

MARINE DEPARTMENT NOTICE NO. 219/2023

(Navigational & Seamanship Safety Practices)

Fatal accident happened on a locally licensed fishing vessel during trawling operation

The Incident

A locally licensed steel fishing vessel (*the fishing vessel*) engaged in a trawling operation (*the trawling operation*) in the waters off the Xiaoxing Mountain, Pinghai Bay in Huidong county. When *the fishing vessel* was hauling in the fishing nets, the nets might have been caught on the seabed causing the main trawling rope to be overloaded and parted. The hauling rope connected to the main trawling rope jumped off from the starboard guide bracket and hit the head of a crew member who was working aside. That crew member then collapsed and fell unconscious, with the back of his head injured and bleeding. He was immediately moved to the middle of the poop deck for the treatment of his wound. Other crew members swiftly cut off the ropes of the remaining fishing nets, sailed *the fishing vessel* to a nearby port, and at the same time called the China Coast Guard for help. A coast guard vessel met with *the fishing vessel* and took the injured crew member to a nearby port for treatment. Unfortunately, that crew member sustained serious injury and was pronounced dead eventually.

2. The investigation revealed that the contributory factors leading to the accident were that *the fishing vessel* failed to comply with the requirement of the auxiliary fishing vessel licence of the People's Republic of China and carried out *the trawling operation* illegally; the coxswain failed to keep watch on the bridge while *the fishing vessel* was hauling in the fishing nets to ensure the safety of the operation, which was in contravention of the “Code of Navigation Watch for Fishing Vessels”¹; and the crew of *the fishing vessel* lacked safety awareness of the potential risks when conducting *the trawling operation*, and failed to communicate effectively to avoid the accident when an abnormality occurred during the operation.

¹ https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2000-06/01/content_5721365.htm On 8 November 1999, the Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China issued announcement No. 10 [1999] of Agriculture and Fishery, i.e. "Code of Navigation Watch for Fishing Vessel (Trial)".

3. The investigation also found that *the fishing vessel* did not have a qualified coxswain and an engine operator, in contravention of the minimum manning requirements of the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Certification and Licensing) Regulation; *the fishing vessel* failed to comply with the requirement of the operating licence on the total number of persons permitted to be carried; and *the fishing vessel* did not comply with the requirements of the Measures of the People's Republic of China for the Administration of Seaman in the Fishery Industry in respect of the minimum manning requirements and the requirement for ordinary crew members to possess certificates on basic safety training for fisheries when engaging in *the trawling operation* in the Mainland waters.

Lessons Learnt

4. In order to avoid the recurrence of similar accidents in the future, fishery organisations and fishermen's groups should understand the contributing factors and safety issues from the report and draw lessons from the accident. The owners and coxswains of fishing vessels shall:

- (a) strictly comply with the requirements of their licences to carry out fishing vessel operations;
- (b) strictly comply with the requirements of their operating licences on the total number of persons permitted to be carried;
- (c) enhance safety awareness of fishing vessel crew members to improve their understanding of potential risks, and maintain effective communication during fishing vessel operations to ensure crew safety; and
- (d) ensure that their fishing vessels meet the relevant minimum crew manning requirements of Hong Kong and the Mainland when fishing in the Mainland waters; and strictly follow the requirements of the "Code of Navigation Watch for Fishing Vessels" to ensure the safety of fishing operations.

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