

SYNOPSIS

On 23 February 2000 the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) was notified of an accident 35 miles east of Wick, on board the fishing vessel *Opportune*. An investigation began that day.

There were no eyewitnesses, but the crewman is believed to have fallen overboard while trying to retrieve part of a net which had gone over the side after he loosened it in preparation for shooting. The vessel was rolling in the stormy conditions and heavy swell at the time. He was in the water for an estimated 15 minutes before he was missed.

A full air and sea search was then co-ordinated by the coastguard, and an hour after the search and rescue (SAR) began the crewman was recovered from the water by helicopter. He was rushed to Caithness hospital, but was pronounced dead on arrival.

Contributory causes of the accident were: the victim probably climbed on to the net, thereby placing himself in immediate danger; he was not wearing an available working-type lifejacket; and he did not inform his colleagues before trying to retrieve the net. A risk assessment had not been carried out on board *Opportune* to identify the risks involved, and the appropriate control measures to be taken.

The MAIB makes no recommendations.