

SYNOPSIS



At about 0930 on 23 May 2005, the small fishing vessel *Bounty* capsized and sank in Lyme Bay. The vessel had her trawl caught on a seabed obstruction at the time. The two crew members found themselves in the water, with lifebuoys, but were able to board the vessel's liferaft and were rescued about 5 hours later.

Bounty had departed Brixham earlier that morning for a day of bottom trawling. The weather was initially fine, but deteriorated as the day progressed. The snagging occurred during the first trawl while the vessel was stern to the wind and sea. Engine power was used to try to free the vessel, but a wave broke over the stern and swamped the working deck. The floodwater was trapped within the vessel's shelter and did not have time to clear through her freeing ports. The vessel listed to port and then wallowed for about 20 seconds before capsizing.

The crewman, who was at the stern, jumped overboard as the vessel listed to port. The skipper, who was at the forward end of the working deck, thought about retrieving lifejackets from the wheelhouse, but decided there wasn't time and evacuated through a hatch in the starboard side of the shelter as *Bounty* was capsizing.

Bounty inverted fully and then sank by the stern. Two lifebuoys floated clear and the crew used these as buoyancy until the liferaft surfaced and inflated. The two survivors boarded the liferaft, and although only about 4 miles from shore, they had to wait nearly 5 hours, until 1428, before they were seen and rescued by the crew of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel *Black Rover*. The survivors were subsequently landed ashore at Portland.

There are currently no minimum requirements for stability, freeboard and loading of small fishing vessels. *Bounty* had inadequate freeboard. The lack of freeboard, and the consequent lack of buoyancy aft, were contributory in causing the wave to break over the stern. The lack of suitable minimum freeboard requirements has been recognised in numerous accidents previously investigated by MAIB and, consequently, action is already being taken to improve regulation in this respect.

Bounty had been built at about the time of the introduction of the MCA's Small Fishing Vessel Code and the Seafish Construction Standards of 2001. The Code required compliance with Seafish standards, but only regarding the construction of the hull. Seafish standards for outfit are only recommendatory. The freeing ports on *Bounty* were of inadequate size and did not meet the current Seafish minimum standard. However, freeing ports are considered part of the outfit, and therefore the minimum standard was not compulsory. In any case, the MAIB believes the existing minimum standards for freeing ports are insufficient where an enclosed shelter is fitted, and a recommendation has been directed to Seafish in this respect.

The benefit of carrying a liferaft was graphically demonstrated in this case as it almost certainly saved two lives. The owner/skipper was not obliged to carry one; the fact that he did, showed a good attitude to safety. The value of liferafts on small fishing vessels has already been recognised, and their free issue by various branches of government is currently being arranged. MAIB fully supports these initiatives.

During the investigation, MAIB discovered *Bounty* had not been inspected by the MCA until more than 3 years after she had been built, shortly before the vessel was sold on to new owners. MAIB believes it would be beneficial if all new small fishing vessels are inspected before entering service. A recommendation has been made to the MCA in this respect.