

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Fatal man overboard from the potting vessel *Wilaya* (M36), 1 nautical mile north of Jack Sound, Pembrokeshire, Wales on 1 May 2025



Wilaya

Narrative

On the morning of 1 May 2025, the 9.34m potting vessel *Wilaya* departed the Port of Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire, Wales in fine conditions for a day's fishing. On board were the skipper, a deckhand and a passenger.

At about 1330, the deckhand was dragged overboard after his foot became caught in a bight of rope while shooting a string of pots. The deckhand was wearing a personal flotation device (PFD); however, its buoyancy was ineffective against the weight of the fishing gear and he was quickly dragged beneath the surface. *Wilaya's* skipper and passenger reacted promptly and recovered the deckhand on board, but he was unresponsive.

The deckhand was transferred to a Royal National Lifeboat Institution all-weather lifeboat, the crew of which continued to provide emergency first aid. The lifeboat arrived at Milford Haven at about 1457 and the deckhand was pronounced deceased at 1540. His cause of death was later recorded as immersion in water.

The investigation found that *Wilaya's* risk assessments were not being followed, and that the deckhand entered the water after becoming entangled in the running backline while repositioning the end weight attached to the pots. *Wilaya* used a self-shooting system to deploy its pots. However, due to the size, number, weight and stack height of the pots and the need to reposition the end weight, a deckhand was required to manually downstack each pot. Consequently, the system did not truly function as a self-shooting system and provide separation from the gear for the crew.

Safety lessons

1. Many fishermen use a self-shooting arrangement on potting vessels. When doing so, it is essential that the crew are separated from the fishing gear at every stage of the deployment process to prevent entanglement or being pulled overboard.
2. Working on a crowded deck with stacked pots and no pound board division to separate the crew from the running gear creates serious risk. Combined with the speed and unpredictability of the shooting gear on an unstable platform, the outcome can be deadly.
3. The risk of an accident increases if established safety measures are disregarded and shortcuts become routine. A formal, structured risk assessment process can be an effective tool for preventing accidents. The risk assessment should involve all crew members, be effectively implemented, and regularly reviewed.
4. Potting is one of the most hazardous fishing methods. The accident on board *Wilaya* was the sixth fatality on board UK potting vessels in the 20 months from October 2023 to May 2025, highlighting the vulnerability of fishermen operating in the sector. By considering and implementing some or all of the guidance provided in publications such as the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's Fishermen's Safety Guide¹ and the Seafish FS45 Potting Safety Industry Advisory Note², fishermen can create a safer working environment and gain a more informed approach to hazards and emergency preparedness. Further guidance is also available via the Home and Dry group's online information and safety campaign³.

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 2026 – Regulation 5:

The sole objective of a safety investigation into an accident under these Regulations is the prevention of future accidents through the ascertainment of its causes and circumstances. It is not the purpose of such an 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 19(1) of The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2026, shall be inadmissible in any judicial proceedings concerning liability unless the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents or a court of law determine otherwise.

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¹ [Fishermen's Safety Guide](#)

² [Seafish FS45 Potting Safety Industry Advisory Note](#)

³ [Home and Dry safety campaign](#)