

SYNOPSIS



All times are BST

At around 1700 on 17 June 2006 on a fine, calm day the crew of the fishing vessel *Pamela S* were preparing to lay a line of whelk pots in Carmarthen Bay when the vessel suddenly, rapidly and without warning, capsized and sank.

Two people were on board at the time: one crewman on deck aft, and the skipper in the forward wheelhouse. The crewman shouted a warning to the skipper as water began to flood onto the deck aft as the vessel started to capsize to port.

Seawater began to flood through the wheelhouse door, threatening to trap the skipper inside, but the crewman made his way forward to the wheelhouse and pulled him clear. The vessel then capsized rapidly to port and, as the men clambered onto the upturned hull, she sank by the stern, sucking the men under the water as she went down.

The men surfaced together and initially congratulated themselves on having survived the sinking. They could see a large navigation buoy, DZ1, denoting the MOD firing range off Pendine beach, approximately 0.5 mile away, which they started to swim towards. However, the tidal flow carried them away from the buoy.

Although the sea was calm, the water temperature was 12.7°C and the men began to tire as they continued to swim. After some time, the crewman became exhausted and slipped below the water, but the skipper managed to pull him back to the surface and resuscitate him. Later, the crewman went under for a second time, and although the skipper was again able to bring him back to the surface, the skipper was unable to resuscitate him and, as darkness fell, he had to leave him. As he did so, he secured a plastic fender, which had floated free from the vessel, to the crewman's clothing and then started to swim towards a light he could see on the shore. Extraordinarily, almost 10 hours after the sinking, the skipper staggered ashore at Pendine beach in the early hours of 18 June. He was discovered by a member of the public, who fortuitously was a trained first-aider and who kept the skipper warm until medical assistance arrived.

Despite an extensive search for the crewman, his body was not found until 27 June when it was recovered from the water off Pendine beach.

The wreck was subsequently salvaged by the vessel's insurers and the MAIB was able to carry out a detailed examination of the vessel to determine its stability, freeboard, bilge pumping arrangements and degree of watertight integrity at the time of the accident.

The MAIB examination found that, regardless of loading condition, the vessel had a very low level of inherent stability with a very low freeboard throughout the length of its working deck. Electrical faults were discovered on the bilge pumping system, no bilge alarm was fitted and, at the time of the sinking, nine securing bolts from the base of the stern gantry were missing.

No evidence of the lifesaving equipment: liferaft, lifejackets or VHF radio previously issued to the skipper on a lease purchase agreement with the South and West Wales Fishing Communities association, through an EU funding scheme, was found on the vessel. If the men had been wearing lifejackets it is probable that they would have both survived.

The report concludes that urgent attention must continue to be given to protecting the lives of fishermen working on fishing vessels under 15 metres in length by:

- improving fishermen's knowledge and understanding of their vessel's stability, freeboard and watertight integrity condition;
- improving MCA fishing vessel inspections;
- introducing basic stability and freeboard requirements for these vessels;
- increasing the number of fishermen who voluntarily carry appropriate lifesaving appliances, such as liferafts and EPIRBs, even though they are not a mandatory carriage requirement.

Recommendations relating to the above points have been made in recent MAIB reports, which the MCA and SFIA are already addressing.

This report does not make further recommendations. However, it is vitally important that the groups involved in reviewing MAIB's previous recommendations relating to fishing vessels of less than 15 metres in length ensure that the necessary momentum is maintained in moving to adopt measures which will improve the safety of this important sector of the fishing industry in which 69 lives and 49 vessels have been lost since 1989 as a result of capsize and foundering accidents.