

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fishing vessel *St Apollo*, grounding and flooding, 24 August 2015



Narrative

At approximately 0327 on 24 August 2015, while on passage to fishing grounds, the 17m scallop dredger *St Apollo* grounded on Eilean Rubha an Ridire, a small island at the south-east entrance to the Sound of Mull. The vessel was on passage with the automatic steering engaged, and it is reported that the vessel suddenly turned unexpectedly. The wheelhouse watchkeeper reduced the engine speed and alerted the skipper who was asleep in his bunk. However, the vessel grounded before the skipper had a chance to reach the wheelhouse.

The skipper and crew quickly mustered, donned lifejackets and determined that there was no water ingress. The coastguard was also informed. Attempts to re-float *St Apollo* were unsuccessful and, as the tide fell, the vessel started to list to starboard. The crew abandoned into a liferaft and were picked up by the Oban lifeboat that was standing by. At 0505, *St Apollo* toppled onto its starboard side and remained partially submerged in shallow water. The vessel was subsequently salvaged but was beyond economic repair.

The MAIB investigation identified that:

- *St Apollo* was probably already to the north of its planned route when it turned. However, this was not noticed by the watchkeeper, who was monitoring the vessel's position using a Decca Fishmaster plotter.
- The cause of the reported loss of heading control immediately before *St Apollo*'s grounding was possibly due to the loss of heading information from a satellite compass, but this cannot be confirmed.

- Although the watchkeeper held a Seafish under 16.5m skipper's certificate, insufficient situational awareness, a lack of knowledge, experience and a low state of arousal resulted in him being unable to effectively meet the challenges he faced alone and at night in such confined waters.
- The crew's actions following *St Apollo's* grounding were well considered and timely.



Crew abandoning *St Apollo*

Safety Lessons

1. Holding a certificate of competency or completing bridge watchkeeping courses are very positive steps in improving navigational safety. However, knowledge is only one component of competency. Experience, skill and demonstrating the right attitudes and behaviours are of equal importance.
2. Disrupted sleep is part of a fisherman's lot at sea and its effect on wheelhouse watchkeepers cannot be underestimated. A watch alarm helps to keep watchkeepers awake, but low arousal is potentially just as hazardous as falling asleep. Doubling-up the watch for 'choke points' in a passage or at night helps to mitigate this risk.
3. Navigating using plotters is widespread, but this should not be done at the expense of keeping a proper lookout and using lights and buoys where they are available. Over-reliance on plotters, particularly when close to dangers, is potentially dangerous.
4. Electronic and mechanical failures can and do occur. In order to quickly identify, diagnose and react effectively, wheelhouse watchkeepers must have sufficient knowledge of the equipment to make best use of the little time that may be available to take the appropriate actions when an emergency occurs.
5. MGN 313 (F) *Keeping a safe navigational watch on fishing vessels* provides excellent advice and should be used when planning and prioritising watchkeeping arrangements.

This flyer and the MAIB's investigation report are posted on our website: www.gov.uk/maib

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