

Marine Guidance Notice (MGN) 265 (F)

Fishing Vessels: The Hazards Associated with Trawling, Including Beam Trawling and Scallop Dredging, Notice to all Owners, Operators, Skippers, Crews, Managers, Gear Fitters, Ship Builders and Designers

Fishing Vessels: The Hazards Associated with Trawling, Including Beam Trawling and Scallop Dredging

Notice to all Owners, Operators, Skippers, Crews, Managers, Gear Fitters, Shipbuilders and Designers.

This notice supersedes MGN181 (F)

Summary

- Provides guidance on the safe operation of fishing vessels engaged in trawling.
- Provides specific guidance on the safe operation of fishing vessels engaged in twin beam trawling, including scallop dredging with derricks or booms. Some of the risks identified for beam trawlers may also be applicable for other fishing vessels or fishing techniques that have similar characteristics.

1. THE DANGERS OF TRAWLING

- 1.1 The nature of trawling, especially beam trawling can result in serious accidents occurring at sea. Analysis of casualty data has shown that human error, failure of equipment, snagging of gear and loss of stability are recurring factors.
- 1.2 This notice provides general advice on safety matters related to the operation of fishing vessels. It is the responsibility of the owner and skipper to ensure that all procedures in use whilst fishing are suitable for the vessel, its equipment and its mode of fishing.
- 1.3 A video, 'Level Headed' looking at the risks involved in beam trawling is available from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

2. BEFORE GOING TO SEA...

Knowing the vessel

- 2.1 The skipper should ensure that only persons who are fully experienced in handling the vessel and competent in its fishing methods are on watch. All watch keepers and engineers should be aware of conditions that can reduce the stability reserves of the vessel including the use of fuel, stowage of fish and the effects of entrapped water when scuppers are restricted by debris or gear.
- 2.2 All crewmembers should be made aware of the procedures to follow in the event of an emergency, these should include the closing of weathertight doors and hatches to spaces which are needed to maintain the stability of the vessel. They should be made aware of the location and correct operation of all safety related equipment on board the vessel.

3. WHILST AT SEA...

3.1 Loose gear should be restrained or secured. In particular, booms, beams, nets, trawl doors and attached chains should always be securely lashed when not in use, even in fine weather. This safe working practice also helps to prevent inadvertent loss of gear, injuries to crew and the blockage of freeing ports and scuppers due to loose gear on deck.

3.2 Weathertight doors and hatches should be kept closed at sea when not in use. This reduces the number of vital tasks that need to be completed in the event of an emergency. They should not be left open to assist in ventilation. Inadequate ventilation should be rectified by improvements to the ventilation system. If possible, openings for winches or winch wires should be positioned well above the weather deck

4. WHEN SHOOTING AND RECOVERING GEAR...

4.1 Crew working on deck should be aware of the dangers of equipment failure and the simple precautions they may take to avoid injury. These include keeping out of the bights of ropes and keeping away from working machinery unless directly involved in its operation.

4.2 Sudden rolling of the vessel followed by a heavy list may arise when hauling or towing equipment fails or a load is lost from one side. This may happen whilst clearing sand, stone or weed from a trawl that is clear of the seabed.

4.3 Methods of restraining the net prior to release should not cause crew members to become fouled in bights of lifting ropes which are too stout to be made up on cleats. Sharp course alterations should be avoided whilst lifting the cod end.

4.4 On vessels where the winch controls are on deck, care should be taken to ensure good communications are maintained between the skipper and the winch operator, especially if the skipper has only a restricted view of the winch operator. This is particularly important on smaller vessels with powerful winches where there may be less time to react to a dangerous situation.

If problems occur the load should be lowered as quickly and safely as possible to the deck or onto the seabed.

4.5 Be aware of the additional risk from use of dog-clutch type winches. Dog-clutch winches should always be de-clutched when fishing.

5. WHEN RECOVERING FOULED OR FASTENED GEAR

5.1 Recovery of fouled gear can impose extra loads on wires and machinery, particularly in adverse weather conditions. Failure of either may result in excessive rolling or a dangerous list to the vessel.

5.2 The vessel's stability reserves may be seriously reduced when hauling on fouled gear with the winches working hard. Additionally winches should not be braked and used in conjunction with a vessel's motions to free fouled gear, a heavier than normal swell may be sufficient to bring about the vessel's capsize in this condition. Dog-clutch winches are particularly hazardous in these circumstances.

5.3 Unusual or potentially dangerous operations should always be carried out under the supervision of the skipper.

5.4 There should be an emergency means for the fast release of snagged gear.

6. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR BEAM TRAWLING

6.1 A recent study undertaken with the co-operation of the fishing industry has emphasised the particular risks of beam trawling. Appropriate precautions should be taken to ensure safe fishing. The study emphasised a number of other important safety issues.

6.2 Even with the increased stability reserves that are required for beam trawlers, the vessel's stability may not be adequate in some sea conditions when recovering the fishing gear and catch with the derricks raised.

- 6.3 No beam trawler should be operated without experienced crew in charge of the vessel and in control of the winch.
- 6.4 All winch operators should be fully trained and experienced.
- 6.5 The skipper's understanding of how stability is affected during fishing operations can be enhanced by the ready availability, in the wheelhouse, of simplified stability information.
- 6.6 A beam trawler at sea with gear deployed can behave differently to vessels using other fishing methods. The fishing gear has a damping effect on the roll of the vessel. This damping effect masks the signs that indicate the vessel's true stability state. A long roll period indicates reduced stability.

Risk Assessment

- 6.7 A thorough safety risk assessment should be carried out before fishing operations are commenced. The Seafish safety folder includes a risk assessment questionnaire that is excellent for this purpose. Guidance on carrying out risk assessment is also contained in Marine Guidance Note 20 (M+F). The following points are relevant to the particular risks associated with beam trawlers:
 - Crew fully trained and experienced in beam trawler methods and familiar with the vessel and its operation.
 - Bridge control of winches to include warp and topping lift as well as control of the engines.
 - Bridge control or a suitable method for the release or lowering of derrick head blocks. This will enable controlled lowering of the point of suspension of the load from the head of the derrick down to the shoulder block. This can prevent a dangerous list or capsize occurring if the gear picks up an abnormal load.
 - Warp-tension monitoring equipment.
 - Sounding equipment that can reduce the possibility of the trawl picking up excess loads of sand and shells or snagging an obstruction on the bottom.
 - Past experience of safe working with gear of similar sizes and weight.
 - Particular care when working on fishing grounds where the features of the sea bed are not known.

- Past experience of safe working with a vessel whose structure, weight distribution and stability characteristics are substantially unchanged.
- Avoiding the use of systems with dogclutch winches. These winches often take considerable time to de-clutch and re-clutch preventing a rapid response to sudden load changes. Operators should be aware of these additional risks. Dogclutch winches should be de-clutched when trawling.

What the owner should do

- 6.8 Owners should note that possession of approved stability is no guarantee of satisfactory stability during fishing operations. An assessment of safety for beam trawling should be based on three principles:

History - Generally a beam trawler will continue to operate safely if it has a history of safe operation and its operating profile remains substantially unchanged. This includes factors such as the vessel's characteristics, its gear, the fishing grounds, its crew and the worst weather conditions in which the vessel operates.

Stability - On vessels newly acquired, or after structural alterations, or before working with a new arrangement of fishing gear, or on new vessels, an appraisal should be made of the vessel's stability during fishing operations. Such information should supplement the relevant sailing conditions that are contained in the approved stability book. For normal fishing operations the worst case is generally shown to be when the vessel is recovering her gear and catch.

Control - Control generally means control of winches in addition to engines and helm. A skipper's ability to respond and the speed of response is enhanced by full and immediate access to these separate controls.

General Operations

- 6.9 Every effort should be made to avoid an excessive list by ensuring uneven loads are kept to a minimum during recovery of the gear.
- 6.10 When hauling on snagged gear, this should ideally be carried out with the warp load acting as low and as close to the vessel's side as is possible and not from the derrick head.
- 6.11 Generally, when gear is stuck fast on an obstruction such as a rock or wreck, the vessel is stopped and hauled back over the obstruction. It is possible that the gear on the free side may be raised to act as a counterbalance to the snagged gear however this is a dangerous operation and capsizing may occur if the snagged gear is suddenly released. All crew members should be advised when gear recovery operations commence and when they are completed. During recovery, they should be on deck with their lifejackets.
- 6.12 Great care should be exercised during adverse weather conditions or where there is a significant swell or tidal current. These conditions can impose a sudden increase in the loads that the trawl warps exert on the vessel.
- 6.13 Vessels sometimes pick up excess loads of sand, rocks, shells, weed or man-made debris from the seabed. Without warp-tension monitoring equipment it can be difficult to detect excess loads on the gear. Subtle indications may come from extra strain on the winch, changes in vessel handling or steering or from increased engine exhaust temperatures.
- 6.14 For beam trawlers, the use of a "weak link" near to the cod end can increase the chances of capsizing during trawling or gear recovery operations. The problem will arise if a "weak link" parts in one of the trawls when both trawls are laden and at or near the sea surface. The condition of these weak links is therefore very important and these should be inspected whenever the nets are onboard. Care should be taken when cleaning heavy debris from nets and all crew members should be advised whenever an abnormal load has been trawled. In this situation they should be on deck with their lifejackets. Both trawls should have a freefall quick release.
- 6.15 Experienced skippers apply a range of methods to clear fouled gear of debris however care should be taken when raising heavy loads as this can have serious effects on the stability of the vessel. A vessel's centre of gravity rises proportionally to the magnitude of the weight that is being lifted and the vertical positioning of the derrick head lifting block. Vessels become less stable as the centre of gravity is raised so if there are any doubts about the ability of the vessel to raise a load safely, then the lift should not be attempted.
- 6.16 It is important that all weathertight doors and hatches are closed and freeing ports are checked free and clear, before the recovery operation takes place. Unless this is done and if the vessel heels suddenly, it is possible that water may downflood into the hull and this, if unchecked, will invariably lead to capsizing and the loss of the vessel.
- 6.17 If snagged gear cannot be freed without hazarding the vessel, the safe course of action is to release the gear, mark it with a buoy and leave it until conditions improve or a more capable vessel can recover it.
- 6.18 All those involved in the catching operation should fully understand their role and be familiar with the equipment that is in use.

Experience and Training

- 6.19 It is essential that all crew members are aware of the particular risks of beam trawling. Special training by experienced beam trawler fishermen is necessary, the crew should have time to become accustomed to the work and equipment and be supervised whilst fishing is being undertaken.

Stability Information

- 6.20 It is recommended that the weights and positions of fishing gear and the lengths of beams and derricks should be recorded in all future revisions of beam trawler

stability information. Changes in fishing gear can have significant and detrimental effects on a vessel's stability and unless such changes are investigated their effects will remain unknown.

Further information on the contents of this Notice can be obtained from:

Fishing Safety Branch
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Spring Place
105 Commercial Road
SO15 1EG

Telephone: 023 8032 9130
Fax: 023 8032 9173

General Enquiries: 24 Hour Info Line
infoline@mcga.gov.uk
0870 600 6505

MCA Website Address: Internet:
<http://www.mcga.gov.uk>

File Ref: MS 088/001/00426

Published: 04/2004

© Crown Copyright 2004

Safer Lives, Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas

Department for
Transport

The MCA is an executive agency
of the Department for Transport