

FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fishing vessel *Stella Maris*, capsized and sinking, 28 July 2014

Image courtesy of Jon Irwin



Narrative

At around 0910 BST on 28 July 2014 the 9.9m trawler *Stella Maris* capsized and sank while attempting to lift a heavy cod end of fish and debris. The two crew successfully abandoned the boat without injury and were rescued about 7 hours later from their liferaft.

The investigation found that *Stella Maris* capsized as a result of insufficient stability due to an overweight cod end being lifted from a high 'A' frame gantry by an excessively powerful gilson winch.

Almost 1 year before its loss, *Stella Maris* had been significantly modified with the aid of financial assistance administered by the Marine Management Organisation. This modernisation had included the fitting of the "A" frame gantry and gilson winch. No calculations had been required or carried out regarding the effects of this work on the boat's stability or on the weight that could be safely lifted from the new gantry.

In the UK there is no stability requirement for fishing boats under 15m length overall (LOA) so skippers and owners need to take steps to assess and ensure the safety of working practices, lifting operations or possible modifications.

During the investigation, the stability of a very close sister vessel to *Stella Maris* was assessed using the simplified methods of Roll Test, Small Commercial Vessel Heel Test and Wolfson Guidance mark. These all indicated that the vessel had a reasonable measure of stability. However, when the vessel's stability was assessed by inclining, it did not comply with the intact stability criteria for vessels over 15m LOA.

Stella Maris was equipped with both traditional and constant wear lifejackets. However, it capsized so quickly that the crew did not have time to put either of these on. The boat was also equipped with a liferaft, which they were able to launch and safely board as the vessel capsized.

Stella Maris capsized very quickly; there was not enough time for the crew to transmit a distress alert and the vessel was not equipped with an EPIRB.

Safety Lessons

- Simplified methods of assessing stability can be used to give an indication of a fishing vessel's stability but they should not be relied on to provide definitive assurance that the vessel has the reserves of intact stability currently required by, for example, fishing vessels over 15m LOA. A full inclining experiment will provide such assurance.
- Unless a vessel has been supplied with accurate, up to date stability data, it will be impossible to determine how much fish it can safely carry or what weights can be safely hauled by its lifting appliances.
- *Stella Maris* did not need to be fitted with a liferaft. However, its use undoubtedly saved the lives of the boat's crew as they did not have time to retrieve and don their lifejackets before the vessel capsized.
- It took 7 hours for the crew to be rescued because there was no time to send a distress message before the fishing boat was abandoned. During this time the crew used all but one of their flares to try to attract the attention of passing vessels to no avail. Had the vessel been fitted with a GPS enabled EPIRB, it is likely that it would have been activated and the coastguard alerted within minutes of the vessel's capsize, which would have significantly reduced the time taken to rescue the crew.

This flyer and the MAIB's investigation report are posted on our website: www.maib.gov.uk

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