

SYNOPSIS



(All times are UTC + 1)

At about 0150 on 10 July 2005, the leisure powerboat *Sea Snake* crashed at high speed into a low cliff near the entrance to Tarbert's inner harbour. As a result, three people lost their lives and three others were seriously injured.

The previous day, four married couples, including the owner, left Holy Loch marina on board *Sea Snake* and travelled to Tarbert, Loch Fyne. After the boat had been berthed in the inner harbour, the four couples had an evening meal in a hotel. During the meal, they agreed to visit Stonefield Castle by boat later that night.

At about 0045, three of the couples left the hotel to board the boat, while the fourth couple retired to their hotel room. They boarded *Sea Snake* and left the harbour, and were seen by a yachtsman to be driving competently, keeping to the recognised route out of the harbour. The navigation lights were on and there was laughter from those onboard. There was little wind, the visibility was good and it was a moonless night.

Sea Snake travelled to Stonefield Castle, where the couples stopped to view it. However, in the darkness there was little to see, so they reversed out of the inlet and made passage to return to Tarbert. The sea was calm, and with the boat at high speed the party sheltered from the cold in the cockpit.

Later, the same yachtsman observed a high speed boat travelling south in Loch Fyne, turn into the restricted navigational area of the outer harbour, and then head towards the inner harbour. The yachtsman lost sight of the boat, but shortly afterwards heard a crash. He notified the emergency services, and he and his crew quickly headed for the site of the accident. The yachtsman helped two of the injured people from *Sea Snake* onto his yacht, and local men, police officers and the coastguard soon arrived to assist with the rescue operation. As *Sea Snake* was badly damaged, taking water, and in danger of foundering, she was towed to a ferry slipway near by.

The emergency services arrived at the slipway and found that of the four apparently unconscious people on board, three were dead, including the experienced helmsman.

Post-accident examinations revealed no mechanical faults on *Sea Snake*; the environmental conditions were good; there were no other vessels moving in the area; and the navigational aids marking the entrance were clear. The powerboat had been travelling at high speed and, as it approached the inner harbour, for some reason the helmsman made a turn to starboard and the boat crashed into the rocky shoreline. The impact caused extensive damage to the forefoot of the power boat, also causing the occupants to be thrown forward, with the three in the front of the cockpit suffering fatal injuries as a result.

The postmortem examination toxicology tests on the bodies of the helmsmen, showed that both were nearly 2½ times over the drink-driving limit for motor vehicles.

The MAIB investigation highlighted several contributing factors, including:

- The combination of the effects of fatigue and excessive alcohol consumption was most likely the principal factor contributing to this accident.
- The driver of the powerboat probably became unsure and confused by the navigation marks leading to the inner harbour, and decided to turn *Sea Snake* around to starboard and make another approach.
- The powerboat was being operated at an unsafe speed for the location and prevailing conditions.
- There is little effective legislation in the UK to limit the consumption of alcohol when operating leisure boats. The Tarbert Harbour Authority Bye-Laws did not include any reference to the navigation of a vessel when under the influence of drink or drugs.

The only recommendation that would be appropriate as a consequence of this investigation is identical to a recommendation made in the recent MAIB *Carrie Kate* and *Kets* investigation report, therefore repetition of the recommendation in this report is not necessary (see Section 4).



View of a Pro-Line Powerboat