MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fishing vessel, *Enterprise* (SH323), Fatal man overboard, 6 November 2017

Narrative

On 6 November 2017, a deckhand on board the 8.95m potter *Enterprise* died after becoming caught in the backrope and then being dragged overboard. He had left a 'safe zone' protected by pound boards as a fleet of pots was being shot away. As the deckhand walked forward towards the wheelhouse, his left leg was snared in a loose bight of the running backrope. The bight quickly tightened and the weight of the shooting pots dragged the deckhand through the shooting door and under the water. Another deckhand grabbed the backrope, but he was unable to hold on to it.

Enterprise was stopped in the water and the pot hauler was used to pull the submerged deckhand to the surface. However, he had been underwater for about 15 minutes and was lifeless. The deckhand then remained suspended from the pot hauler by his left leg until lifeboat assistance arrived over 40 minutes later: although the two remaining crew were able to hold his head clear of the water, they were unable to lift him over the gunnel. After the deckhand was lowered into a lifeboat, he was transferred to hospital by helicopter, where he was declared deceased shortly after his arrival.

After dropping the anchor and marker buoy at the start of the shooting process, it was the deckhand's usual routine to remain in the 'safe area' behind the pound boards until only five or six pots remained on deck. The deckhand could then walk over the relatively clear deck towards the wheelhouse to drop the remaining anchor and marker buoy. This time, the deckhand left the 'safe area' without apparent reason, and attempted to cross over the running backrope while about 20 pots remained on deck. The deckhand had worked on board *Enterprise* for several years, and had been cautioned previously by its skipper for occasionally leaving the 'safe area' prematurely and crossing the running backrope.

Safety lessons

1. The likelihood of survival after being dragged overboard by the fishing gear while shooting pots is very, very slim. Most victims are dragged overboard so quickly that there is no time to cut the backrope, and the weights of the pots exceed the buoyancy provided by PFDs, so they are quickly dragged underwater. The time taken to halt the shooting operation and recover the already deployed pots means that unless the individual is able to release themselves from the gear they will likely drown.

2. Self-shooting arrangements, which in this case included the fitting of a shooting door and pound boards, reduce the risk of entanglement with the running line. Nonetheless, it is essential that crew remain separated from the backrope and pots as they are deploying. This requires a safe shooting routine to be established, and for the crew involved to rigorously adopt the routine and not place themselves in harm's way.

3. Although not significant in this case, the skipper's "Mayday" was made on VHF channel 16 rather than digital selective calling (DSC), which is now the primary means of distress and urgency alerting. However, if the skipper had used the DSC function to raise the alarm, it would not have transmitted the vessel's position because the VHF (DSC) radio was not connected to the GPS receiver. When the VHF (DSC) radio is not connected to a GPS receiver the vessel's position should be entered into the set every 4 hours. However, the best solution is to ensure the radio is properly connected to the GPS.

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

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