

# Synopsis

In a telex to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB), at 0130, 18 November 1997, Falmouth Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) reported they had broadcast requests for information on the fishing vessel *Margaretha Maria*. The incident was re-classified as a “Mayday” and, following an unsuccessful search for the vessel, MAIB opened an inquiry late on 18 November.

*Margaretha Maria* was a 21.54 metre twin beam trawler, operated out of Newlyn, Cornwall, by a properly certificated and experienced crew of four. The vessel carried all mandatory safety equipment and had a valid United Kingdom Fishing Vessel (UKFV) Certificate. The vessel left Newlyn at 1630 on 11 November 1997. Apart from telephone calls made by the crew that evening, there was no further contact with the vessel. A Search and Rescue (SAR) operation began on 18 November, and covered a large area of the western approaches to the English Channel. No sign of the vessel, associated debris, or her crew was found. SAR operations were terminated on 20 November.

A body was recovered in fishing grounds about 50 miles south-west-by-south of Lizard Point on 11 February 1998. It was later identified as that of Robert Holmes, skipper of *Margaretha Maria*. Following a request to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for assistance in locating the vessel, HMS *Cromer* located the wreck of *Margaretha Maria* on 17 March, about five miles from the position where the skipper’s body was recovered.

The wreck was surveyed twice during 1998. Once in April, by a team commissioned by families of the crew, and once by the MAIB in June. Analysis of the surveys’ results, stability assessments and consideration of other material formed the basis of the inquiry.

The inquiry concludes that the vessel capsized, flooded aft and sank by the stern. Capsize was most probably due to the derricks being topped while large weights of shells and sand were in the nets. This reduced the vessel’s stability sufficiently to induce the capsize. The accident occurred at a time unknown between 11 and 17 November 1997. None of the crew survived. Liferafts and the Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) failed to surface and function as intended.

In particular, this inquiry has revealed that the stability of beam trawlers may be substantially reduced by normal operational movements of derricks and fishing gear. Assessment of this effect is not required by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) before a UKFV Certificate is issued.

Recommendations have been made on vessel reporting systems, stability standards of beam trawlers, positioning of EPIRBs and publicising the potential dangers of using high capacity winches on beam trawlers.