

MGN 84 (F) Keeping a Safe Navigational Watch on Fishing Vessels

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## KEEPING A SAFE NAVIGATIONAL WATCH ON FISHING VESSELS

Notice to Owners, Operators, Skippers and Crews of Fishing Vessels

*This Notice supersedes Merchant Shipping Notices: M1020, M1190, M1463, M1649, M1656*

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### *Summary*

This notice explains why fishing vessels need to maintain a proper navigational watch at all times, and defines the correct use of navigational equipment.

#### Key points:

- Watches must be properly manned by competent people who are fit for duty.
- A proper lookout must be kept at all times.
- Check the vessel's position by all available means. Do not rely only on a single piece of equipment.
- Other traffic must always be monitored.
- Do not use navigational aids for purposes for which they are not intended.

### 1. Why Should I keep a Watch on Fishing Vessels?

1.1 Investigations into collisions and groundings involving fishing vessels have continued to show that poor watchkeeping is a major cause. In many cases one or more of the following were important factors:

- (a) an unqualified or inexperienced man in charge of the watch;
- (b) only one man on watch (regardless of whether a watch alarm was fitted);
- (c) a poor lookout being kept;
- (d) divided command; and,
- (e) fatigue.

The guidelines laid down by the International Maritime Organisation must be closely followed at all times. A competent alert Watchkeeper, keeping a proper all round lookout at all times is absolutely essential.

1.2 Failure to maintain a safe navigational watch will be and has been viewed very seriously by the Agency and the Courts.

### 2. What are the Arrangements of a Safe Navigational Watch?

2.1 The watch should always take into account the prevailing circumstances and conditions. Even where there is no statutory requirement for certificated officers, it is still essential that watchkeepers are always experienced, capable, and have been instructed in their

duties. This is especially vital if you are making a landfall, navigating close to the coast, in restricted visibility, severe weather conditions or in dense traffic.

2.2 When deciding the composition of the watch the following factors should be considered:

- (a) the wheelhouse must not be left unattended at any time;
- (b) the weather conditions, visibility and time of day. Although the size of the crew and the wheelhouse may not permit a continuous two person watch, two people should always be on watch during the hours of darkness and in poor weather conditions;
- (c) the proximity of navigational hazards which may make it necessary for additional navigational duties to be undertaken;
- (d) the use and operational condition of navigational aids such as radar, automatic pilot, and position-fixing equipment.
- (e) any unusual demands on the navigational watch that may arise as a result of special operational circumstances.

### 3. Fitness for Duty

Both the skipper and the watchkeepers should take full account of the quality and quantity of rest taken when determining fitness for duty. Particular dangers exist when the watchkeeper is alone. It is all too easy to fall asleep, especially while sitting down in an enclosed wheelhouse. Watchkeepers should ensure they remain alert by moving around frequently, and ensuring good ventilation.

### 4. Navigation

- 4.1 The intended voyage should be planned in advance taking into account any relevant information. Courses should be checked before departure.
- 4.2 It is important that watchkeepers maintain a close watch on their own vessel and always know the position, speed and course steered. Many groundings occur when the position is not being monitored and the watchkeeper thinks that the vessel is in safe water.

4.3 The watchkeeper should know the location and operation of all safety and navigational equipment on board and their limitations.

4.4 The person in charge of a navigational watch should not undertake any other duties that would interfere with the safe navigation of the vessel.

4.5 Unfortunately it is not possible to rely on every give-way vessel to keep clear. It is therefore vital to monitor the movement of ALL traffic. Remember that a vessel engaged in fishing does not always have the right of way. In restricted visibility, even with gear extended, a fishing vessel has no special privileges.

4.6 Domestic radios, cassette players and television sets should never be used in the wheelhouse to the neglect of navigational duties. The proper place for such items, specifically television sets, is in the accommodation.

### 5. Navigational Equipment

5.1 Watchkeepers should make effective use of all available equipment and not hesitate to use the **helm, engines and sound signalling apparatus**. Use the **radar**, as an aid. There is no substitute for keeping a good visual lookout.

5.2 It is strongly recommended that any **automatic pilot** fitted should incorporate a **watch alarm**. It is good practice to extend the installation of a watch alarm to vessels not fitted with automatic pilot. It is advised that a watch alarm is fitted on board ALL vessels where there may be one person on navigational watch. The watch alarm will not only alert the watchkeeper but also other members of the crew.

5.3 Over-reliance on **video plotters** has been a factor in several recent collisions and groundings. Using an electronic system does not remove the need for proper passage planning and navigation, using appropriately scaled paper charts. Assessments or assumptions based on video plotters alone are dangerous and unreliable. A video plotter used for fishing purposes is not adequate for safe navigation.

5.4 If you use a video plotter, bear in mind the limitations of this type of equipment and always cross-check the accuracy of your position, course and speed. Equipment of this type may aid navigation, but it cannot replace the fundamental need to maintain a visual lookout.

5.5 Information, charts, routes and waypoints can be stored for future use. However, stored data should always be checked and used with caution, especially if transferred between vessels. Ensure it is applicable to the vessel's specific condition and voyage, and always keep this data up to date.

5.6 **Electronic magnetic compasses** may be unsuitable for use within a steel wheelhouse. Groundings have been caused by the improper functioning of this equipment linked to an auto-pilot. When a heading reference is required for navigational equipment such as an auto-pilot or radar, it is recommended that a **transmitting magnetic compass** (rather than an electronic magnetic compass) be fitted.

## 6. Navigational Duties and Responsibilities

6.1 The person in charge of the watch should:

- (a) keep watch in the wheelhouse, which should never be left unmanned;
- (b) continue to be responsible for the navigation of the vessel, despite the presence of the skipper, until it is mutually agreed the skipper has taken over;
- (c) notify the skipper when in any doubt as to what action to take in the interest of safety;
- (d) not hand over to someone who is obviously not capable of taking over the watch. The skipper should be advised accordingly.
- (e) on taking over a watch establish the vessel's estimated or actual position and confirm the intended track course and speed. Any dangers to navigation expected during the watch should be noted;

(f) maintain a proper log of all movements and activities during the watch that relate to the navigation of the vessel.

## 7. Look-out

7.1 It is absolutely essential that a proper look-out is kept at all times. Casualties to fishing vessels, resulting in loss of life, continue to occur because of the lack of a look-out. In addition to assessing the situation and risk of collision, stranding and other navigation dangers, the duties of the look-out should include the detection of other vessels or aircraft in distress, shipwrecked persons, wrecks and debris.

7.2 The look-out must give full attention to keeping a proper look-out and no other duties should be undertaken which could interfere with that task. The duties of the look-out and helmsman are separate and the helmsman is not considered to be the look-out while steering except where an unobstructed all-round view is provided and there is no impairment of night vision or other impediment. The watchkeeper may only be the sole look-out during daylight hours provided that it is safe to do so and assistance is immediately available.

## 8. Weather Conditions

8.1 The watchkeeper should take early action to notify the skipper when adverse changes in the weather could affect the safety of the vessel, including the possibility of icing occurring.

## 9. Navigation with Pilot Embarked

9.1 The presence of a pilot on board does not relieve the skipper or watchkeepers from their duties and obligations. The skipper and pilot should exchange information regarding navigational procedures, local conditions and the vessel's characteristics. The skipper should co-operate closely with the pilot. An accurate check of the vessel's position and movement should be maintained.

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MGN 137 (M+F) Look-out During Periods of Darkness and Restricted Visibility



Maritime and Coastguard Agency

## MGN 137 (M+F)

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### Look-out During Periods of Darkness and Restricted Visibility

Note to shipowners, operators, masters, skippers, deck officers and crews of all UK ships anywhere, and other ships operating in UK waters.

*This Note should be read in conjunction with Merchant Shipping Notice MSN 1682(M) or any subsequent amendment*

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#### Summary

This Note is a reminder to all UK ships wherever they may be and other ships operating in UK territorial waters, of the legal requirements for keeping a proper look-out, especially during the hours of darkness.

1. Following a recent serious casualty in UK territorial waters involving a container ship, which resulted in the loss of the vessel and her cargo as well as oil pollution, the MCA reminds operators and masters that all UK ships, wherever they may be, and other ships in UK territorial waters, are strongly advised not to operate with the officer of the navigational watch acting as the sole look-out during periods of darkness. An additional look-out should also be posted at any other time during restricted visibility or when the prevailing circumstances indicate such action is in the interests of safety.
2. All UK ships wherever they may be, and other ships in UK waters, are required under the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996 to maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions, so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision. The owner, master and any person for the time being responsible for the conduct of the ship, is liable to prosecution in the event of a contravention.
3. Failure to maintain a proper look-out may also endanger the ship or persons, and render the master or responsible officer liable to prosecution under section 58 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. A 12 month custodial sentence was recently imposed on the Chief Mate of a cargo ship, in that he failed to maintain a safe navigational watch as a result of drunkenness and disabling the watch alarm system. The vessel had run aground resulting in £100,000 worth of damage.
4. Masters of UK ships and other ships when in UK waters (other than fishing vessels and pleasure craft) are also reminded of the requirements in the Merchant Shipping (Safe Manning, Hours of Work and Watchkeeping) Regulations 1997. These requirements are to ensure that the watchkeeping arrangements for the ship are at all times adequate for

maintaining safe navigational watches, having regard to the STCW Code section A-VIII, and to give directions to deck watchkeeping officers in accordance with Part 3 of that section. Having regard to STCW 95, masters ought not to operate with the officer

of the navigational watch acting as sole lookout during periods of darkness and restricted visibility. Depending on the circumstances, such operation may run a serious risk of rendering the owner and master liable to prosecution under the 1997 Regulations.

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Environment, Transport and the Regions*

Safety Alert 090 issued by the Belfast Marine Office in December 2005

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During recent times the MCA has been paying attention to an increasing amount of collisions at sea involving fishing vessels and other traffic. The purpose of this **Safety Advice Notice** is to draw particular attention to the responsibility of Owners and Skippers of Fishing Vessels in relation to the **Merchant Shipping Notice No. 1781 : The Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996**

The MCA would like to advise specific adherence to Rule 5 of the above Regulations:

### **Rule 5 Look-out**

**Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight as well as by hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.**

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is responsible throughout the UK for implementing the Government's maritime safety policy. That includes co-ordinating search and rescue at sea by Her Majesty's Coastguard and checking that ships meet UK and international safety rules. We work to prevent the loss of lives at the coast and at sea, to ensure that ships are safe and to prevent coastal pollution. We are putting increasing effort into prevention work and a measure of our success is when accidents do not happen, or where we intervene to minimise their impact.