

MAIB SAFETY BULLETIN 1/2000

Foundering

11 miles to the east of the Isle of Man of

fv SOLWAY HARVESTER

with the loss of seven lives

on 11 January 2000

Issued February 2000

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This document, containing safety recommendations, has been produced for marine safety purposes only on the basis of information to date.

The *Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1999* provide for the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents to make recommendations at any stage of an investigation if, in his opinion, it is necessary or desirable to do so.

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) is carrying out an investigation into the loss of the scallop dredger *Solway Harvester*, and her seven man crew on 11 January 2000. A report will be published.

The MAIB's initial inquiries have revealed evidence of several safety shortcomings which give rise to serious concerns about the safety of all fishing vessels, and particularly, for the crews sailing on similar scallop dredgers and other trawlers operating out of Kirkeudbright.

These concerns relate to four aspects which directly affect the safety of fishermen. They are:

- the watertight integrity of main decks;
- the regular servicing of liferafts;
- the correct installation of liferafts; and
- crews' completion of the mandatory basic safety training courses.



J S Lang
Rear Admiral
Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents

Background

At about 1745 on 11 January 2000, the Kirkcudbright registered scallop dredger *Solway Harvester* sank with the loss of her seven man crew about 11 miles to the east of the Isle of Man. She was carrying about 9 tonnes of shellfish and, because bad weather was forecast, was heading towards Ramsay to seek shelter. Reports of the weather conditions at the time she sank vary, but the wind was probably about force 6 from the south-west, with a moderate to rough sea running on her port quarter.

The first indication that she might have foundered was the detection of a transmission from her EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon). An extensive search and rescue operation was mounted immediately but, apart from finding two uninflated liferafts and the beacon, nothing else was seen. There was no sign of either *Solway Harvester* or her crew.

An investigation into the circumstances of her loss was started immediately and following the discovery of the wreck, has included an underwater survey of it.

The absence of a “Mayday” transmission or any other radio report of trouble, and the subsequent discovery by divers that all seven bodies of the crew were inside the vessel, indicates that whatever happened occurred very rapidly.

The underwater survey has revealed some hull damage which, on initial inspection, is consistent with *Solway Harvester* having impacted the seabed stem first. The wreck will be raised and the hull will be examined more closely before this can be confirmed beyond doubt.

The loading scuttle to the fish hold on the port side of the main deck was found open. The opening, which was flush with the deck, did not appear to be fitted with a hatch cover and this is being investigated further.

The liferafts were examined at RFD’s (a liferaft manufacturer) premises in Birkenhead and were found to have last been serviced in September 1996, and should have been serviced annually. Both liferafts did, however, inflate satisfactorily during the examination and did not leak.

The ends of both painters were carefully examined and were found to be both unbroken and heat sealed. This indicates they were not attached to the vessel when she sank. They should have been.

Before sailing in a fishing vessel, fishermen are required to undergo basic safety training. Three of the seven crew are known to have done so, but there is no evidence to indicate the remaining four had.

Safety Recommendations

1. The owner or skipper of every fishing vessel registered in the United Kingdom is very strongly recommended to check that any liferaft carried is:
 - (i) in date for servicing
 - (ii) correctly attached

2. It is recommended that the owner of every fishing vessel registered in the United Kingdom checks that anyone sailing in their vessels who was born after 1 March 1954, has completed the mandatory safety training. If it is found that they have not, such training should be arranged as a matter of urgency.

3. **It is further recommended that in the overriding interest of safety, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency:**
 - (i) takes immediate action in its promotion of safe practice and its enforcement of safety requirements on the four areas of concern raised by the loss of *Solway Harvester*
 - the watertight integrity of main decks;
 - the service history of the liferafts;
 - the correct installation of liferafts; and
 - crews' completion of the mandatory basic safety training courses.

 - (ii) examines all vessels of similar design to *Solway Harvester* to ensure the watertight integrity of the main deck.