The fatal capsize of Hong Kong locally licenced Class III fishing vessel "Wan Fook Hei" at waters 1.8 nautical miles east of Cheung Chau, Hong Kong on 15 June 2017

1. The incident

1.1 At about 1130 hours on 15 June 2017, the Hong Kong locally licenced Class III fishing vessel “Wan Fook Hei” (the fishing vessel) departed Yung Shue Wan, northwest of Lamma Island and sailed southwesterly to Guishan Island. The local coxswain was steering the fishing vessel on the bridge and two mainland fishermen were working on the main deck. At the time of sailing, the fishing vessel carried about six tonnes of small fish contained in dozens of plastic buckets which placed on the after main deck of the fishing vessel.

1.2 At about 1220 hours, the fishing vessel was sailing in the waters about 1.8 nautical miles east of Cheung Chau. It was suddenly encountered with strong convective weather and violent storms, the fishing vessel was rolling heavily with shipping seas on the deck. A few minutes later, the plastic buckets containing small fish suddenly moved to the port side, and the fishing vessel listed seriously to port side.

1.3 At approximately 1230 hours, the coxswain and two fishermen abandoned the fishing vessel and jumped into the sea. The fishing vessel then overturned and sank. One nearby fishing vessel reported the accident to Hong Kong police and rescued the coxswain and one fisherman from water. Another fisherman was rescued by a police boat arrived at the scene about ten minutes later, but he was unconscious. He was then sent to the hospital for emergency medical treatment but certified dead.

2. Lessons learnt

2.1 During the severe convective weather season, the owner/coxswain of fishing vessel should collect weather warning information and enhance the necessary safety alert. When placing the collected fish cargo on the main deck, the stability of the vessel should be fully assessed, and the cargo should be properly secured, the hatch covers should be closed, so
as to avoid the loss of stability and capsizing of the vessel due to cargo shifting and water pouring into cargo hatch during rolling and shipping seas; and

2.2 The training for the fisherman for donning lifejacket and emergency response should be enhanced.