

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fatal man overboard from the creel boat *Sea Mist* (BF918)

Macduff, Scotland on 27 March 2019



Narrative

At approximately 1225 on 27 March 2019, the skipper/owner of the single-handed creel boat *Sea Mist* (BF918) became entangled in the back rope while shooting creels, and was pulled overboard.

The skipper had spent the morning working creels in his usual fishing grounds to the north of Macduff, Scotland. No-one witnessed the accident. However, the skipper's son, who was nearby on his own fishing vessel, *Ocean Lee*, saw *Sea Mist* circling shortly afterwards. When he could not see his father on deck, *Ocean Lee*'s skipper raised the alarm and lifted his father's leaders in search of him. After about 30 minutes the son discovered one of his father's boots entangled in a back rope.

At 1321, following a sea and air search, *Sea Mist*'s skipper was recovered from the water by the crew of an RNLI lifeboat. He was declared deceased on arrival at hospital.

Sea Mist was set up for self-shooting and the skipper usually remained in the wheelhouse while shooting creels. However, it was evident from the discovery of one of his boots entangled in the back rope that on this occasion he was on the working deck while the gear was being shot.

Sea Mist's skipper was carrying a knife and examination of the back rope after the accident indicated that he had attempted to cut himself free. He was reported to have been wearing a lifejacket earlier in the day, but was not wearing it at the time of the accident. *Sea Mist*'s skipper drowned either because he was dragged under water by the weight of the creels and was unable to free himself in time to reach the surface, or because he was unable to keep himself afloat after releasing his foot from his wellington boot.

There have been 33 recorded fatalities on UK creel boats/potting vessels since the beginning of 2007, 20 of which were a result of either falling or being dragged overboard with the gear.

Safety lessons

1. There was no means of separating the crew from the fishing gear on *Sea Mist*'s deck. It is unknown why the skipper was on deck while shooting his gear, however, the presence of a physical barrier between him and the back rope would probably have prevented this accident.
2. The skipper was working alone on deck without a lifejacket or personal locator beacon. Once he entered the water, he had no means of raising the alarm or remaining afloat without the need to swim. Without the buoyant support of a lifejacket a person's survival time after sudden immersion in cold water can be measured in minutes. In this case, like many others, a lifejacket might well have saved the skipper's life.
3. The skipper had carried out some sensible safety precautions: he was carrying a knife, and knives were readily available on deck. Unfortunately his attempt to cut himself free was not successful, but the line was almost completely severed. In slightly different circumstances, that he had ready access to a knife might have saved his life.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's *Fishermen's Safety Guide* and Seafish's advisory note on *Potting Safety* both include advice on single-handed fishing operations and creeling/potting.

This flyer and the investigation report are on our website: www.gov.uk/maib

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