

# MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

## FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

### *Shark*: MAJOR FIRE



Figure 1

On 19 January 2008, a fire broke out on board the 33 metre, UK registered fishing vessel *Shark*, which at the time was engaged in long-line fishing approximately 74 miles west-north-west of Malin Head, Ireland. Initial attempts by the crew to fight the fire were hampered by a loss of fire-fighting water when electrical supplies were burnt through and because the emergency fire pump was defective. The emergency services were eventually called and a lifeboat, rescue helicopter, patrol aircraft and an Irish naval patrol vessel responded. A fire party from the patrol vessel subsequently extinguished the fire and *Shark* was then escorted to Killybegs, where she berthed the following day. Fortunately there were no injuries to the crew, however the vessel's accommodation suffered extensive fire damage (**Figure 1**).

### *Royalist*: FOUNDERING



On 23 January 2008 *Royalist*, a 36 metre UK registered fishing vessel, flooded and sank during fishing operations when approximately 180nm off Dingle, Ireland. *Royalist* was about to shoot her nets when she was hit by a large wave on her port side, which caused her to heel to starboard. The vessel was starting to return to the upright when she was hit by a second wave. She immediately took on a permanent list due to the amount of water which had accumulated on her main working deck and within an accommodation alleyway. The list increased as water continued to wash over the vessel's submerged starboard gunwale in way of an open net hatch, and was able to progress into the accommodation and engine room via an open weathertight door. Although the crew attempted to stem the flow of water by closing the net hatch, the vessel started to sink.

The skipper sent distress messages on Inmarsat C and VHF radio. He also ordered his crew to don immersion suits and abandon the vessel. About 50 minutes later, *Royalist's* 18 crew were recovered from her two liferafts by another vessel fishing nearby. *Royalist* sank by her stern shortly afterwards.

## The Lessons

Luckily there were no serious injuries resulting from either of these accidents. However, one of the vessels was lost and the other seriously damaged. A number of safety lessons have been identified which would improve safety on board fishing vessels and help to prevent similar accidents from occurring in the future. These include:

- Only properly trained crews and officers holding the appropriate qualifications should be employed.
- Mandatory emergency drills should be carried out monthly, and be properly recorded, and familiarisation training should be carried out for the benefit of new crew.
- There should be procedures to regularly maintain and test emergency safety equipment.
- Fire detection systems should always be fully functional. They should be tested regularly, especially before sailing, and defects should be repaired immediately.
- A “closed door” policy will help to prevent the spread of fire, and doors fitted with self-closing arrangements should be fully functional and should not be latched back.
- All weathertight openings must be kept closed at sea when not in use, regardless of the weather and sea conditions.
- All electrical equipment and associated cabling should be properly installed and inspected at regular intervals.
- All safety information, including signs, should be provided in a language understood by all.
- Although immersion suits are not required to be carried on board many fishing vessels, help might not always be close at hand. They are therefore key to survival when abandoning in cold environments.
- Skippers should not hesitate to alert the emergency services following a major incident; fires can spread quickly, causing a dangerous situation to become much worse. Delays can easily compromise the chances of a safe rescue.

In March 2008 the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) published the “Fisherman’s Safety Guide – A Guide to Safe Working Practices and Emergency Procedures for Fishermen” (MCA Reference: MCA/034). The guide provides useful information on fire prevention, training, drills and maintaining emergency equipment. It is available in foreign languages on application to the MCA headquarters. Owners and skippers are encouraged to request copies, which are free of charge.

Further details on the accidents and the subsequent investigations can be found in the MAIB’s investigation report, which is posted on its website:

[www.maib.gov.uk](http://www.maib.gov.uk)

Alternatively, a copy of the report will be sent on request, free of charge.

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