

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Foundering of the fishing vessel *Freedom II* (CN 111)

11 nautical miles south-west of Oban, Scotland

on 21 February 2024

Image courtesy of the [RNLI](#)



Video still of *Freedom II* as the vessel capsized to port

Narrative

At 1535 on 21 February 2024, the 15.94m prawn trawler *Freedom II* foundered and sank to the east of the Garvellach Islands in the Firth of Lorn off the west coast of Scotland. *Freedom II* had suffered an uncontrolled flood into the engine room. The crew were initially alerted to the flood by the activation of the bilge alarms but did not isolate any sea cocks as they believed that the flood was due to a failed stern seal. The flood, likely caused by the failure of a seawater pipe, overwhelmed the available bilge pumps and passed into the fish hold.

The skipper and a deckhand tried to deal with the flood while *Freedom II* was taken under tow by an RNLI lifeboat. The tow was abandoned when it became apparent that the vessel was sinking, and the skipper and the deckhand swam clear of the vessel as it foundered; they were recovered from the water by the lifeboat's crew.

The MAIB received 230 reports of flooding of fishing vessels between 2013 and 2022, of which 78 (34%) resulted in the loss of the vessel. The data indicates flooding remains a significant safety issue.

Safety lessons

1. Flooding is preventable, but if it occurs can be controlled in most cases. If discovered early, leaking pipes can be isolated and the flooding controlled by pumping out the affected space. Flooding can be rapid, and late discovery leaves no time to treat the cause. An efficient bilge alarm can be critical in providing early warning of flooding.
2. If in doubt as to the source of a flood, closing down the seawater system might contain the floodwater and help to identify the source.
3. On board *Freedom II* the crew initially checked all the compartments around the vessel; however, it was only later in the emergency that the fish hold was found to be almost fully flooded. Regular checks for progressive flooding can help inform effective decision-making throughout each stage of the emergency.
4. Regular checks and function tests of bilge alarms and pumps, together with regular examinations of vessel hulls and pipework will assist in preventing potential leaks or failures occurring.
5. Being prepared for an emergency, and knowing what to do when it occurs, is vital for the safety of all on board: know your vessel systems; test your emergency pumps and drill for emergencies.

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

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Publication date: April 2026

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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