

SYNOPSIS

All times are local (UTC +1).



At about 1032 on 10 September 2001, the 10m-long stern trawler *Sundance* capsized and foundered. The skipper, his son and a crew member were thrown into the water, and as a result the crew member died. The MAIB was notified of the accident at 1407 that day, and an investigation began immediately, carried out by MAIB inspector Captain Nick Beer.

Sundance had left Camber Dock in Portsmouth earlier in the morning to trawl popular grounds off Gilkicker Point which were unfamiliar to her skipper and crew. During her first trawl, she picked up part of a WW2 torpedo and along with it a quantity of mud and shells. The skipper was aware that a heavy load had been “caught” and he and the crew tried to recover it. They

managed to raise the net to the surface without too much difficulty but, when they tried to lift the cod end clear of the water, the weight was too much for the trawl winch. As the winch struggled to lift the cod end through a block on the “A” frame, the vessel took an increasing list to starboard. The load snagged on the starboard quarter and, with the winch’s relief valve blowing, could neither be pulled inboard, nor lowered back into the water. The situation seemed to stabilise with the vessel listed to starboard and with freeing ports on the aft starboard side probably underwater. While the crew member was cutting the net to release the unwanted load, *Sundance* encountered the wash from a passing vessel; *Sundance* rolled, took water over the starboard bulwark and rapidly capsized. The vessel stayed on the surface for only a few minutes before inverting and foundering.

The crew of a yacht witnessed the event. They quickly rescued the skipper and his son from the water and raised the alarm. Other rescue craft were on scene within a short time. The crew member, who was the co-owner of *Sundance* together with the skipper, was discovered floating face-down in the water. A rescue helicopter airlifted the injured man to hospital but, despite continuous attempts to resuscitate him, he was eventually pronounced dead. He was believed to have been a non-swimmer and he had not been wearing a lifejacket.

A combination of circumstances paved the way to the accident and, finally, when the vessel was already in a precarious position, slight wash from a passing ferry was sufficient to cause the capsizing.

The investigation has highlighted the need for skippers to have a good basic understanding of ship stability so that they are able to make informed decisions when extraordinary events occur. It also, highlights, once again, the commonsense advice for fishermen to wear lifejackets when working on the open deck, even in benign weather and sea conditions.