

SYNOPSIS



At about 0424 (UTC + 1) on 24 July 2001, the crabber, *Our Nicholas*, grounded near the entrance to Stornoway harbour. The vessel foundered quickly and the four crew members were rescued by two passing fishing vessels.

Our Nicholas arrived at Uig at about 1600 on 23 July 2001. The crew members discharged the catch into transport lorries and loaded 2 tonnes of bait. This took them until 2200. All the crew then went to a local public house. They returned on board at about 2300 and immediately set sail for Stornoway. After they left port, the crew had a meal. One of the three deckhands turned in and the other two remained in the wheelhouse with the skipper. After the vessel had passed the Shiant Islands,

the skipper handed over the watch to the deckhands and then went to bed. He gave the deckhands instructions to call him at the last waypoint, which was off the entrance to Stornoway harbour, so that he could take the vessel in.

The skipper was woken by a loud noise. He went to the wheelhouse and found that the vessel had gone aground underneath some cliffs. Immediately, he placed the engine astern and the vessel moved into deeper water. However, the damage was so severe that the vessel began to sink rapidly. The crew abandoned the vessel. Three of them clung to a buoy while the fourth drifted away and became caught in some ropes. Two passing fishing vessels had witnessed the grounding and soon were able to rescue *Our Nicholas's* crew from the sea. They were taken ashore and to hospital, where one of them was detained for observation because he had swallowed seawater.

Although the hydrostatic release unit (HRU) had released the liferaft, the liferaft did not inflate properly and remained inside its canister. The EPIRB was similarly released from the vessel and its 406MHz transmission alerted a geostationary satellite, but not the polar-orbiting satellites. However, polar-orbiting satellites received the EPIRB's 121.5MHz transmissions and approximate positions were derived.

The cause of the grounding was that both of the deckhands on watch fell asleep and allowed the vessel to continue on passage, unmonitored, until she went aground. The cause of the foundering was that the vessel was taken astern off the grounding site into deeper water, and the damage was so severe that she sank very quickly.

Other findings include a pin in the EPIRB not to have been soldered in place during manufacture, causing the 406MHz beacon to be under-powered. The liferaft's inflation gas pressure was not sufficient to release the liferaft from its canister probably because of a previously undetected leakage.

Safety recommendations have been addressed to the owners with regard to keeping a safe navigational watch, installing a watch alarm and regularly testing EPIRBs on any vessels they own, now and in the future.