



Report of Investigation  
into the Man Overboard from  
the Local Fishing Vessel  
“M60643T” at Wong Chuk  
Kok Tsui on 12 January 2005



The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
Marine Department  
Marine Accident Investigation Section

## **Purpose of Investigation**

This incident is investigated, and published in accordance with the IMO Code for the Investigation of Marine Casualties and Incidents promulgated under IMO Assembly Resolution A.849(20). The purpose of this investigation conducted by the Marine Accident Investigation and Shipping Security Policy Branch (MAISSPB) of Marine Department is to determine the circumstances and the causes of the incident with the aim of improving the safety of life at sea and avoiding similar incident in future.

The conclusions drawn in this report aim to identify the different factors contributing to the incident. They are not intended to apportion blame or liability towards any particular organization or individual except so far as necessary to achieve the said purpose.

The MAISSPB has no involvement in any prosecution or disciplinary action that may be taken by the Marine Department resulting from this incident.

1. Summary

- 1.1 In the morning of 12 January 2005, the locally licensed fishing vessel of licence No. M60643T was proceeding from Hong Kong to Nan Ao, China for selling fish catches. After the vessel had arrived the destination, a crewmember Mr. SO Loi-tsai (translation) found that his brother Mr. SO Tin-po was missing.
- 1.2 On 27 January 2005, the dead body of Mr. SO Tin-po was found afloat at the position 22° 31.07' N 114° 19.37'E near Wong Chuk Kok Tsui, where the vessel was passing the position at about 0445 on 12 January 2005. The Master saw Mr. SO Tin-po walking afterward to return to his cabin from the side door of the vessel. It is believed that Mr. SO had fallen overboard from the side of the vessel while returning to his cabin and was later drown.
- 1.3 The cause of how the deceased had fallen overboard was not able to ascertain, as there was no witness to the accident. As the Master had last seen the deceased while he was returning to his cabin, it is believed that the deceased had fallen overboard from the gunwale while entering to his cabin via the side door.



Figure 1: The route of the fishing vessel "M60643T" on 12 January 2005

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Route of the vessel



Fig. 2: Front view of the vessel.

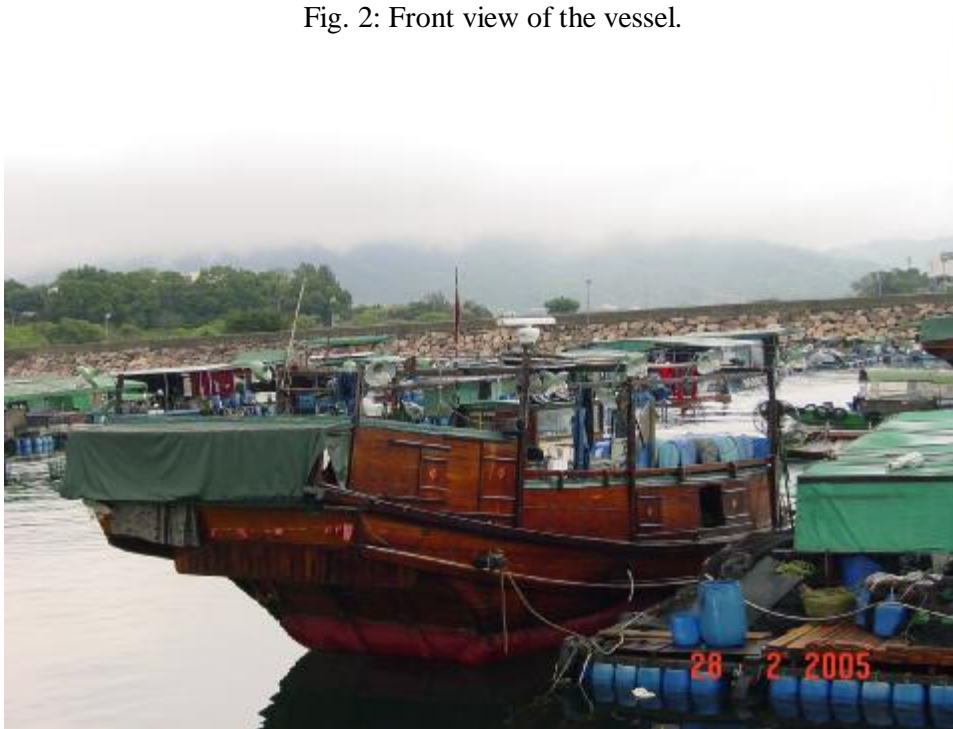


Fig. 3: Side view of the vessel.

2. **Description of the vessel**

- 2.1 "M60643T" is a motor wooden fishing vessel of 53.1 nett registered tons. The vessel has a length of 15.66 m and breadth of 5.2 m. The propulsion engine was a 6-cylinder Gardner diesel of 80.6 kW. The vessel was first licensed on 24 July 1985. Its licence was last renewed on 20 September 2004 and will expire on 11 September 2005.
- 2.2 The vessel was manned by eight crewmembers, comprising the master and seven sailors. Two of the sailors including the deceased, Mr. SO Tin-po were the brothers of the Master, the other sailors of PRC nationals were employed by the Master of the vessel.
- 2.3 The accommodation is located at the aft of the vessel. There are two front access doors and eight side doors which can be used for accessing to the accommodation. (See figure in the appendix)

### **3. Sources of information**

- 3.1 The master of the fishing vessel "M60643T", Mr. SO Tin, he was also the brother of the deceased;
- 3.2 The sailor of the fishing vessel "M60643T", Mr. SO Loi-tsai, he was also the brother of the deceased;
- 3.3 The sailor of the fishing vessel "M60643T" Mr. HO but-man (translation) and;
- 3.4 The Hong Kong Observatory.

#### **4. Outline of Events**

- 4.1 At about 0000 on 12 January 2005, the fishing vessel "M60643T" with eight crewmembers was engaged in fishing operation at Double Haven (印州塘). At about 0400 they finished the fishing operation and departed for Nam Ao for selling the fish catches via Fung Wong Wat (鳳凰笏) ( fig. 1 )
- 4.2 During the voyage from Fung Wong Wat to Nam Ao at about 0430, the master was steering the vessel while all other seven crewmembers including the deceased were engaged in sorting fish catches on deck. At about 0445, the master saw the deceased walking aft to return to his cabin from the side door of the vessel. As there was no any anomaly with the deceased, the Master continued its voyage and arrived Nam Ao at about 0800.
- 4.3 Upon arrival at Nam Ao, a crewmember knocked at the deceased's cabin door for breakfast but without response. He went into the cabin and found that the deceased was not in the cabin. After reporting to the Master they suspected that the deceased might have fallen into the sea. The Master took the vessel back to the sea for searching the deceased. However, they were not able to find him, the case was immediately reported to the Hong Kong Marine Police for assistance. Search and rescue operations were carried out by police launches and helicopter in the vicinity waters for two days but with negative result.
- 4.4 Although the search and rescue operations were stopped on 14 January 2005, the Master and his crew continued to send his vessel to the route areas to search for the deceased in the following days. On 27 January 2005, a body was recovered by them in the waters near Wong Chuk Kok Tsui, it was later identified to be the missing crewmember SO Tin-po.

## 5. Analysis of Evidence

- 5.1 According to the weather report from the Hong Kong Observatory, northerly wind with a speed of 13 km/h was prevailing in the area. Waves at height of about 1 metre was expected. Visibility was at a range of about 6 km.
- 5.2 The deceased was last seen by the Master during the voyage to Nam Ao, as he was walking aft to his cabin at about 0445 on 12 January 2005. The Master recalled that there had not been any anomaly occurred during the voyage. As no one on board knew how the deceased disappeared from the vessel, it is believed that the deceased might have fallen overboard as he intended to enter his cabin using the side doors.
- 5.3 There were two main entrances at sizes of 70cm width x 86cm height located at the front of accommodation, however the front entrance was not used for entry because it was covered by tarpaulin sheet and obstructed by some crew working on the front deck. The tarpaulin was fitted to prevent any ingress of water into the accommodation whilst the vessel was at sea. In addition to the front entrances, there are also eight doors smaller in size located on both sides of the vessel. The side door can also be used for entry to the accommodation.
- 5.4 The master stated that the side doors would be more convenient to use for entry because the main entrances were usually covered with tarpaulin sheet. Although the tarpaulin sheet could be lifted up to make entry to the accommodation, there were other crewmembers working at the front deck causing obstruction to normal entry. As such the crewmembers would prefer using the side door instead of the main entrances.
- 5.5 However it was not easy for the crewmembers to enter from the side doors to the accommodation, he was required to stand on the narrow gunwale with one hand holding the handrail in maintaining balance while using the other hand to open the side door. The gunwale was about 28.5 cm in width.
- 5.6 The Master of the vessel stated that there had not been any similar accident in the past when

using these side doors. However the use of these side doors for making entry to the accommodation when the vessel is at sea is considered to be dangerous, as the vessel would be subject to complex rolling and pitching motions at sea. Furthermore, crewmember standing on a narrow and possible wetted gunwale could easily lose his balance, slipped and fell overboard. Crewmembers should be made aware of the possible danger and to avoid using the side door whilst the vessel is at sea.

5.7 As the body was recovered 15 days after the incident, the post-mortem examination could not ascertain the cause of death of the deceased due to decomposition.

## **6. Conclusions**

6.1 After the fishing vessel M60643T arrived at Nam O in the morning of 12 January 2005, a crewmember was found missing from the vessel. Searches were initiated but with negative result. The body of the deceased was found fifteen days later near Wong Chuk Kok Tsui.

6.2 The cause of how the deceased had fallen overboard was not able to ascertain, as there was no witness to the accident. As the Master had last seen the deceased while he was returning to his cabin, it is believed that the deceased had fallen overboard from the gunwale while entering to his cabin via the accommodation side door.

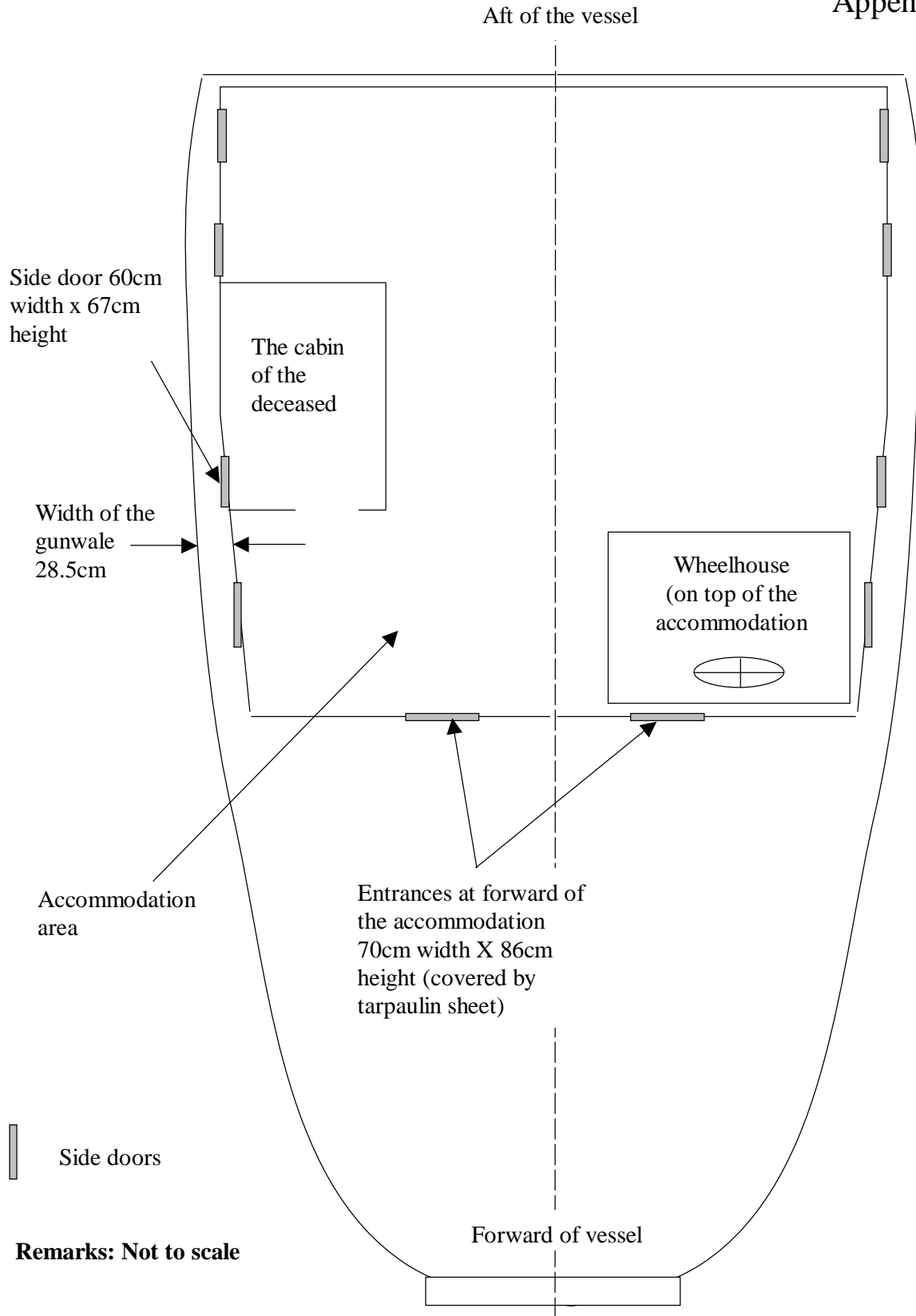
6.3 The investigation revealed that it would be an unsafe practice for the crewmembers to use the side door in entering the accommodation whilst the vessel is at sea.

**7**      **Recommendation**

- 7.1      A copy of the report is to be sent to the master of the local fishing vessel "M60643T" and the Fishermen Association drawing their attention of the possible dangerous situation when using the side doors for making entry to the accommodation during voyage. Fishermen are advised to use safe means of access to the accommodation at all times.

**8**      **Submission**

- 8.1      In the event that the conduct of any person or organization is commented in an accident investigation report, it is the policy of the Marine Department to send a copy of the relevant part of the draft report to that person or organization for his/her comments.
- 8.2      The final draft report was sent to the master of the Vessel to revert with their comments.
- 8.3      No submission was received from him.



Sketch 1: Arrangement of the accommodation of the motor fishing vessel: M60643T