

SYNOPSIS

At 2251 on 8 January 2000 the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) was informed that *Harbour Lights* was overdue and a search for her had begun off the south coast of Cornwall. An investigation, conducted by MAIB inspector Richard Barwick, began two days later, after wreckage had been found.

Harbour Lights was a 7.2m in length, glass reinforced plastic (GRP) gill netter. Based in Polperro, Cornwall, she fished the area to the south of the port. She was also used for passenger sightseeing trips and taking out diving parties. The owner and skipper, Mr Daniel Kebble, was an experienced young fisherman who had undertaken all the basic safety training courses. Both he and *Harbour Lights* were licensed by the local council to undertake these activities.

Mr Kebble was fishing single-handedly from *Harbour Lights*, about a mile south of Polperro. While deploying the last gill net, he fell overboard. The vessel continued on until it hit rocks and broke up just east of Downend Point, about a half a mile east of Polperro. During the day Mr Kebble had caught about 190kg (30 stone) of fish.

An extensive search operation began at 1911, shortly after *Harbour Lights* became overdue. This continued for the rest of the evening, throughout the night, and most of the next day. The search involved a helicopter, lifeboats, about 30 fishing vessels, a police diving unit, and coastguard teams working along the shore. Flotsam and wreckage from *Harbour Lights* were recovered but, at the time of writing this report, the body of Mr Kebble was still missing.

Mr Kebble did not normally wear a lifejacket. Had he been wearing one at the time of the accident, his chances of survival would have increased substantially. The non-wearing of lifejackets is a common feature in the loss of fishermen. This tragic accident spurred the harbourmaster of Polperro, and Mr Kebble's father, to organise a lifejacket campaign in the area, which resulted in the local chandler selling out of lifejackets. The MAIB strongly supports this sort of initiative; if it were followed throughout the country, the chances are there would be a reduction in the number of fishermen lost.

A recommendation has been addressed to the training section of the Sea Fish Industry Authority emphasising the importance of wearing lifejackets and carrying waterproof portable VHF sets on fishing vessels operated single-handedly. If such fishermen fall overboard the lifejacket will keep them afloat and the radio will enable them to summon help, thus enhancing their chances of survival.