

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fatal man overboard from the single-handed fishing boat *May C* (SY213) at Loch Carnan, Outer Hebrides, Scotland on 24 July 2019



Reconstruction of outboard motor propeller being cleared

Narrative

At about 1230 on 24 July 2019, the owner/skipper of the single-handed creel fishing boat, *May C*, was found close to his boat in the sea and unconscious by the crew of another small creel boat working in the same area. The two crewmen of the boat that found *May C*'s skipper were unable to recover him into their own boat but managed to move him to a fish farm, where they recovered him onto the walkway to commence CPR. Unable to revive him, they then took him to a nearby jetty where an ambulance was in attendance. Despite being taken ashore, *May C*'s skipper could not be resuscitated and the postmortem examination established that he had drowned. The weather conditions were fine with calm seas and a gentle breeze; the sea temperature was 14°C.

Safety Lessons

1. The exact circumstances of this accident are unknown because the skipper's fall overboard was not witnessed. However, the boat's engine was found in the raised position so it is most likely that he fell overboard and drowned while trying to clear weed or some other obstruction from the propeller. To get to the propeller the skipper had to climb onto *May C*'s narrow transom, which circumvented the only significant safety barrier to prevent him falling overboard, the raised guardrails, specifically in place to prevent crew falling over the side.

2. The skipper was not wearing his personal flotation device (PFD) or carrying his personal locator beacon (PLB) when he fell in the sea; indeed, neither piece of safety equipment was on board. Wearing a PFD significantly increases the chances of keeping your head and face clear of the water when falling into the sea, preventing seawater ingestion during the gasp reflex associated with cold water shock. Equally, the carriage of a PLB will provide an immediate and effective means of raising the alarm in an emergency, and it will guide the search and rescue assets to the location.
3. Single-handed fishing operations are extremely hazardous, primarily because there is no-one there to help if you get into difficulties. It is important to recognise the severe hazard associated with falling overboard. The best way to combat this is to ensure that every precaution has been taken to prevent going in the sea in the first place, and if that does happen, then measures are in place to increase your chances of survival and rescue.
4. Every fishing vessel should have a method of recovering a man overboard back into the boat. The fact that the two crew of the fishing boat who found *May C's* skipper were unable to immediately recover him out of the water is testament of the extreme physical effort required to haul someone out of the sea. For that reason, it is very important to have a ready means of recovering a person from the water and to conduct regular manoverboard recovery drills.

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

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Extract from The United Kingdom Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012 – Regulation 5:

“The sole objective of the investigation of an accident under the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012 shall be the prevention of future accidents through the ascertainment of its causes and circumstances. It shall not be the purpose of an such investigation to determine liability nor, except so far as is necessary to achieve its objective, to apportion blame.”

NOTE

This safety flyer is not written with litigation in mind and, pursuant to Regulation 14(14) of the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012, shall be inadmissible in any judicial proceedings whose purpose, or one of whose purposes is to attribute or apportion liability or blame.

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