

SYNOPSIS

Early in the morning of Friday 4 May 2007, a sloop loaded with approximately 150 illegal migrants was attempting to land at Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), when it was intercepted by the police launch *Sea Quest*. The sloop was taken in tow towards the island harbour of South Dock, but a short while later, at about 0215, the sloop capsized.

Sea Quest raised the alarm and commenced rescuing survivors. Having rescued all in their vicinity, the launch put into South Dock with 66 survivors onboard. On sailing again, the launch rescued one more survivor from the water before becoming disabled due to a fouled propeller. The next rescue assets to arrive on scene did so at first light, around 0545, when another 11 survivors were found clinging to the hull of the upturned sloop. These were the last passengers to be found alive. In total, 60 bodies were recovered, 12 from the deck and hold of the sloop.

Conclusions

Stability analysis of the sloop indicates that with 125 passengers on deck, it would have negligible stability and the slightest of triggers would have caused capsizing. It would appear that the sloop capsized while under tow, when the number of passengers on deck reached a critical number and stability was lost. However, the exact trigger for the capsizing remains unknown.

The problem of Haitian sloops with poor stability carrying migrants was well known in the region and among members of the TCI marine police unit (MPU). However, no instructions or operating procedures for mitigating the risk of capsizing when interdicting these vessels had been issued to the police launch crews. *Sea Quest's* captain did what he and other captains had done numerous times before, without realising the potential hazards.

Sea Quest's rescue efforts were commendable, but the launch was ill-equipped for the task. The wider rescue operation suffered from poor communications; lack of central coordination; and slow mobilisation of resources.

Recommendations:

Responsibility for the condition and overloading of the sloop, which ultimately resulted in this tragic accident, rests with those involved with the trafficking of migrants. However, MAIB cannot make recommendations to these individuals, and it remains the responsibility of the government of Haiti to prevent vessels in such unsafe condition putting to sea. Therefore the recommendations in this report have been addressed only to the authorities responsible for the interdiction and SAR roles within TCI territorial waters.

Recommendations, have been made to the TCI police force to:

Review its procedures for the interception of Haitian sloops along the following lines:

- Immediate, until effective procedures are developed: cease actions that are likely to precipitate a sloop's capsizing. Initial recommendations addressing this issue have been made by the MAIB in Safety Bulletin 1/2007, reproduced at Annex B.
- Short term: work with the UKSAT MTU to develop standard operating procedures that can be implemented within present resource limitations to facilitate the safe interdiction of sloop traffic.
- Medium term: identify and procure the assets and establish the procedures necessary to achieve the safe interdiction of Haitian sloop traffic.

Take steps to improve TCI's maritime SAR capability by:

- Improving the emergency and lifesaving equipment on the TCI patrol launches and other State vessels.
- Establishing the maximum number of passengers that can be safely embarked on State vessels likely to become involved in SAR operations.
- Ensuring that vessels operating off the coast are able to raise the alarm and communicate effectively between each other and with the authorities ashore. For MPU vessels, this could be done by repairing the police band radio relay stations. However, a more universal solution would be through provision of a VHF channel 16 and DSC alerting service.
- Developing a maritime SAR alerting and coordination plan that can be put into force quickly and effectively once the alarm is raised. For simplicity, responsibility for enacting this would best be co-located with the monitoring of the designated radio circuit.

