

MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

FISHING ACCIDENT FLYER

Fatigue - take it seriously!

The Banff registered stern trawler *Brothers* BF138 sailed from Gairloch with a skipper and one crew at about 0225 on the morning of 1 June 2006 intending to fish for prawns in the Trodday fishing grounds. At about 0520 the vessel grounded and then sank off Eilean Trodday, a small uninhabited island off the north coast of Skye. No "Mayday" message had been broadcast.



The alarm was raised in the evening when the boat had not returned to Gairloch and the crew were not responding to calls to their mobile phones. The body of the crew member was found on the north-west coast of the Scottish mainland on 18 June. The skipper was still missing at the time of writing this report.

The evidence indicates that the vessel probably grounded due to one of the crew falling asleep in the wheelhouse, which allowed the vessel to continue on autopilot past her intended fishing grounds and onto the rocky shore. Both crew would have been suffering the effects of fatigue brought on by a number of long days at work, with only short, broken sleep periods. Both crew had also drunk some alcohol before the vessel left the harbour.

Prawn fishing is seasonal and dependent on good weather, therefore when the conditions for fishing are good, fishermen work very long days to make the most of it. It is not unusual for crews to work several 20-hour days before poor weather ensures they get a reasonable uninterrupted rest in port.

Safety Issues

1. The watch alarm fitted on board *Brothers* sounded only in the wheelhouse, so it would not have woken up the other off watch crew member when it activated. It appears to have also failed to wake the watchkeeper. This is not the first time that this factor has featured in fishing vessel grounding accidents. **Watch alarms, to be fully effective, must be made to sound in the crew cabin if not cancelled by the watchkeeper.**
2. After *Brothers* struck the shore at speed, there was enough time for one of the crew to reverse the engines to pull the vessel astern. The vessel had been badly damaged, and she then foundered very quickly; there was not enough time for the crew to get their lifejackets, send a distress message or release the liferaft or other buoyancy aids. **After a collision or grounding it is usually safer to check the damage before pulling away.**
3. *Brothers* did carry a liferaft but, unfortunately, it was not fitted with a hydrostatic release unit. She did not carry an EPIRB. **All fishermen are advised to fit an EPIRB and a liferaft with a hydrostatic release mechanism.** In many areas, there is funding available to help with the cost of this essential safety equipment which might have saved the lives of the crew on this occasion.
4. Merchant Shipping Notice (MSN) 1786 (F), the Application of the Fishing Vessels (Working Time: Sea-fishermen) Regulations 2004, contains detailed mandatory work time requirements for many fishing vessels. However, they do not apply to self employed fishermen like the crew of *Brothers*, but self employed fishermen are advised to regard the regulations limiting working hours as useful benchmarks to avoid working excessive hours and the dangers of fatigue. **Fatigue should have been identified as a serious risk on *Brothers*, and appropriate control measures should have been considered. Fishermen should note that drinking even a small amount of alcohol markedly increases the effect of fatigue.**

Further details on the accident and the subsequent investigation can be found in the MAIB's investigation report, which is posted on its website:

www.maib.gov.uk

Alternatively, a copy of the report will be sent on request, free of charge.

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