

FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Capsize of fishing vessel *Aquila* with three fatalities



Photo: Sean Mcilwraith



On 20 July 2009, at about 1540 UTC, the starboard warp of the scallop dredger *Aquila* became snagged on the seabed while she was trawling, downwind, in moderate to heavy seas near the isle of Eigg.

The vessel almost immediately veered and heeled over to starboard. The skipper was heard to pull the engine control back to neutral, but a succession of large waves then struck the vessel and she rapidly capsized. The three crewmen were initially trapped, and as water entered the mess room through the open accommodation door one of them dived down and out through the door to escape from the vessel.

When he surfaced, the wind and tide took him quickly away from the upturned hull, but he was able to grab two wooden planks which had floated free of the wreck. The man started swimming towards the shore, which was about 2 miles away. He had been in the water for more than an hour when he attracted the attention of a passing yacht and was rescued. A search and rescue operation was then commenced for the remaining men whose bodies were recovered from the sea over the next few hours.

Aquila was built in 1988 and had a registered length of less than 12m. Although not statutorily required, her stability was checked at the time of her build when she was found to comply with the stability requirements for larger vessels.

After the accident the vessel was salvaged and an analysis of her stability was undertaken. This found that additional ballast had been fitted to the vessel and, with the carriage of more fishing gear, her displacement tonnage was found to have increased by 32%.

The ballast had been placed under the accommodation floor and also below the steering flat, to increase the stern trim and thus the depth and thrust of the propeller. However, the resultant centre of gravity of the additional ballast was found to be 1.5m above the keel which meant that the vessel no longer met the stability requirements for larger fishing vessels.

The MAIB investigation found that there were delays in the deployment of Search and Rescue assets. While these delays are not considered to have affected the outcome of this tragic accident they are addressed in the Investigation report.

SAFETY ISSUES:

1. When planning to add ballast or making other modifications to a vessel, the effect of such action on a vessel's stability should be properly assessed by a competent person.
2. The risks of fishing gear becoming snagged, particularly when trawling downwind, should be fully assessed to ensure appropriate control measures are in place to prevent water ingress or capsize.

This accident was the subject of an MAIB Investigation report which can be found on MAIB's website at: www.maib.gov.uk

A copy of the report and/or the flyer will be sent, on request, free of charge.

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