

SYNOPSIS

The accident was notified to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) at 1420 on 12 November 1998 and an investigation started the same day. The investigation was carried out by Mr K Dixon, Principal Inspector. The completion of this investigation regrettably was delayed because of the number of Inspector's Inquiries and the associated heavy workload undertaken in the second half of 1998 and the first quarter of 1999.

Blue Hooker, a wooden fishing vessel of 7.41m length, with two experienced local fishermen on board, was swamped and capsized while in the process of recovering her pots from the seabed off Blackchurch Rock near Clovelly, North Devon. Both on board died, their bodies being recovered sometime later.

The investigation has concluded that this small open vessel had been operating in unsafe sea conditions and was swamped. Weather conditions were poor all that day, with WNW force 7 winds being recorded at Hartland Point, some three miles from where the vessel was operating. Conditions deteriorated in a squall and the sea became very rough.

When it was realised that *Blue Hooker* was missing, prompt action was taken by the honorary secretary of the Clovelly lifeboat and a full search was started by the Coastguard. Wreckage from the vessel was found along the sea shore the same day. However, the bodies of the crew were not recovered until about a month later, when they were found on the shores of Cornwall and South Wales respectively.

This report highlights the importance of fishermen obtaining weather information and forecasts. Recommendations are made to the MCA concerning the fitting of liferafts, and to marine insurance companies concerning safety equipment carried on fishing vessels.

Acknowledgement

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch acknowledges the help and co-operation of Mr L Winsborrow, the honorary secretary of Clovelly lifeboat.