

SYNOPSIS



At 1205BST on 8 September 2005, while operating in Weymouth Bay, the skipper of the fishing vessel *Blue Sinata* made a request for lifeboat assistance on VHF Channel 16. The position he gave was imprecise. Shortly after this call, the vessel sank. Portland Coastguard responded and tasked various search and rescue units. Two of those on board *Blue Sinata* managed to clear the sinking vessel and were safely recovered but the third, the skipper, went down with his boat and was drowned.

The vessel was recovered by MAIB in order to find the cause of sinking. Damage was found on the vessel's starboard quarter that allowed water to enter the hull under conditions of limited freeboard. At the time of her loss, the vessel was operating with greater than normal weights on deck, in the form of water tanks to hold live catch. This weight reduced the freeboard sufficiently to allow flooding through the damaged area of hull.

It is not certain when the hull damage occurred. Because protective rubber matting largely covered the area of damage, it was obscured to the casual observer and might have been present for some time, becoming critical only when freeboard was reduced by extra weight.

Apart from the skipper, the vessel carried two others (a man and a woman) who are considered to have had the status of passengers. Although *Blue Sinata* normally operated, and had been inspected, under the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels, on the day of her loss she was on charter to perform tasks that were not usual for a commercial fishing vessel: to catch undersized fish under a dispensation from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The carriage of passengers and the service provided indicate the vessel should have been operating under the MCA's Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Workboats and Pilot boats (workboat code).

The workboat code demands significantly higher standards of construction, inspection, maintenance and operation. Had *Blue Sinata* met the standards of the workboat code, there is every likelihood she would not have foundered. Had she still done so, the workboat code requirements for better watertight integrity, increased pumping capacity, and a liferaft, would have increased the crew's chances of surviving the event.

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs is recommended to require, with any application for a dispensation to catch undersized fish, the submission of evidence that any vessel named in such a dispensation has safety certification as required by the MCA.

The MCA is recommended to advise The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs of the safety certification that would be acceptable for a vessel catching undersized fish under a dispensation issued by them.