

## SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Creel boat, *Varuna* (BRD 684), fatal man overboard, 20 November 2017



### Narrative

At about 1415 UTC<sup>1</sup> on 20 November 2017, the single-handed creel boat *Varuna* was found aground and unmanned on Eilean nan Naomh, a small island to the west of Camusterrach on the north-west coast of Scotland.

The vessel's engine was running and continuing to drive the boat on to the shore, and the shooting gate in the transom was open.

*Varuna* had left its mooring earlier in the day and had been seen working creels to the west of Applecross Bay. Radar data from the nearby BUTEC<sup>2</sup> Range Control indicated that *Varuna* left its fishing grounds at 1332 to head back to its mooring in Poll Creadha.

There were no witnesses to the accident. However, it is likely that the owner/skipper was preparing the catch and washing down the working deck, as was his normal practice, when he fell overboard. He was known not to wear a lifejacket or other personal flotation device (PFD) when fishing.

An extensive sea, land and air search failed to locate the boat owner/skipper, who had been the only person on board, but almost 3 weeks after the accident his body was found ashore in Staffin Bay on the Isle of Skye.

<sup>1</sup> Universal Co-ordinated Time

<sup>2</sup> The British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre (BUTEC) is a range used to evaluate submarine acoustics operated on behalf of the Ministry of Defence by Qinetiq

## Safety lessons

1. The water temperature was 9°C, and as *Varuna's* owner/skipper was not wearing a PFD his chances of survival after entering the water were slim. The first effect of falling into water of that temperature would have been massively debilitating cold shock. Thereafter, the owner/skipper would have quickly lost the ability to swim and tread water as cold incapacitation impaired his strength and coordination. Given the speed with which a search was commenced, had he been wearing a PFD when he entered the water it is very possible that he would have survived this accident.
2. The risks involved in single-handed fishing are inherently greater than on boats with more crew as the lone fisher has to rely entirely on their own resources to resolve any situation. Even a simple slip or fall can have tragic consequences when there is no-one else nearby to lend a hand. When *Varuna's* skipper went over the side, no-one was around to raise the alarm or turn the vessel back to rescue him. As recommended in the Fishermen's Safety Guide, *a risk assessment here is essential because once all the risks have been identified, solutions can be applied*. In most cases, risk control measures are easy to adopt and are relatively inexpensive. In this instance, closing-off the shooting gate when not in use might have prevented the accident and, as above, wearing a PFD while working on deck but also carrying a Personal Locator Beacon would have substantially increased the owner/skipper's chances of survival once he did enter the water.

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

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