

MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

FISHING ACCIDENT REPORT

Chelaris J



The 16.8m Guernsey registered stern trawler *Chelaris J* sank while fishing on the Banc de la Schole, 6 miles south of Alderney. All four of her crew were lost.

Chelaris J was one of only a few vessels powerful enough to endure the difficult conditions around the steep-sided sandbank of the Banc de la Schole. But tragedy struck on 1 October 2003, when she ran into trouble during her second tow. Her gear became snagged in the sandbank, in force 6 winds and a strong tidal stream. No other vessels were in the immediate area when her EPIRB started transmitting. An extensive search was mounted that day, but only her EPIRB and some debris were found. The following day, the wreck was located and the bodies of two of the missing crew were retrieved.

The initial MAIB investigation into why the vessel was lost revealed concerns about her stability, and prompted a decision to raise the wreck to allow a more detailed examination to be carried out.

The investigation concluded that “improvements” and alterations to the vessel carried out over a number of years, had reduced her stability so much that she lost the ability to right herself when she became snagged in the steep ridges of the sandbank. *Chelaris J* had been inherently unstable for at least 2 or 3 years, and it was only by good luck that she had not foundered earlier.



Lessons

To avoid a repeat of this tragedy, the following lessons must be learned:

- 1. Fishing vessels do come fast on obstructions – which can include their trawl doors digging in. They also do operate in heavy seas. To survive such events, they need good inherent stability. Do not carry out any alterations to your boat without first seeking professional advice and, in the case of major alterations, consulting with the certificating authority (in UK, the MCA). If you think your current vessel has not been checked since alterations were carried out - get it checked now; do not depend on good luck for your safety.**
- 2. Stability is a subject that few of us understand. Seafish are developing a one day course to help skippers recognise the signs of dangerously reduced stability and avoid putting their vessels at risk. You are strongly advised to sign up for one of these courses when they start – your and your crew’s lives could depend on it.**

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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