

MARINE OCCURRENCE REPORT

MAN OVERBOARD WITH LOSS OF LIFE

FISHING VESSEL "FISH FINDER"  
OFF POINT ESCUMINAC, NEW BRUNSWICK  
06 MAY 1997

REPORT NUMBER M97M0031

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) investigated this occurrence for the purpose of advancing transportation safety. It is not the function of the Board to assign fault or determine civil or criminal liability.

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### *Summary*

While recovering a seine net, a crew member was propelled overboard when a line attached to the net struck him in the back. At the time of the occurrence, the vessel was rolling heavily. Attempts to recover the crew member from the water were hampered by the vessel's motion and the clothing that the victim was wearing. Unable to hold on to the vessel, the crew member drifted away. Lifejackets, a lifebuoy and net floats were thrown to him. Rescue attempts reportedly continued over a 45-minute period. The victim, who appeared unable to help himself, was recovered later by another fishing vessel which had come to assist. He was transported to hospital where he was pronounced dead.

*Ce rapport est également disponible en français.*

## *Other Factual Information*

### *Particulars of the Vessel*

Name:	"FISH FINDER"
Port of Registry:	Moncton, N.B.
Flag:	Canada
Official Number:	816844
Type:	Northumberland Strait-type fishing vessel
Gross Tons:	12.54
Length:	11 m
Built:	1994, Cap Pele, New Brunswick
Propulsion:	One Cummins diesel engine, 156kW
Owners:	St. Louis-de-Kent, N.B.

The "FISH FINDER" is a fishing vessel typical of the Northumberland Strait, with the wheel-house and cuddy forward and a clear work deck aft, over a fish hold. A hydraulically-operated net drum and winch are located immediately aft of the wheel-house. At the stern, a horizontal roller is mounted on a frame secured to the deck, mounted at each end of which there is a 23 cm vertical guide roller. The height of the vertical rollers (guiding posts) on the "FISH FINDER" is less than the average height of rollers fitted to other, similar boats. The vertical rollers are not fitted with horizontal stoppers at their upper ends.

Along the outboard sides of the after deck there is a wooden bulwark which extends 33 cm above the deck. A galvanized pipe, 5 cm in diameter, has been used to form a railing 75 cm above the deck on the port and starboard mid-lengths of the after deck, beginning some 48 cm forward of the stern. When the vessel is in still water and without fish in the hold, the top of the wooden bulwark surrounding the after deck is 129.5 cm above the waterline. The view of the after deck from the control position in the wheel-house is obstructed by the winch drum.

The "FISH FINDER" departed Pointe Sapin, N.B., at 1530<sup>1</sup> on 06 May 1997, with four crew members on board, bound for the fishing grounds off Escuminac Point. The crew members, as is customary, were wearing rubber boots, a waterproof jacket and pants over warm clothing.

On arrival off Escuminac Point, the crew of the "FISH FINDER" were preparing to recover the herring nets. The first net anchor was hauled in and secured. The net line was then attached to the winch line and the hauling of the net over the stern roller commenced. The skipper was in the wheel-house controlling the vessel, one of the helpers was operating the winch and one was standing nearby. The victim, who had been engaged in line-handling, was standing near the stern on the starboard side of the vessel between the incoming rope and the bulwark.

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<sup>1</sup> All times are ADT (Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) minus three hours) unless otherwise stated.

A large wave passed under the vessel, causing the vessel to move. As the stern dropped, the taut net rope rode up over the top of the starboard 23 cm vertical guide roller, striking the victim in the mid-back and propelling him into the sea. When he surfaced, he was able to take a hold of the net line and haul himself back to the starboard side of the vessel. Efforts by the remaining crew members to bring him inboard were hampered by the rolling of the vessel, the wet rubber clothing he was wearing and his large size. The skipper broadcast a Mayday message using the Citizen's Band (CB) radio on board. The fishing vessel "FREEBOOTER", which was in the area, responded to the Mayday call.

As a wave struck the vessel, the victim lost his grip and he drifted away. A lifebuoy, lifejackets and net floats were thrown overboard to him, however, he appeared to be unable to assist himself.

Rescue efforts reportedly continued over a period of 45 minutes. The victim was recovered by the fishing vessel "FREEBOOTER".

The two vessels proceeded to Escuminac where they were met by an ambulance, RCMP officers from Baie-Sainte-Anne, N.B., and the deputy Sheriff and Coroner. The victim was transported to the hospital in Miramichi, N.B., where he was pronounced dead. The attending physician stated that the most probable cause of death was hypothermia. The coroner completed a Coroner's Declaration to this effect. No autopsy was performed.

The four crew members on board were professional, experienced fishermen. The owner/skipper held a valid Fishing Master, Class II certificate.

The 1130 marine forecast for the Northumberland Strait-Gulf-Magdalen area called for winds from the south-east at 15 to 25 knots. The Ocean Meteorological (METOC) Service weather and surface analysis for the Point Escuminac area reported good visibility, with an air temperature of 8 to 9°C. Reports from Point Escuminac automatic weather station indicated that winds were south-east at 20 to 25 knots, with gusts to 30 knots. The sea temperature off Point Escuminac was near 2°C and the wave height was 1 to 2 metres.

The vessel, being under 15 gross registered tons, was not required to be inspected by Transport Canada, Marine Safety. No boarding ladder was carried nor was one required to be carried.

## *Analysis*

While the net line was being winched aboard, the line was under tension. When a large wave passed under the vessel, she rolled heavily, causing the line to ride up the vertical guide roller. Because the 23 cm vertical guide roller was not fitted with a horizontal stopper at its upper end, the line rode over the top of the starboard roller and struck the victim in the back just above the waist. The victim was thus propelled over the railing and into the sea.

The clothing worn by the victim did not provide him with any thermal protection nor any flotation capabilities. He was reportedly 183 cm tall and weighed 118 kg. The waterproof outer clothing that he was wearing and his large size, combined with the motion of the vessel, hampered the efforts of the crew to take a hold of and assist the victim. As the victim was not wearing a personal flotation device (PFD), he would have had to expend a

large amount of energy in attempting to stay afloat once he lost his grip on the side of the vessel.

The smooth hull of the vessel afforded the victim no possibility of using his legs to assist him to get out of the water. The use of a simple portable device to provide a foot hold for the victim could have assisted his recovery.

There are several brands of commercially available products designed to assist the recovery of persons from the sea. These include inflatable PFDs fitted with an integral harness, and a combined boarding ladder and rescue cradle.

There are several types of commercially available outer work-wear that provide buoyancy and afford protection for the wearer from the effects of cold water immersion. In the past, fishermen have been reluctant to wear this type of outer wear as they considered it to be restrictive and difficult to wear while working. Improvements have been made to the design and manufacture of this type of outer wear and it is now gaining gradual acceptance within the fishing industry.

It is generally accepted that persons holding still and wearing a standard lifejacket and light clothing in water of 2 to 3°C could expect to be able to help themselves for about 15 minutes. After about 15 minutes, they would become weak and unable to help themselves. The predicted survival time in water of 2 to 3°C is a little more than one hour before the victim succumbs to hypothermia.

## *Findings*

1. A rope, attached to the net which was being hauled in, struck the victim in the back and propelled him overboard into the sea.
2. The lack of horizontal stoppers at the top of the vertical net rope guide rollers allowed the line to ride up over the starboard roller and strike the victim.
3. The victim was not wearing a PFD.
4. The waterproof outer clothing which he was wearing did not afford protection from the effects of hypothermia, nor did it provide buoyancy.
5. The victim's size combined with the motion of the vessel hampered the efforts of the remaining crew members to assist him.
6. The victim had no means of using his legs to assist him to board the vessel from the water.

## *Causes and Contributing Factors*

The cause of the man overboard of the crew member of the "FISH FINDER" was that the victim was struck by a line and propelled overboard. The effects of hypothermia occurring in the cold water most probably caused the victim's death.

The efforts of the remaining crew to recover the victim from the sea were hampered by the vessel's motion, the type of clothing worn by the victim and the lack of an effective means to assist in his recovery.

## *Safety Action*

Following the occurrence the owner installed additional vertical guides at the after and forward end of the net hauling hawser to prevent the line from riding over the rollers and striking a person. The vessel was equipped with a portable ladder for use in an emergency. The deck crew now wear floater-type work suits when hauling nets.

*This report concludes the Transportation Safety Board's investigation into this occurrence. Consequently, the Board, consisting of Chairperson Benoît Bouchard, and members Maurice Harquail, Charles Simpson and W.A. Tadros, authorized the release of this report on 07 July 1998.*

*Appendix A Cold Water Survival*