

## **MARINE DEPARTMENT NOTICE NO. 52 OF 2016**

### **(Navigational & Seamanship Safety Practices)**

#### **Fatal fire accident on board a Hong Kong wooden fishing vessel**

##### **The Incident**

1. A locally licenced wooden fishing vessel, carrying 5 crew members and 11 anglers caught fire in the engine room on the voyage to Qinglan Gang, Hainan, Mainland China after fishing in the vicinity of Wenchang oil platform water area. Five persons were killed and the other two sustained injury in this accident.
2. The accident happened at night while the coxswain was navigating the vessel in the wheelhouse. The weather was poor with winds of force 6 to 7 on the Beaufort scale. The wave was about five metres in height.
3. When the coxswain saw white smoke coming out from the engine room ventilator, he immediately instructed the engine operator to check the engine room. The engine operator could not enter into the engine room as it caught fire and filled up with dense white smoke. The crew members could not use portable fire extinguishers to control the fire as they were kept inside the engine room.
4. The fire went out of control and spread quickly. The coxswain ordered to abandon ship. However, the inflatable liferaft failed to launch into the water and eventually burned. Lifejackets were distributed to all persons on board and they subsequently jumped into the water even though some of them did not wear their lifejacket properly. The vessel sank eventually and the accident resulted in the death of five persons.
5. The cause of the fire in the engine room could not be found, but the investigation into the accident revealed the safety issues as follows: -
  - (i) the vessel was not manned by a qualified coxswain and an engine operator;
  - (ii) the number of persons on board exceeded the total number of persons permitted to carry as specified in the operating licence of the vessel;
  - (iii) the vessel was operated in waters of Mainland China, but not complied with the Mainland regulations;
  - (iv) the portable fire extinguishers on board were not placed at appropriate locations; and
  - (v) crew members were not familiar with the launching of the inflatable liferaft and it was also too late to distribute the lifejackets to all persons

for them to don it properly before jumping into the water.

### **Lessons learnt**

6. To avoid reoccurrence of the accident, it is important that:
- (i) fishing vessels should be manned and operated in compliance with the regulations of Mainland China when navigating in their waters;
  - (ii) portable fire extinguishers provided on board ship should be placed at appropriate locations; and
  - (iii) crew members should be familiarized with the use of all life-saving and fire-fighting appliances provided on board.

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