

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

**Fishing boat *Illustris* (B119) fatal man overboard after boarding,
12 November 2017**



Illustris alongside another fishing vessel

Narrative

At about 1000 on 13 November 2017, the crew of fishing vessel *Illustris*, which was berthed at Royal Quays Marina, North Shields, identified that one of the deckhands was missing. Following an extensive search, his body was discovered under an adjacent fishing vessel the following day. The subsequent MAIB investigation concluded that the deckhand fell overboard at about 2246 on 12 November, shortly after returning on board following an afternoon ashore.

On the night of 12 November, the deckhand had been escorted back to *Illustris* by the skipper of another vessel. The boarding arrangements were far from ideal, so the skipper watched while the deckhand boarded the inboard vessel, crossed its deck, and then climbed on board his own. He was last observed as he passed out of sight behind *Illustris*'s wheelhouse.

When the deckhand's body was recovered two of his fly buttons were noticed as being undone. The postmortem examination found a large quantity of urine in the deckhand's bladder, and he had a blood-alcohol concentration of 346 milligrams per 100 millilitres. This high level of alcohol would have adversely affected the deckhand's risk perception, reaction time and co-ordination.

It was concluded, therefore, that he was attempting to urinate over the side when he slipped or over-balanced and fell into the harbour, and thereafter was unable to self-rescue. Although another crewman was in the wheelhouse at the time, he was absorbed making a phone call and had not noticed his colleague boarding *Illustris*.

The MAIB investigation identified that living on board fishing vessels places additional safety and social responsibilities on the owner and a consequent need to address all additional associated risks, including alcohol consumption.

Safety lessons

1. Between 1994 and 2016, there have been 24 accidents resulting in the death of fishermen boarding UK fishing vessels. Alcohol consumption was identified as a contributing factor in 17 of those accidents. While limited alcohol consumption may be acceptable in port, the high number of fatalities resulting from fishermen falling overboard while returning to their vessels under the influence of alcohol demonstrates a need for the fishing industry and port authorities to work together to address this issue.
2. Risk assessments should cover all activities of the crew, including going ashore or returning on board from recreational activities. Fishermen have their own part to play in minimising risks to themselves, and this includes limiting their alcohol consumption. Even so, adopting an appropriate, formal alcohol policy in port can help emphasise this responsibility and so help ensure the safety and wellbeing of crew living on board.
3. Monitoring movement of crew on and off a vessel can be easily achieved and can ensure that someone is on hand to assist or raise the alarm in a timely manner in the event of an accident. In addition to assigning a dedicated crew member to remain on board for this purpose, 'buddy' systems provide an additional means for crew members to watch out for each other when returning together after a period of shore leave.

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

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