

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

**Fatal man overboard from the potting vessel *Pioneer* (NN200)
south of Hastings, England, on 29 July 2021**



Pioneer

Narrative

At about 0853 on 29 July 2021, the skipper of the UK registered fishing vessel *Pioneer* fell overboard from the aft deck of the vessel. At the time of the accident, *Pioneer* was returning from its fishing grounds to its beach landing at Hastings in moderate sea conditions with a 2m swell.

Pioneer's sole deckhand was in the wheelhouse when they heard a shout; they immediately went out onto the deck and saw the skipper in the water some distance aft of the vessel. The skipper was not wearing a personal flotation device (PFD). The deckhand threw a life ring towards the skipper and saw him attempt to swim to it before returning to the wheelhouse and manoeuvring the vessel back towards the skipper. By this time the skipper was motionless with his face in the water. The deckhand tried in vain to manually haul the unconscious skipper back on board.

The deckhand raised the alarm by making a "Mayday" call to the coastguard using a VHF radio, then made further unsuccessful attempts to help the skipper. Forty minutes later, with the help of a rescue helicopter winchman who had been lowered onto the vessel, the skipper was recovered on board and then airlifted to hospital, where he was later declared deceased.

The investigation found that the bulwark around *Pioneer's* aft deck was low and the vessel's wheelhouse windows were semiopaque and cracked, restricting visibility from inside. Some items of mandatory safety equipment were missing, damaged or out of date, the Seafish risk assessment had not been completed, emergency drills had not been conducted and the skipper had not undertaken mandatory safety awareness training.

Safety lessons

1. Make sure your vessel is well maintained and fit to go to sea. Check that your safety equipment is in its correct position on board and in date for service.
2. Risk assessments provide the opportunity to take stock of a fishing vessel's normal working activities, identify hazards and put in place measures to mitigate them. Had *Pioneer* had a guardrail of adequate height, or had the skipper been wearing a tethered safety harness in this case, either would have offered protection against the risk of falling overboard. Make sure you have attended the Seafish Safety Awareness course and refer to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency publication *The Fishermen's Safety Guide* for advice on how to prepare risk assessments for your vessel.
3. The wearing of a PFD while working on deck improves the likelihood of survival should the unexpected happen and you fall overboard. PFDs are designed to keep you afloat with your airway clear of the water.
4. Conduct frequent emergency safety drills, including man overboard recovery, and practice using your safety equipment so you know what is available, how to operate it correctly, and whether it is adequate should a lone crew member be required to effect a recovery; do not wait until an accident happens to find out.

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:

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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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