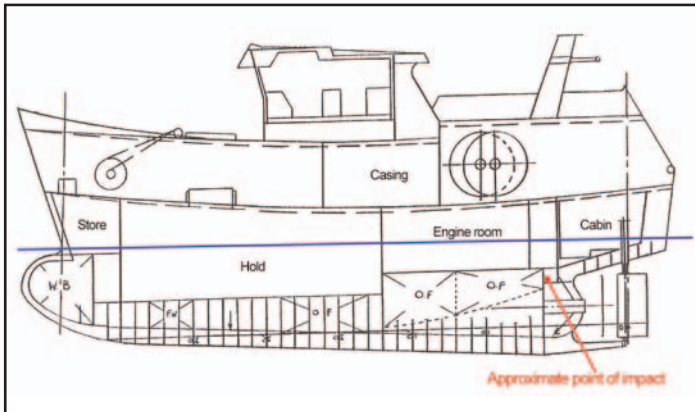


MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

FISHING ACCIDENT FLYER

COLLISION AND SINKING WHILE PAIR TRAWLING



In reasonable weather, wind force 4 to 5, two steel pair trawlers were making their final haul before returning to shore. They each carried a crew of 5, including 2 Latvians.

The vessels clutched in their hydraulics and removed the towing chains in preparation to haul. The skipper of the first vessel set his autopilot to 15 degrees starboard helm to compensate for the

strain on the vessel while heaving. Shortly after, the auxiliary engine shut down. The skipper started his second auxiliary engine and left the wheelhouse to go to the pump room to change over the hydraulics, and other services, onto the running generator. On his way to the pump room, the skipper indicated to one of his crew to go to the wheelhouse to take over the watch. He then continued on to the pump room as intended. On returning from the pump room, after changing over the services, the skipper met the crew member on the open deck; he had misinterpreted the skipper's signals and had followed him to the pump room, leaving the wheelhouse unattended.

Meanwhile, the skipper on the second vessel had started to haul, and was donning his oilskins in the wheelhouse when he looked up to see the other vessel coming straight at him. He took avoiding action, by releasing the haul and swinging his vessel to starboard. But it was too late and the vessels collided. The oncoming vessel struck the other at the bulkhead situated between the engine room fuel tanks and crew accommodation. The bulbous bow penetrated the vessel's hull, and sea water immediately began to flood into the accommodation spaces, which started to fill rapidly.

The skipper, realising his vessel was badly damaged, put out a "Mayday" call on VHF channel 16 and ordered his crew to launch the liferafts. He then ordered his Latvian crew members to transfer to the partner vessel by liferaft while he, and his remaining crew, assessed the state of his vessel. Before transferring, the Latvian crew members failed to don the lifejackets provided.

On realising the vessel was flooding rapidly, the skipper decided to abandon her, and all remaining crew members transferred, via the liferaft, to the adjacent vessel. Again, despite the availability of lifejackets, the crew did not use them during the transfer. The badly damaged vessel sank some moments later. The EPIRB floated free and activated.

The "Mayday" call was picked up by a nearby offshore platform support vessel who diverted to the scene and alerted the Coastguard of the incident. Fortunately, the first fishing vessel had suffered little damage from the collision and was able to return to port with all the crew members from both vessels safely on board.



Minimal damage caused to bulbous bow of first fishing vessel

Lessons

1. The standard of lookout and communication between the vessels was poor, and contributed directly to this accident. Pair trawling is an inherently dangerous operation; the MAIB has investigated a number of accidents which have happened during such procedures. Extreme vigilance and good communication, at all times, is essential if the operation is to be conducted safely. This is particularly true while shooting and hauling the nets.
2. The skipper of the first vessel left his wheelhouse unattended when he went to the pump room to change over services after starting his standby generator. During this period, his vessel's heading changed to a collision course with the other vessel, without warning. To leave the wheelhouse unattended for any period is unacceptable, and endangers both your own vessel and those around you.
3. The use of foreign national crew within the UK fishing industry is becoming more common. This is perfectly legitimate, but the ability to communicate effectively, particularly during an emergency situation, is essential for the safety of the vessel and her crew. The skipper recognised this, and controlled any risk by evacuating these crew members early in the emergency. This, however, left him with fewer crew members to tackle the flooding.
4. A "Mayday" call was made immediately following the accident, but only on VHF channel 16. This was a sensible precaution given the unknown extent of damage to both vessels. However, by not also sending a distress message via DSC, reception of the distress call was limited to recipients in the local area. Distress calls should always be made via an appropriate DSC frequency to ensure that the widest audience, including the Coastguard, is alerted to the problem.