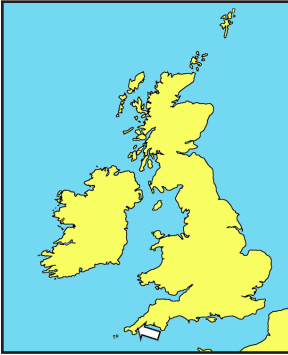


SYNOPSIS



At approximately 0600 on 3 October 2007, *Lady Hamilton of Helford* left the Helford River and headed across Falmouth Bay at 6 knots towards the 'Old Wall' fishing grounds. Her skipper was on watch in the wheelhouse while the vessel's two deckhands slept. At approximately 0615, *Blithe Spirit* left Falmouth and headed south towards the Manacles at a speed of between 18 and 26 knots. Shortly after leaving the harbour, the skipper of *Blithe Spirit*, who was operating single handed, altered course to port to avoid a cluster of unidentified lights ahead of him. Once steady on his new course, with the way ahead apparently clear, he sat down to rest.

At approximately 0622, *Blithe Spirit* and *Lady Hamilton of Helford* collided. The crew of *Lady Hamilton of Helford* were thrown to the deck and covered in debris. *Lady Hamilton of Helford* was holed above and below the waterline and started to rapidly take on water. Her skipper used a mobile phone to inform the coastguard while his crew launched a liferaft. The liferaft did not fully inflate and was unusable. Fortunately, a local pilot boat quickly arrived on the scene and recovered the skipper and his crew. The damaged vessel was taken in tow but sank at 0646. When the two vessels collided, the skipper of *Blithe Spirit* hit his head on a chart plotter on impact before landing on the deck of his boat. It would appear that he then lost consciousness for a short period. After coming to, *Blithe Spirit's* skipper took the boat back to Falmouth, arriving there at about 0715.

Neither skipper saw the other vessel immediately before or after the collision and both concluded they had struck semi-submerged objects. The investigation identified a number of factors which led to the collision. In particular, neither skipper maintained an effective lookout.

To improve fishing vessel safety, the MCA intends to require skippers of vessels under 16.5m to hold a certificate of competency and is considering the provision of a team of safety advisors to raise awareness of the risks associated with a fishing vessel's routine operation. It is also considering the promulgation of a minimum recognised standard for liferafts carried on board fishing vessels of less than 15m.

The investigation also identified that the liferaft deployed from *Lady Hamilton of Helford* had not been serviced in accordance with its manufacturer's instructions and did not fully inflate because there was insufficient gas in its cylinder. As a result, the MAIB strongly advises that all owners of leisure craft and fishing vessels who own or hire liferafts seek confirmation from service agents that all maintenance, checks and tests conducted have been in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Recommendations have been made to the MCA and Premium Liferaft Services, which seek to improve the reliability of liferafts carried on smaller vessels. A further recommendation to the MCA aims to improve the safe operation of fishing vessels capable of fast speeds.