

SYNOPSIS



At about 1955 on 19 January 2006, fv *Greenhill* grounded on the shore between Ardglass and Ringfad Point on the east coast of Northern Ireland. The vessel was returning to Ardglass with her skipper and two deckhands on board. After the grounding, the vessel was manoeuvred into open water and started to flood rapidly. At 2002 she foundered in a depth of 24m. The skipper and two deckhands initially clung on to the vessel's liferaft canister. The skipper then managed to inflate the liferaft, but it inflated upside down; by the time the skipper managed to right it, the deckhands had disappeared. The skipper was rescued from the liferaft by the Portaferry lifeboat, which had been tasked by the MCA to locate fv *Greenhill* after receiving a distress signal from the vessel's EPIRB. The body of one of the deckhands was later recovered from the seabed close to the wreck of fv *Greenhill*. The body of the second deckhand was not found.

Several factors contributed to the grounding and foundering of fv *Greenhill*, which resulted in the loss of her two deckhands, including:

- The wheelhouse was unattended. The skipper and deckhands were working on the shelter deck from where neither a visual or aural lookout could be maintained.
- When the skipper last visited the wheelhouse, no electronic aids were used to verify the vessel's position.
- Following the grounding, manoeuvring the vessel ahead, and penetrations on the vessel's main transverse bulkheads, increased the rate of flooding through the vessel's damaged bow.
- No distress call was made using the VHF DSC function.
- All electrical power was lost because the vessel's generators, batteries and switchboards were fitted low down in the engine room, they were not protected against water ingress, and because the construction of *Greenhill* pre-dated the requirement for a separate, emergency power source for lights and VHF radio.
- It was not possible to retrieve the lifejackets, flares, or immersion suits from their normal stowage in the accommodation space.
- The liferaft inflated upside down, probably due to the skipper and deckhands holding on to the liferaft canister.
- It is possible that the deckhands were struck by the liferaft canister as the liferaft inflated.

Recommendations have been made to the Fishing Industry Safety Group and Seafish with the following aims:

- Improve the standard of watchkeeping on fishing vessels with particular emphasis on the importance of not leaving the wheelhouse unattended when at sea.
- Provide fishermen with practical guidance and instruction on actions to be taken in various emergency situations including the application of damage control procedures following an accident.

Recommendations have also been made to the owner and skipper of *Greenhill* regarding the stowage of lifejackets, the watertight integrity of their vessel(s) internal structure, and the keeping of a proper navigational watch.