

## FLYER TO FISHING VESSELS AND SMALL CRAFT

***Achieve*: Foundering off Western Isle, Scotland on 21 February 2013**



**Figure 1:** Fishing vessel *Achieve*

### **Narrative**

At about 1500 on 21 February 2013, the fishing vessel *Achieve* (**Figure 1**) foundered 6nm north-west of the Island of Taransay, Western Isles, while it was returning to Leverburgh. Although all three crewmen were rescued, one of them died later in hospital.

As soon as the skipper became aware that the vessel was rapidly sinking, he transmitted a short “Mayday” message on very high frequency (VHF) radio channel 16.

His message, which lasted 8 seconds, stated:

*“Stornoway coastguard, Stornoway coastguard, Stornoway coastguard, Fishing vessel Achieve, Mayday, Mayday, Mayday”*

The coastguard immediately responded:

*“Fishing vessel Accord, this is Stornoway coastguard, what is your position? Over.”*

The skipper was already running out of the wheelhouse by then and did not have time to respond. He quickly launched the liferaft and got into it with one of the crewmen. The second crewman, who was wearing a lifejacket, jumped into the sea as the vessel sank very rapidly. He managed to board the liferaft nearly 20 minutes later but was suffering from the effect of the cold water.

Forty five minutes elapsed before the coastguard was able to establish that *Achieve*, and not *Accord*, was in distress, and pinpoint the vessel’s location. Thereafter, the rescue of the crew was quick and effective. By 1633 all three crewmen were in the rescue helicopter and by 1649 they had been landed at the Western Isles Hospital in Stornoway. Although the hypothermic crewman was conscious when admitted, he suffered a cardiac arrest and efforts to revive him were unsuccessful. He was declared deceased later that evening. The autopsy stated the cause of death as hypothermia.

The MAIB's investigation found that although the skipper could have initiated a complete "Mayday" transmission in 3 seconds using a distress button on the Digital Selective Calling (DSC) enabled VHF radio (**Figure 2**), he preferred to use the voice channel because he did not fully understand the DSC function. The 8 seconds he had to transmit a "Mayday" call before focusing on abandoning the vessel was insufficient time to ensure that the coastguard was provided with enough information to mount an effective rescue. As a consequence, more than 45 minutes were lost before the rescue efforts commenced.



**Figure 2:** A typical VHF Radio with DSC function

## Safety lessons

1. If you don't have a DSC enabled VHF on your vessel, it is highly recommended that you fit one as soon as possible and connect your GPS to it. When your DSC transmits a call it will, as a minimum, transmit the following information
  - a. Your vessel's unique MMSI<sup>1</sup> number
  - b. Your vessel's location
  - c. The time of the message
2. DSC is monitored by all coastguard stations, and by all SOLAS vessels and fishing vessels fitted with DSC enabled VHF. Although HM Coastguard continues to monitor VHF channel 16, its primary focus, for distress monitoring purposes, is via the DSC alert system.
3. Pressing the DSC distress button for just 3 to 5 seconds (depending on model) will transmit a basic "Mayday" message.
4. When activated, the distress message is transmitted five times with a brief pause for acknowledgement. If not acknowledged, the process is repeated up to a maximum of five times.
5. Increasingly, vessels with DSC capability rely on it for communication as well as for monitoring distress calls; keeping a listening watch on channel 16 is becoming less common.

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

For all enquiries:

Marine Accident Investigation Branch  
Mountbatten House  
Grosvenor Square  
Southampton SO15 2JU

Email: [maib@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:maib@dft.gsi.gov.uk)  
Tel: 023 8039 5500

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<sup>1</sup> Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number is a series of 9 digits used to uniquely identify a marine vessel or a shore station