

Synopsis

The accident was notified to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) at 0928 on 11 March 1997 and an investigation commenced the same day. The investigation was carried out by Captain N Beer, Inspector, with contributions by Mr K Dixon, Principal Inspector, and Mr O Brown, Inspector.

GORAH LASS, a GRP fishing vessel of 7.78m in length with three people on board foundered with the loss of all hands while returning from a successful fishing trip towards her home port of St Ives in North Cornwall. The accident occurred suddenly and without warning at about 0455 in weather conditions which were described as “nasty” by the only witnesses, the Skipper and crew of another fishing vessel who raised the alarm.

An extensive search of the area began within minutes. The bodies of the two crew members, along with various items of wreckage, were recovered later in the morning. Despite all efforts that day, and a continuing search of the shoreline over subsequent days, the body of the Skipper has not been recovered.

The initial investigation, which included a survey of the wreck by divers, was unable to explain the reason for the loss of the vessel. In order to assist with the investigation the MAIB contracted a firm of divers to recover the wreck. A full survey of the vessel and analysis of her stability was then undertaken.

The investigation has concluded that the vessel was swamped by one or more waves which were unable to drain rapidly from the decks. The additional weight of water on deck and sudden reduction in stability caused the vessel to list and then to capsize and founder. The lives of all three people on board were consequently lost. The lack of a liferaft and the fact that lifejackets, and other emergency equipment were not readily available were contributory factors in the loss of life.

Two recommendations arising from the investigation have been directed to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) with the aim of encouraging research into the behaviour of small fishing vessels in rough seas and improving methods of promulgating the simple safety messages which are at the heart of this accident.