

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Aquarius: Fatal man overboard on 17 August 2015

Narrative

In the early hours of the morning on 17 August 2015, a fisherman on board the 20.8m twin rig trawler *Aquarius* (**Figure 1**) was thrown overboard violently when a rope stopper parted. The vessel had just cleared the port of Aberdeen, Scotland, and its crew were attempting to re-mark the trawl warps when the accident happened. The skipper reacted quickly to stop the vessel, and the crew threw lifebuoys to the casualty. However, the recovery attempt was unsuccessful and, about 10 minutes later, the casualty sank out of view. The skipper then raised the alarm but, despite a search involving numerous vessels and a helicopter, the casualty's body was not recovered.



In order to mark the steel wire warp, the crew had streamed it over the stern. The stopper was used to take the strain of the trailing warp so that the crew could lower its inboard section on to the deck (**Figure 2**). The MAIB investigation established that:

- The stopper parted under tension because a man-made fibre rope had been used instead of a chain, and a proper stopper hitch had not been applied.
- The casualty was thrown overboard because he had positioned himself within the bight of the slackened trawl warp.



- The method used to mark the trawl warp was unnecessarily hazardous and the outcome was entirely foreseeable.
- The crew were unable to recover the casualty back on board because neither they, nor their vessel had been adequately prepared to deal with such emergency situations.
 - The vessel did not carry a dedicated means of recovering a person from the water.
 - The crew did not conduct periodic emergency drills.
- The casualty sank and his body was not recovered because he was not wearing a lifejacket or other type of personal flotation device while working on the vessel's open deck.
- *Aquarius* had been poorly operated; its safety equipment was not properly maintained, hazardous activities had not been risk assessed and its crew worked prolonged hours and did not receive the minimum amount of rest or leave required by UK legislation.

Safety Lessons

The importance of developing and promoting a strong safety culture within an inherently hazardous industry and ensuring that a vessel and its crew are properly prepared to deal with emergency situations is repeatedly highlighted by MAIB in fishing vessel accident reports. Neither of these safety critical factors was evident on board *Aquarius*; the key lessons to take from this accident are:

- Fishing vessel owners and skippers must make every effort to promote a strong safety culture on board their vessels; hazardous activities should be properly planned and safe systems of work developed. This is particularly important when carrying out non-standard or one-off tasks.
- Crew should always wear lifejackets or personal flotation devices when working on deck, especially when working on fishing gear that is to be towed, shot or recovered.
- The dangers of standing in the bight of a rope, or over a slacked warp should be well understood by all seafarers and, in accordance with basic seamanship good practice, must be avoided at all times.
- Whenever a person falls or is thrown overboard, the alarm should be raised immediately, preferably by use of the vessel's VHF radio digital selective calling function. This will ensure the speediest response from the emergency services and other vessels operating in the area.
- The importance of conducting regular manoverboard recovery cannot be emphasised enough; emergency drills will help ensure that the vessel's safety equipment remains fully operational, is suitable for its intended use and that the crew are familiar with its use.
- Tiredness is a major hazard to all fishermen, and in order to reduce the risk of crew fatigue skippers must ensure that they monitor and record hours of rest.

This flyer and the MAIB's investigation report are posted on our website: www.gov.uk/maib

For all enquiries:
 Marine Accident Investigation Branch
 First Floor, Spring Place
 105 Commercial Road
 Southampton, SO15 1GH

Email: maib@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Tel: 023 8039 5500