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£30m cargo 'lost' as ship sinks



An inquiry has been launched into the sinking

Nearly 3,000 new luxury cars on board a carrier ship which sank in the English Channel are almost certainly write-offs, salvage experts have said.

The multi-million pound cargo of vehicles, including BMWs, Volvos and Saabs, is lying on the seabed inside the sunken Norwegian carrier ship the Tricolor.

The 55,000-ton vessel sank after colliding with a 20,000-ton container vessel in the early

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hours of Saturday.

A salvage company is sending a ship to the area with divers on board to try to find a way of removing the wreck - lying in about 25m of water.

HM Coastguard Lee Drew said: "The wreck must really go as soon as possible, because the Dover Straits is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world - and this is the actual crossroads where ships come from and to the European ports."

All 24 crew members survived the incident, which happened about 30 miles (48km) east of Ramsgate, Kent.

The Tricolor had been travelling from Zeebrugge, Belgium, to Southampton with its cargo of 2,862 cars and 77 containers when it hit the container ship the Kariba.

The value of the cargo was put at £30m, though the cars would have fetched double that at retail prices, motor industry experts say.



The crew members were taken to hospital in France

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The car carrier also had about 2,000 tons of oil on board, according to Lloyd's Casualty Reporting Service.

An anti-pollution plan was drawn up by the French authorities managing the incident, but a French naval official said there was no sign of any leakage.

The Tricolor crew abandoned ship and took to lifeboats after the collision at 0130 GMT on Saturday.

The captain and two officers were rescued by the Kariba while the rest of the mostly Filipino crew were picked up by a tug boat and have been taken to hospital in the French port Dunkirk.



The Kariba, registered in the Bahamas, was severely damaged but was able to make its own way to the Belgian port of Antwerp.

Warship at scene

The estimated value of the Tricolor itself is about £25m, and the cargo about £30m.

Per Ronnevigsaid, spokesman for the Tricolor's owners Wilhelmsen Lines, said the ship and

cargo owners would work with the insurers.

But he said it was likely the cars would probably have to be written off.

"She [the Tricolor] probably capsized when she went down. It means that all the cars are probably lying in pieces down there."

Dover Coastguard said a Belgian warship, the Wandelaar, was in the area helping French coastguards to deal with the incident.

A UK coastguard emergency towing vessel was sent to the scene along with other tugs.



The Tricolor collided with the container ship Kariba

The Tricolor was initially only partly submerged because of a low tide.

But it later disappeared from view.

UK coastguards said it was up to the ship's owners as to what would happen to the vessel's cargo.

But salvage expert Robin Middleton said: "History indicates [the vehicles] will not be suitable for re-processing once they are taken

out of the water.

"By and large in the past cargoes such as this have been scrapped in their entirety."

An inquiry will be launched by the French authorities into the cause of the accident.

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