SYNOPSIS

On 7 July 2002, the Belgian beam trawler *Flamingo* sank just inside UK waters to the east of Harwich. Her crew of four was lost.

That evening, she had been fishing in the company of three other Belgian trawlers but, at 2253, Thames Coastguard was informed of an EPIRB alert from the vessel. She could not be contacted and a search and rescue operation began immediately.

Flamingo's upturned hull was located, and the bodies of two of the four crew members were picked up. Neither was wearing a lifejacket.

The hull drifted with the tide until the following afternoon, when it was attempted to tow her towards a nearby sandbank, with the intention of beaching her. She sank shortly after the tow began.

A Belgian wreck recovery vessel raised *Flamingo* on 14 July, and she was taken to Zeebrugge, where the MAIB and the Belgian authorities examined her. The two missing crew members were not found.

The nets were being cleaned before the catch was brought on board. However, a weight of rocks and shells in the portside net caused it to break at a "weak link". This raised the vessel's centre of gravity, reduced her stability, and she capsized as a result.

There are indications that the vessel might not have capsized immediately, but remained with a large angle of heel for a short period of time. These indications include the EPIRB being manually activated, and the liferaft painter possibly having been manually released.

This tragic accident highlights the inherent dangers associated with beam trawling and the adverse effect on stability when operating fishing gear with derricks raised above the horizontal towing position.

It also illustrates the need for working-type lifejackets to be worn whenever crew members are working on deck. Doing so, might have saved the lives of *Flamingo*'s crew.

Recommendations have been made with regard to the wearing of lifejackets on the deck of fishing vessels, the risks to stability when operating beam trawlers, the effectiveness of quick release gear in preventing capsize, and the inherent dangers of the design of the "weak link".