate the sunken ship, assist in the sea floor documentation of the wreckage, and recover the voyage data recorder.