

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Grounding and capsizing of the single-handed creel fishing vessel *Lexi Rose* (BF 370) resulting in one fatality on Melrose Point, north-east Scotland on 21 September 2023

Image courtesy of [HM Coastguard](#)



Lexi Rose and liferaft after the recovery of the skipper

Narrative

During the early morning of 21 September 2023, the skipper of the lone-operated creel fishing vessel *Lexi Rose* departed Banff harbour, Scotland to fish along the coast to the east of Macduff. The winds were from the south-south-west and there was a 1m to 1.5m residual swell from the north. The skipper had discussed working in the swell with another creel fishing vessel skipper who was out fishing at the same time. They agreed that, while the wind direction was favourable for fishing beneath the cliffs, the swell made operating more difficult and so decided to work together should support be needed.

Lexi Rose's skipper began working his individually placed creels in the small coves along the coast before the other fishing vessel had arrived in the area. As *Lexi Rose's* skipper moved his vessel from one creel to another the outboard engine's lower assembly unit hit a rock promontory at the entrance of a small cove. The engine's lower assembly unit detached from its mounting, causing an immediate loss of propulsion.

Lexi Rose became subject to the waves washing against the shore and was moved onto the rocks within 4 minutes. The skipper made an initial radio call on the local working channel to say he was grounded and in need of immediate aid. Moments later, he made another call on the same channel to say the vessel was going over. The skipper of the other fishing vessel heard the calls and raised the alarm.

Lexi Rose's skipper was found approximately 5m from his vessel in shallow water by emergency services personnel. He was recovered by helicopter but declared deceased on the way to hospital. The skipper could not swim and he was not wearing a personal flotation device (PFD) or carrying a

personal locator beacon, although both were normally available on board *Lexi Rose*. A postmortem examination indicated that the skipper had received a significant head wound at the time of the accident and was most likely unconscious before or immediately after he entered the water.

The investigation could not determine what steps the skipper took to mitigate the increased risk of grounding and capsizing due to the presence of a significant swell close to shore. The investigation found that the lone skipper had little time to take action to avoid a grounding and might not have realised that the engine's lower assembly unit had been lost. He also had limited time to take all the possible actions that might have improved his chances of survival such as setting an anchor; raising a "Mayday" distress; and donning a PFD.

The accepted method used by fishermen operating near Macduff to prevent grounding and capsizing was to drop an anchor to hold the vessel away from the shore. No evidence was found of an anchor being used and it is considered unlikely the skipper had enough time to do so without other crew on board.

Safety lessons

1. When operating close inshore, the presence of a swell or other unusual weather event can increase the risk of exposure to the hazards of grounding and capsizing. If unsure, the safe action is to abort fishing operations.
2. The risks of operating single-handedly are well known, but are compounded when working close inshore when the time to react is reduced. Good preparation is essential to deal with emergencies effectively.
3. Preventing a grounding using an anchor requires sufficient room between the vessel and shore for the anchor and chain to have an effect. This method might prove ineffective when close inshore, particularly when waves are acting on the vessel.
4. Wearing a PFD with crotch straps when there is any risk of entering the water increases the chances of survival as it will keep an unconscious person's airway out of the water.

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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