

Fishermen Fell Overboard While Engaging in Pair Trawling In Position of 19 Miles South of Dangan Dao

A. The incident

1. Two fishermen were lost when the fishing vessel M69380Y was engaged in pair trawling with another fishing vessel in the approximate position of 19 miles south of Dangan Dao on 10 Decemer 2003.
2. While shooting net, the legs of one fisherman were entangled by a towing warp. As a result he was dragged overboard.
3. Another fisherman, while attempting to save the fisherman from the sea, lost his balance due to heavy rolling of the vessel and also fell overboard.
4. The two fishermen struggled for some time in the water. Despite the efforts of the other crew members, the rescue to bring the two persons back on board was not successful. Both fishermen subsequently disappeared in the heavy seas.

B. Findings

1. The fisherman tendering the towing warp was standing with one or both of his feet on the bight or in the loop of the towing warp laid on the deck. As a result, his legs were entangled by it and was dragged towards the shipside and thrown overboard.
2. Another fisherman was probably too eager to rescue the fisherman from the sea and thus overlooked his own safety. He was standing rather close to the gunwale trying to pull the fisherman out of the water. He lost his balance due to heavy rolling of the vessel and also fell overboard.
3. The fishermen did not wear lifejacket at the time of the accident.
4. The vessel was not equipped with effective means of retrieving persons overboard.
5. The lack of a working VHF radio capable of contacting the Hong Kong Marine Emergency and Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre instantly delayed the search and rescue operation.

C. Lessons

1. Personnel involved in handling net should always be aware of the danger associated with moving wires or ropes, especially when hauling up or shooting net. Masters of fishing vessels should ensure there is proper coordination between crew members engaged in such operation.
2. When attempting rescue operation under adverse weather conditions, it is of paramount importance that involved personnel should first address their own safety.
3. Trawling operation under adverse weather poses risk to personnel working on board. If the risk of man overboard is considered high, appropriate safety measures such as wearing of lifejacket should be adopted.
4. The vessel should deploy appropriate rescue means for the retrieval of persons fallen overboard.
5. Fishing vessels operating beyond Hong Kong waters should be provided with appropriate radio communication equipment on board to alert the appropriate authority instantly for search and rescue.

Figure 1 Position of Man Overboard

