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Accidents rise 75 per cent since 1991

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THE number of collisions in Hong Kong waters has jumped 75 per cent in two years to 286 last year from 163 in 1991.

But the Marine Department does not believe these statistics worthy of panic, given the large increase in traffic.

While admitting that the harbour is "riskier", Deputy Director of Marine Ian Dale said the level of accidents was still acceptable.

"You have to look at it as

part of a much bigger picture," he said.

The harbour would be safer as traffic increased, because boats were forced to slow down, reducing chances of a serious accident.

The department's accident target figure calls for accidents not to exceed 0.1 per cent of vessels in Hong Kong waters. They say it is 0.06 per cent, below the world average of 0.2 per cent to 0.3 per cent.

But Mr Dale said planners were constantly working on ways to improve safe-

ty, including a risk analysis to begin in six to nine months.

While there were 286 accidents last year, pilots logged more than 45,000 movements in local waters, a 17 per cent increase in vessel traffic from the year before.

Vessels travelling in the harbour are grouped into several categories: ocean going ships - those more than 300 tonnes; locally licensed vessels - ferries, lighter boats and tugs; river trade craft - many from China; and a number of sub-catego-

ries such as international ferries to Macau and other pleasure-type crafts.

Accidents have been blamed on irresponsible or amateur pilots from China, large vessels obstructing the views of smaller ones, faster vessels like catamarans becoming more predominant and the fact that the harbour has been getting smaller.

More junks and tugs collided in Victoria Harbour in the first four months of this year than in the whole decade before, boat owners and masters have said.