

SYNOPSIS

(all times are UTC)

On 1 October 1999, an accident occurred off the Isles of Scilly, involving the grounding and subsequent loss of a fishing vessel, resulting in one fatality. The next day HM coastguard notified the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB). After gaining further information, MAIB inspectors, Captain Nick Beer and Mr Richard Barwick began an investigation.

The fishing vessel *Rachel Harvey* had been heading for St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, in poor weather and was approaching the eastern end of St Mary's Sound with six people on board.

The sole watchkeeper was navigating using a track control system that had been fitted in December 1998 and had been used extensively since. The system interfaced a Global Positioning System (GPS) navigator with the autopilot and enabled the autopilot to steer so as to maintain the vessel on a selected track.

The video plotter was not being used for navigation, and neither the intended track nor the vessel's position was plotted on the chart. The watchkeeper did not understand how the interface functioned, and tried to alter course using the autopilot's course setting knob while the interface was connected. The system did not allow it.

The vessel grounded on Peninnis Head, and foundered within two or three minutes. One of the crew lost his life. Due to a lack of substantive evidence it is impossible to come to a firm conclusion on the reasons why use of the track control system failed to ensure the vessel remained in safe water. However, irrespective of the reason why she did not track as planned, the fact that the position of the vessel was not closely monitored, by plotting on the chart or by use of the video plotter, meant that the failure went undiscovered. This fundamental shortfall in the vessel's navigational management was the principal causal factor in the grounding.

Recommendations are directed at improving safety and navigational training on board fishing vessels.