

SYNOPSIS



Tullaghmurry Lass was a 10.02 metre registered length fishing vessel, of wood construction, operated as a prawn trawler out of Kilkeel, Northern Ireland. At 0340 on the morning of 14 February 2002, she left Kilkeel for a day fishing trip with three people on board. One of these was a child of 8 years of age.

Efforts to contact the vessel later that morning failed, and she was not seen during the remainder of the day. Members of the owner's family alerted the coastguard to the vessel being overdue at 0439 on the morning of 15 February, and a search and rescue (SAR) operation began.

The search was unsuccessful in finding the vessel, or any of the three people on board, and all SAR operations were terminated late afternoon on 16 February.

Subsequent underwater searches for the wreck of the vessel, by the Royal Navy and Irish Navy, were unsuccessful. Following an extensive sonar search by the Irish Fisheries Protection vessel, *Ken Vickers*, the wreck of the vessel was finally found and identified on 23 March, by a team of divers from the Police Service of Northern Ireland operating from *Ken Vickers*. The position of the wreck was about 7 miles south-east of Kilkeel, in the Irish Sea.

An underwater survey by the MAIB showed that the vessel sank because she had suffered an explosion in her cabin area, which had caused catastrophic damage to her hull and wheelhouse. Although gas has been identified as the fuel for the explosion, some uncertainty remains as to the source of the gas. A leak from the vessel's own LPG system is considered most likely.

Owners and skippers of fishing vessels are recommended to heed the advice contained in MCA's MGN 192(F) on the safe use of space heaters which use LPG.