

SYNOPSIS

At 1238 BST on 2 April 2000, Stornoway Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre (MRSC) sent a facsimile to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB). This stated that two crewmembers from the fishing vessel *Astra II*, SY153 had been reported missing, and their bodies had been recovered by search and rescue (SAR) units. The following day the MAIB began an investigation.

Astra II is a 16.4m wooden fishing vessel operated out of Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, by her owner/skipper.

During the afternoon of 1 April 2000, the vessel was fishing off the west coast of the Isle of Skye. When the weather conditions began to deteriorate, the decision was made to seek shelter in Loch Harport, Isle of Skye.

Six other fishing vessels had also decided on similar action, and were already tied up alongside each other at Carbost pier. *Astra II* arrived at 1930, and berthed outboard of the other vessels.

Astra II's crew tidied their vessel, had a meal and then headed ashore for the evening. By 2200 they were all in a bar ashore, remaining there until some time between 2400 and 0115, (probably closer to 0115).

Having consumed varying quantities of alcohol, they left the bar together and walked the quarter of a mile back to the pier. They needed to climb over the six other vessels to reach *Astra II*. It was dark and there was no artificial lighting. Two of the crew were heard to fall into the water. One was seen briefly but he could not be recovered.

A call for assistance was made to the coastguard on VHF channel 16. SAR operations began at 0221 using Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) lifeboats, a rescue helicopter, a coastguard coastal search team and police. The bodies of the two men were recovered after daybreak.

The effects of alcohol on co-ordination, risk perception and decision-making, together with lack of lighting and slippery wet surfaces are considered to have contributed to this accident.

No recommendations are made.