

MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY Grounding of fishing vessel *Niamh Aine*

Photograph courtesy of the Irish Coast Guard



In the early hours of 22 March 2009, the shelter deck potter *Niamh Aine* ran aground as she returned to port to land her catch after a 6-day trip.

The weather conditions during the trip had been exceptionally good for the time of the year and the crew had worked long hours, hauling about 1500 pots each day in order to catch sufficient crab to make the trip profitable in challenging commercial conditions.

The skipper took over the bridge watch as the vessel approached her home port. It was a very dark night with a calm sea and no other vessels in the area. He sat in the wheelhouse chair, reset the bridge watch alarm, and then fell asleep.

The skipper awoke to the alarming sound of the vessel striking rocks. He then ensured that the crew, who had been asleep down below, were safe and mustered in the wheelhouse, wearing lifejackets and warm clothing. He sent a "Mayday", which was quickly answered by the coastguard; they tasked lifeboats, a helicopter and a cliff rescue team to proceed to the vessel's assistance.

The helicopter arrived but then departed because the vessel's precarious position made it unsafe to winch the men at night. The vessel's crew, who demonstrated considerable fortitude, had to wait a further 3 hours for first light before being rescued.

Throughout the rescue the skipper's conduct was most professional; he maintained excellent communications with the rescue services and ensured the crew remained calm in challenging circumstances.

The vessel was subsequently declared a constructive total loss.

SAFETY ISSUES:

FATIGUE

During the fishing trip, the crew had worked for long periods each day, usually between 16 and 18 hours, while hauling and shooting pots. In addition, they each took a watch on the bridge during the night, such that their periods of rest were disturbed. This sector of the industry has to work hard to remain profitable as it is facing rising costs, reduced catches and lower market prices.

It is particularly important for owners to recognise that their crews are working longer hours and to introduce additional control measures to safeguard their vessels and crews.

In different circumstances this accident could have resulted in not just the vessel being lost.

Owners are strongly urged to:

- **Consider the appropriate manning levels required for each trip based on the hours the crew will have to work each day.**
- **Introduce measures to ensure that each crew member is properly rested in order to avoid accidents such as this.**
- **Ensure the bridge watch alarm is sited such that the watchkeeper is not able to cancel the alarm while seated in the wheelhouse chair.**

This accident was the subject of an MAIB Preliminary Examination, a summary of which can be found on MAIB's website at: www.maib.gov.uk

A copy of the flyer will be sent, on request, free of charge.

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