

FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fishing vessel *Enterprise* (PD147), fatal man overboard accident, 9 July 2015



Figure 1: Fishing vessel *Enterprise*

Narrative

At about 0415 on 9 July 2015, the skipper of the fishing trawler *Enterprise* (**Figure 1**), fell overboard through one of the fishing net shooting ports while repairing a fishing net. The vessel was 16nm north of Dogger Bank in the North Sea and the skipper had been standing on the cod end that was laid out on the deck astern of the net drums (**Figure 2**). He had come down from the wheelhouse to where the crew were repairing the nets and was not wearing a lifejacket, oilskins or appropriate footwear. The sea was rough and there was a north-westerly gale force wind.

When the skipper fell overboard, no one took command despite there being a nominated second skipper on *Enterprise*. This resulted in an uncoordinated rescue effort by the crew, causing delays in his recovery. The skipper was ultimately recovered, unconscious, back on board the vessel having been in the water between 30 to 40 minutes, at which point the crew were unable to resuscitate him. The skipper was pronounced dead at 0531 by a doctor ashore who was communicating with the vessel by satellite telephone.

Enterprise had been converted from a beam trawler into a twin rigged stern trawler in 2006. Following this conversion the unsafe nature of the deck-level openings created by the net shooting ports was not identified by the vessel's owners or in the vessel's risk assessment despite being clearly non-compliant with the relevant regulations requiring a minimum barrier height of 1m.

Standard practice on board was to repair the nets in the space aft of the net drums adjacent to the unguarded openings regardless of the weather conditions, even though there was sufficient space to conduct repairs forward of the net drums or on the main deck, either of which would have been safer. The crew's choice to work very close to the open ports, particularly when there were very heavy seas, exposed them to unacceptably high risks.



Figure 2: Illustration showing approximate position of the skipper just before the accident

The skipper ensured his crew followed a strict policy of wearing lifejackets while working on deck. Unfortunately, he did not adhere to this rule himself. Had he been wearing a lifejacket it is likely that he would have survived.

Safety lessons

1. Prevention is better than cure. Maintaining minimum bulwark heights, minimising exposure to unfenced openings, and adopting safe working practices can all reduce the risk of falling or being swept overboard.
2. The crew of this vessel had adopted good practice by wearing lifejackets when working on deck. Unfortunately, one lapse resulted in a fatality. Safe ways of working need to be adhered to if they are to be effective.
3. The nature of commercial fishing is such that a man overboard is an ever present risk. A lifejacket will help the person survive initial immersion in cold water and will keep them afloat. However, a well thought out and practised manoverboard recovery procedure is essential to saving the life of anyone unfortunate enough to fall or be washed overboard.
4. Regular emergency drills will ensure that, in a crisis situation, everyone knows who is in charge and that the required response is conducted in the most effective way.

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

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