

SYNOPSIS



At 0637 UTC on 26 April 2004, MRSC Stornoway received a “Mayday” mobile telephone call from the skipper of the fv *Kingfisher II*. The report indicated the vessel was suffering an engine room fire, off the east coast of North Uist.

Kingfisher II sailed from Stockinish at 0100 on 26 April 2004 to recover her 5 fleets of 90 creels each, off North Uist, and re-shoot them in the South Minch area. Four of the fleets had been recovered and, at about 0635, *Kingfisher II* was steaming at 7 knots to pick up the final fleet. A crew member then

reported to the skipper that there was smoke passing through the bulkhead separating the engine room from the accommodation area.

The skipper opened the engine room hatch situated in the wheelhouse. He was immediately confronted by thick acrid smoke but, before closing the hatch again, he did notice an intense glow in the vicinity of the after bulkhead. There was no time to attack the fire, or to report the incident to the coastguard using the VHF radio, because the wheelhouse rapidly filled with smoke, making it untenable. The skipper ordered the crew onto the upper deck. The two crew left the accommodation area, but did not close the hatch. This allowed smoke to continue to enter the wheelhouse. Unclear of the extent of the fire, the skipper ordered the liferaft to be launched. He then attempted to enter the wheelhouse to contact the coastguard by VHF radio, but was prevented from doing so by the intense heat and thick smoke. Realising the fire was beyond his control, the skipper alerted the MRSC using his mobile telephone, stating that the crew were about to enter the liferaft.

A “Mayday” Relay broadcast was initiated by the MRSC. The Barra lifeboat was paged and the coastguard rescue helicopter, G-BIMA, was scrambled. A number of fishing vessels responded to the “Mayday” Relay. The fv *My Girl’s Jill* was nearest, arriving on scene at 0715. She immediately recovered *Kingfisher II*’s crew and liferaft. The crew were shocked, but uninjured.

My Girl’s Jill later went alongside *Kingfisher II* and attempted to fight the fire using her deck wash facilities, but this was soon abandoned. A tow was connected and *Kingfisher II* was towed towards Kallin Harbour, Grimsay, with the helicopter acting as escort. Once outside the harbour, the Barra lifeboat brought *Kingfisher II* alongside for berthing operations, and the helicopter was released. *Kingfisher II* was met by the Highlands and Islands fire brigade, who conducted “dampening down operations” and made the vessel safe.

The fire was probably caused by an electrical defect, which ignited cable insulation, the wooden after bulkhead and the main electrical distribution panel. The area behind the panel was completely destroyed, and there was smoke damage in the engine room, accommodation area and wheelhouse.

Recommendations centre on amendments to the Fishing Vessel Code of Practice for vessels under 12 metres in length, stowage of emergency equipment, and the conduct of risk assessments.