



Bundesstelle für Seeunfalluntersuchung Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation

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The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) hereby announces the publication of the Summary Investigation Report 20/20 on 1 February 2021. The report deals with a fatal person-overboard accident involving a crew member of the fishing vessel HELEN MARY and is available for download at

<https://www.bsu-bund.de/EN/News>

Fatal person-overboard accident involving a crew member of the fishing vessel HELEN MARY in the North Atlantic on 30 January 2020

The German-flagged fishing vessel HELEN MARY was in international waters north-north-west of the Isle of Lewis (Hebrides) when the accident happened on the night of 29–30 January 2020.

The crew had just launched the trawl at 0243 on 30 January 2020 and started to fish when sensors on the bridge indicated a large shoal of fish in front of the net. To prevent the destruction of the fishing gear, the net was immediately hauled from the bridge. The aim was to catch a manageable portion of the shoal. At the same time, the crew was called back to the deck by means of an audible signal. Since the six fishermen working on the deck assumed they would be performing a different task because the period between deployment of the fishing gear and the signal being sounded was unusually short, they did not put on inflatable work vests. Although the actual situation on the deck was recognised, none of the fishermen returned to the superstructure to fetch or put on an inflatable work vest before they began hauling in the fishing gear.

During the works related to hauling in the fishing gear, one of the fishermen climbed halfway on to the bulwark so as to lean out and reach for an auxiliary line from there in a kneeling position. He lost his balance and fell into the water in the process. The other fishermen quickly lost sight of him.

The bridge was informed of the incident immediately after the fall. The necessary measures, including manning the lookout positions and launching the workboat, were set in motion from there. The developing search operation was supported by seven other fishing vessels. A helicopter from HM Coastguard was additionally deployed later on.

The search was unsuccessful to begin with. Since the inflatable work vest had not been donned, its personal locator beacon was not available to support the search operation. It was only possible to recover the casualty three hours later. An emergency doctor who flew to the ship confirmed the death.

The investigation uncovered evidence to suggest there is a need for improvements in communication between the bridge and fishing deck as well as in the regulation of responsibilities on the fishing deck. In addition, another recommendation on ratification of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW-F), which has already entered into force under international law, has also been formulated.

All investigation reports, safety recommendations and other information published by the BSU are available at

<https://www.bsu-bund.de/EN/Publications>.

Ulf Kaspera
Director