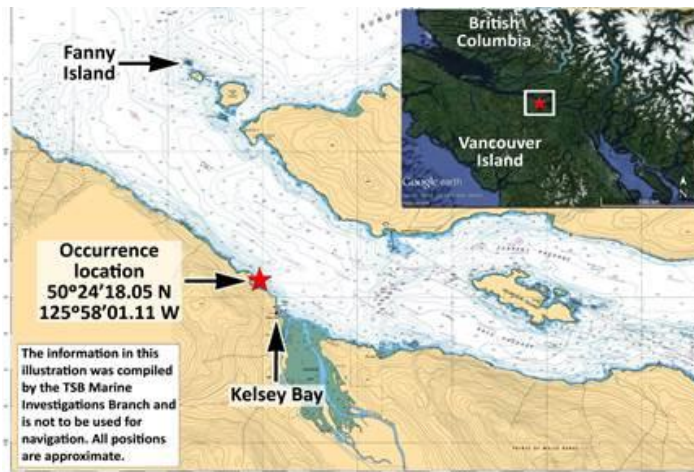


Being prepared for a marine emergency

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On June 12, 2014, the small fishing vessel *Five Star* was returning from a 3-day crabbing trip to Kelsey Bay, British Columbia. The trip had been good, and with the largest catch of the year loaded on deck, the *Five Star* left the sheltered waters of the mainland inlets and entered Johnstone Strait. However, the ebb current was building and a near gale northwest wind was blowing. As the vessel neared Kelsey Bay, it broached in the 1 m following sea, the line securing the catch broke and everything on deck shifted to the port side of the vessel. Water quickly shipped on deck, and the vessel capsized and sank. Prior to the capsizing a VHF call was made to a nearby fellow fisherman for help but was unsuccessful: the DSC function was not available and there was no equipment on board to send an automatic distress signal.



Although both crew members abandoned the vessel, **the only one who survived was wearing a lifejacket.** This person was subsequently able to reach the shore and call 9-1-1.



Our TSB Investigative report M14P0121 (*Five Star*) noted that the master, who is presumed to have drowned, had recently participated in FishSafe’s Safest Catch program and that; as a result, he had applied some of the tools obtained during the program to improve emergency preparedness aboard the *Five Star*. This included purchasing immersion suits and PFDs, and developing a safety procedures manual. However, the conducting of emergency drills—which are both required by regulation and encouraged by the Safest Catch program—had not been done. The program provides training on how to conduct emergency drills but its success relies on fishermen taking ownership of safety and conducting drills on a regular basis.

Regulations aside, **drills are an effective means of assessing emergency preparedness and can save lives.** They can simulate a variety of situations, provide masters and crew members with an opportunity to identify problems, and show them how to take necessary action. This includes, but is not limited to, the need for lifesaving equipment (immersion suits, PFDs, and

life jackets) to be in good shape and accessible at all times, and knowing how to use equipment (VHF radio, DSC function, and EPIRB) to notify authorities in an emergency.

A lot of good work has been done in the past few years by fishermen and the fishing community. But there is still a long way to go. In many cases, fishermen have still accepted the risk of not wearing a PFD and in British Columbia; individuals were found not to be wearing PFDs in 44% of fishing-related fatalities since 2004.

Many vessels might also benefit from the carriage of an EPIRB. Although not always required by regulation, they can automatically transmit a distress signal when crew members cannot, preventing any delay in search-and-rescue operations. In fact, between February 2010 and June 2014, the TSB received reports from across Canada of 6 other fishing vessels of less than 12 m that capsized and/or sank without being equipped with an EPIRB or successfully transmitting a distress message. These occurrences resulted in a total of 16 crew members having to abandon their vessels, and only 7 of whom survived.

A lack of emergency preparedness was just one of several factors contributing to this accident. A 2012 TSB report into fishing safety across Canada identifies 10 safety issues that frequently contribute to accidents—four of which were present to some degree in this occurrence:

- **Stability**, in which the vessel's
 - original construction included a stern extension,
 - stability limits were never established,
 - top-side weight was increased,
 - route led to following sea conditions,
 - stability was affected but not appreciated;
- **Fisheries resource management**, in which fishermen compete for their share of the resource, which in turn may encourage risk-taking activities such as operating in poor weather or overloading their vessel;
- **Training**, in which fishermen do not often practice learned skills and apply knowledge and experience;
- **Safe work practices**, in which fishermen need to develop safe work practice such as ensuring cargo is secured.

There is a complex relationship and interdependency among these issues. Removing one contributing factor may have saved a life but only reduces the risk of losing others. Hopefully, tragedies like the *Five Star* will provide lessons to be learned, and prompting the fishing community to take further action. Until then, the TSB will continue to push for change—investigating accidents and making recommendations, and communicating what we learn—so that more and more fishermen make it home safely.



Fish SAFE offers comprehensive 1-Day and 4-Day Stability Education Workshops to help commercial fishermen understand the stability characteristics of their vessel and develop procedures to minimize or remove potential threats to stability.

For more information or to register, please call Fish SAFE at 604-261-9700 or email fishsafe@fishsafebc.com

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