

SYNOPSIS



The Banff registered stern trawler *Brothers* BF138 sailed from Gairloch with a 2-man crew at about 0225 on the morning of 1 June 2006. At about 0520 the vessel grounded and then sank off Eilean Trodday, a small uninhabited island off the north coast of Skye. No “Mayday” message was broadcast.

The skipper’s father called the emergency services, reporting the vessel overdue that evening after the families were unable to contact either the skipper or crewman by telephone.

Over the next 36 hours an extensive air and sea search which involved numerous resources, including helicopters, a nimrod aircraft, lifeboats, fishing boats and auxiliary coastguard search teams, was carried out. Just before midday on 3 June a local fishing boat reported that the missing boat had been found on the seabed just off Eilean Trodday. A short while later they reported that a quick search of the wreck by a local diver had failed to find any sign of the trawler’s crew.

The search for the missing crew was continued during that day and the following day. It was called off 4 days after the boat had sailed from Gairloch.

The body of the crew member was found on the north-west coast of the Scottish mainland on 18 June, 17 days after the vessel had sunk. However the skipper was still missing at the time of writing this report (January 2007).

It is believed the vessel probably grounded due to one of the crew falling asleep in the wheelhouse, which allowed the vessel to sail past her intended fishing grounds and onto the shore at Eilean Trodday. Both crew would have been suffering the effects of fatigue brought on by a number of long days at work, with only short, broken sleep periods. Both crew had also drunk some alcohol before the vessel left the harbour.

These factors combined to cause the accident but, during the course of the investigation, the MAIB discovered some other issues which, though not causal factors, nevertheless, provided lessons to be learned by the organisations and individuals involved.

In the early stages of the emergency, a mistake was made at MRCC Stornoway in interpolating data taken from the skipper’s mobile phone records. Had this mistake not been made, it is possible that the boat might have been found sooner. However, the outcome for the crew would not have been improved.

A prototype confidential position reporting system (CPRS) was being tested on board *Brothers*, but the equipment failed to operate. The skipper might have been aware that the unit had a fault, but it was apparent that he was probably unaware that it had failed completely. This has raised concerns about the management of the system, which is operated principally by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).

In the event, even if the CPRS had worked, it probably would have made no difference to the outcome for the crew, because without any lifesaving aids, their likely survival times would have been measured in minutes rather than hours.

During the incident, one of the crew appears to have put the engine astern to pull the vessel off the rocks. This led to the vessel quickly flooding and sinking and has raised concerns regarding damage control training for fishermen.

The RNLI has taken further action to warn other CPRS users of the problems associated with malfunctioning units, and the MCA has taken action to improve SAR management in general, and the handling of mobile phone data in particular. The MAIB intends to publicise the problems associated with fatigue widely within the fishing industry.

Figure 1



Brothers BF138