

SYNOPSIS

The accident was reported to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch on the evening of 6 August 1999. The investigation began the following day and an inspector interviewed the crew in Peterhead on 12 August 1999.

Radiant Star III, a traditional wooden fishing vessel of 24m registered length, left Peterhead with her partner vessel *Constant Faith* on a pair trawling trip at 1130 on 6 August 1999. After they had travelled about 30 miles it was realised that the record of propeller settings for both vessels could not be found (**Figure 1**). The skipper decided that as the weather was favourable, they should continue on to the fishing grounds some 60 miles north-east of Fraserburgh, and carry out a towing test for the propeller settings there.

As *Radiant Star III* manoeuvred close to the stern of *Constant Faith* to pick up the towing warp, the two vessels touched lightly. Nothing was thought of this slight contact and the test began. Twenty minutes later the lights in the galley on *Radiant Star III* began to dim. The driver went down into the engine room to investigate and found it flooding rapidly.

The cause of the flooding was found to be at least one broken plank on the port side of the hull. The leak could not be stopped and the pumps could not cope with the rate of flooding. The coastguard was informed and a request made for assistance. As a precaution, the crew were transferred to the partner vessel, leaving the skipper and mate on board *Radiant Star III*. It soon became apparent that the vessel would sink before help arrived, so the skipper and mate were also taken off.

After *Radiant Star III* sank, her Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) floated to the surface and was recovered, but the liferafts did not appear. An underwater survey by Shell UK Exploration revealed that the port liferaft container was unopen and lying against the guardrails; the starboard liferaft was not seen.

It has been concluded that the contact between *Radiant Star III* and her partner vessel, *Constant Faith*, probably broke an already weakened plank in the hull of *Radiant Star III*, resulting in uncontrollable flooding. Contributory factors were: a lack of preparation for the pair trawling operation; the skipper's unfamiliarity in manoeuvring this particular fishing vessel; and the non-watertight, aft boundary to the engine room.

The MAIB makes no recommendations.