

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fishing vessel *Solstice*, capsized and sinking resulting in the loss of one life, 26 September 2017

Narrative

At 1938 on 26 September 2017, the 9.9m fishing vessel *Solstice* (**Figure 1**) capsized in calm weather conditions about 7 miles south of Plymouth. The skipper and crewman were rescued from the vessel's upturned hull (**Figure 2**) about 5½ hours later, but the vessel's owner was trapped and drowned in the wheelhouse. *Solstice* later sank.

The scallop dredger had recently been modified to operate as a stern trawler and its owner, skipper and crewman were in the process of hauling their second catch of the day on board when the capsizing occurred. The net's cod-end was full of fish, moss and sand, and started to move uncontrollably along the transom as the vessel rolled in the light swell.

The capsizing was rapid, and the crew did not have time to raise the alarm before they entered the water. As the vessel was not equipped with an emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) and the crew did not carry personal locator beacons (PLBs), they were wholly reliant on family and friends realizing they were overdue and alerting the coastguard.



Figure 1: *Solstice*



Figure 2: Upturned hull floating on surface (photograph taken the following morning)

Safety lessons

- *Solstice* capsized because it did not have sufficient transverse stability to safely lift the contents of its net on board over the stern. This was primarily because the weight in the net was excessive and the height of the lifting point at the stern was high (**Figure 3**).



Figure 3: *Solstice* scallop dredging four weeks before the accident

- The dangers of modifying small fishing vessels and changing fishing methods are well known and the consequences on stability are often fatal. However, the vessel had no stability data and a safe method of fishing had not been developed.
- It is important to have a clear understanding of your vessel's stability, but the impact that fishing methods have on stability cannot be emphasized enough. Talk to your local fishing vessel surveyors and seek expert advice if necessary before commencing any structural modifications, but especially modifications to change or alter the method of fishing.
- It was obvious that the weight in the net was excessive, but the crew remained determined to lift the catch on board. No catch, no matter how valuable, is worth a life. Stop and seriously consider your options and, ultimately, be prepared to let it go.
- The survivors were extremely fortunate that *Solstice's* upturned hull remained afloat as they were not wearing lifejackets when they entered the water, and it took over 5 hours for them to be found and rescued. Personal flotation devices should always be worn when working on deck and emergency use lifejackets should be readily available.
- It was also fortunate that the survivors were found. Their friends and family did not know where they had been fishing and, because *Solstice* was not equipped with an automatic identification system (AIS) transceiver, the coastguard could not identify the vessel's last recorded position. The carriage of an EPIRB and/or PLBs would have resulted in an immediate and location-focused emergency response. The carriage of an AIS transceiver in this case would have been of invaluable benefit.

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

For all enquiries:

Marine Accident Investigation Branch
First Floor, Spring Place
105 Commercial Road
Southampton
SO15 1GH

Email: maib@dft.gov.uk
Tel: 023 8039 5500

Publication date: 6 December 2018