

Grounding and subsequent loss of the fishing vessel *Silver Cloud II* (WK 80) on Rubha Rodha, Lochinver, Scotland on 14 October 2025

Extract from The United Kingdom Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2026 – Regulation 5:

The sole objective of a safety investigation into an accident under these Regulations is the prevention of future accidents through the ascertainment of its causes and circumstances. It is not the purpose of such an investigation to determine liability nor, except so far as is necessary to achieve its objective, to apportion blame.

NOTE

This report is not written with litigation in mind and, pursuant to Regulation 19(1) of The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2026, shall be inadmissible in any judicial proceedings concerning liability unless the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents or a court of law determine otherwise.

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SUMMARY

At about 0238 on 14 October 2025, the fishing vessel *Silver Cloud II* grounded on rocks at Rubha Rodha, near Lochinver, Scotland. The vessel was holed and partially flooded and the three crew members abandoned to the shore where they were subsequently rescued by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) without injury. *Silver Cloud II* later broke up on the rocks and was declared a constructive total loss.

The investigation found that:

- The skipper, who was alone in the wheelhouse, fell asleep. This was likely due to acute fatigue caused by insufficient and fragmented rest, compounded by a flu-like illness that further reduced alertness and increased the skipper's need for sleep.
- The vessel was fitted with a watch alarm; however, the system arrangement provided limited redundancy and was insufficient to mitigate the consequences of watchkeeper incapacitation.
- It is highly likely that the regular safety drills conducted on board prepared the crew for such an eventuality, equipping them with the knowledge and experience to increase their chances of survival.

In view of the repetition of findings from previous Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) investigations, no recommendations have been made.

Image from Gordon Macrae ([MarineTraffic](#))



Silver Cloud II

FACTUAL INFORMATION

Vessel and environment

Silver Cloud II was a 15.58m prawn trawler that operated out of Ullapool and Gairloch, Scotland. It was built in 1972 and purchased by Silver Cloud Shellfish Ltd in 2024. The vessel was typically crewed by the skipper, a mate and one deckhand.

The skipper and mate had both worked as fishermen for about 25 years. The deckhand was new to fishing and had been on board *Silver Cloud II* for about 12 months. Regular safety drills were conducted on board, and all crew members held the required Seafish certification.

Narrative

On 10 October 2025, *Silver Cloud II* completed a period of repair work. The skipper was in attendance to assist with the repair and returned home at about midnight to rest.

At about 1100 on 11 October, *Silver Cloud II* departed Gairloch to start fishing. At the time of departure, the skipper was experiencing flu-like symptoms but deemed themselves fit to sail. The crew fished throughout the day and evening and arrived into Ullapool at about 2300. They went to bed at about midnight.

At about 0330 on 12 October, the crew got up and departed Ullapool shortly afterwards. The mate took the first watch until about 0530, when the skipper took over until the first nets were shot away¹ at about 0630. The nets were hauled at 1130, and the crew worked for the rest of the day. In the evening, the vessel sailed to an old submarine mooring buoy known as 'The Can' in Loch Ewe, arriving at about 2030. The crew had dinner and went to bed at about 2300.

At 0415 on 13 October, *Silver Cloud II* departed 'The Can' to proceed to its fishing grounds for the day. The crew shot away at about 0645 but, on hauling at 1100, the net was found to be significantly damaged. The crew decided to proceed to Stornoway to land their catch and conduct repairs. The vessel arrived alongside at about 1500.

The skipper went to bed, while the mate and deckhand repaired the net, landed the catch and had dinner. At about 2100, the skipper got up and the crew decided to conduct a night trawl to make up for the lost trawl earlier that day. At about 2130, *Silver Cloud II* departed Stornoway (**Figure 1**). The mate took the first watch in the wheelhouse for 2 hours until about 2330, when the skipper took over.

The skipper set a waypoint near the fishing ground, which had an arrival time of about 0115, and placed the vessel into autopilot. At some point between 2330 and 0115, the skipper fell asleep in the wheelhouse. The vessel passed the waypoint and continued on a course of 092° towards mainland Scotland.

At 0238, *Silver Cloud II* grounded on rocks at Rubha Rodha (**Figure 2**). The impact and subsequent movement awoke the skipper and crew. On inspection, approximately 1m of rising water was found in the fish hold. The skipper decided to abandon the vessel.

The three crew each donned a personal flotation device (PFD). The deckhand was able to step directly onto the rocks. As the vessel began to heel to port, the starboard side rose clear of the water. The mate entered the water from the starboard side and was assisted ashore by the deckhand.

The skipper placed the engine in neutral, activated the emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB), transmitted a distress alert via digital selective calling (DSC)², and took a VHF radio. The

¹ The release of trawl gear (e.g. nets and doors) from a vessel, into a position to trawl for fish.

² A digital alerting system that, on the press of a single button, can send a vessel's identity, position, and the nature of its distress to all DSC-equipped vessels and shore stations within range.

skipper then moved to the starboard side, secured a rope around their waist, entered the water, and was pulled ashore by the mate and the deckhand. At about 0300, an RNLI lifeboat arrived on scene and recovered the crew.

Silver Cloud II remained aground, with salvors attending to remove debris and nets. The vessel subsequently broke up and sank.

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Figure 1: Chart showing the final path of *Silver Cloud II*

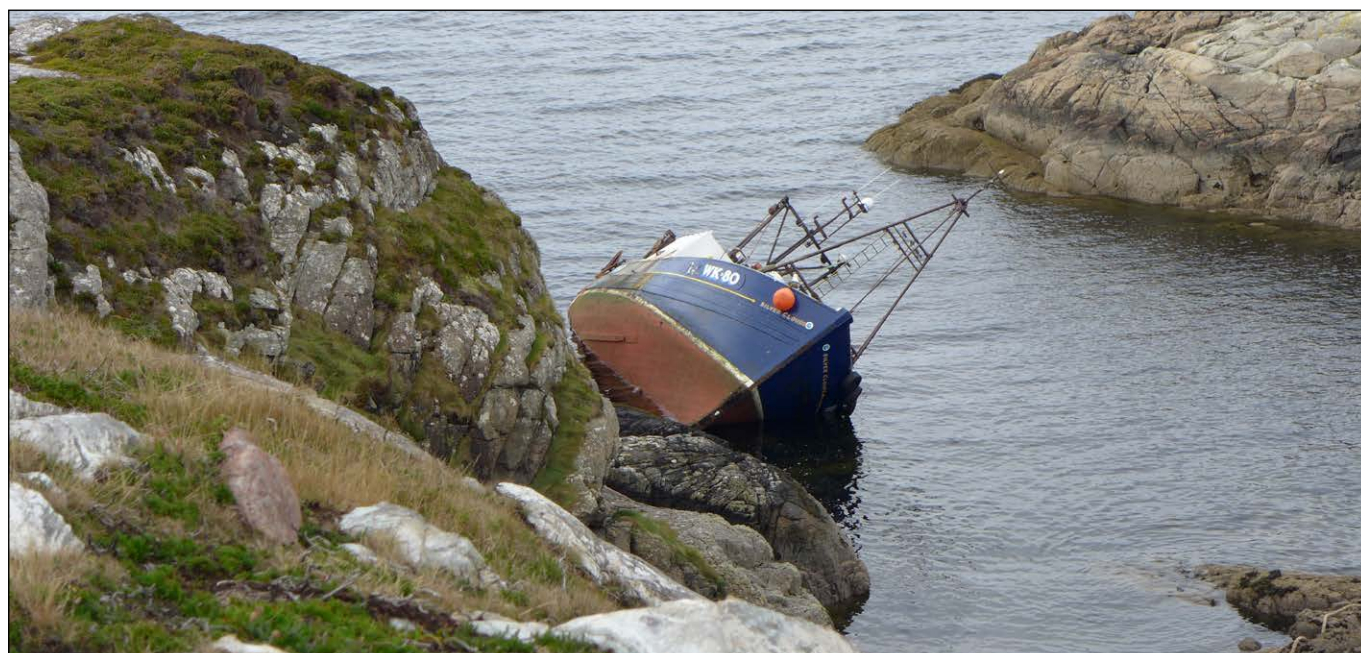


Figure 2: *Silver Cloud II* aground on the rocks at Rubha Rodha

Hours of work and rest

Silver Cloud II operated as a twin rig prawn trawler, predominantly fishing in daylight hours. Nets were typically shot away before or around first light and trawling continued throughout the working day, which typically ran between 0700 and 1800 in autumn.

The vessel operated a cycle of up to 10 days at sea, followed by 4 to 5 days ashore. The vessel landed catch every 2 days and returned to harbour (or a sheltered mooring) each night. The skipper presented with flu-like symptoms at the start of the vessel's final trip. These symptoms included headache, a sore throat, congestion and muscle aches and were being managed with self-administered paracetamol.

Table 1 shows the work and rest hours for the skipper during the final trip. Greater consideration was given to the skipper's work pattern, and they took more rest periods than usual.

Date	11 October 2025	12 October 2025	13 October 2025
Work/rest period			
Rest	Midnight to 0600	0001 to 0330 0630 to 0830 2300 to midnight	0001 to 0400 1900 to 2100 2200 to 2330
Work	0600 to midnight	0330 to 0630 0830 to 2300	0400 to 1900 2100 to 2200 2330 to midnight ³
Total work hours	18	17.5	16.5
Total rest hours	6	6.5	7.5
Longest work period (hours)	18	14.5	15
Longest rest period (hours)	6	3.5	4

Table 1: The skipper's work and rest hours

WATCHKEEPING PRACTICES

Watchkeeping and lone working

Watchkeeping on board *Silver Cloud II* was shared between the three crew, with each taking watches as required. The vessel operated an informal watchkeeping arrangement and had no structured rota. Watches were allocated dependent on operational demands such as shooting, hauling, towing and transit between fishing grounds and ports.

The skipper or mate was normally in the wheelhouse for extended periods while towing, typically through daylight hours. The watches were conducted by the mate and deckhand during transits. The deckhand was building experience and was not undertaking towing watches independently.

Silver Cloud II routinely operated with a single person on watch. At the time of the accident, the skipper was alone in the wheelhouse.

Use of watch alarm and media in the wheelhouse

Silver Cloud II was fitted with a watch alarm system, which was located inside the wheelhouse and it was active when the vessel was on autopilot. The watch alarm system operated on a timer, requiring a button to be pressed every 4 minutes to prevent the alarm sounding. The volume of the alarm increased if no intervention was taken after 1 minute of the first alarm sounding. The system did not include any visual alarm or a repeater within the crew accommodation.

³ The skipper fell asleep in the wheelhouse between 2330 and 0115 (+1 day); actual working time may therefore be marginally less than stated for this period.

Music was often played on the deck during recovery of the catch and inside the wheelhouse. On the night of the accident, music was being played in the wheelhouse while the skipper was on watch.

REGULATION AND GUIDANCE

Marine Guidance Note 313 (F)⁴

Guidance on maintaining a safe navigational watch on fishing vessels was provided in MGN 313 (F). The notice stated that a proper lookout must be maintained at all times and that vessels should be navigated by competent people who continuously monitored the vessel's position using all available means.

The MGN further highlighted that insufficient watchkeeping remained a significant causal factor in collisions and groundings. Contributory factors identified in the notice included lone watchkeeping, distraction in the wheelhouse (music systems or similar), and fatigue or impairment of the watchkeeper.

Additionally, MGN 313 (F) recommended the use of watch alarms, particularly on board vessels with a lone watchkeeper. The guidance emphasised that these alarms were intended to alert both the watchkeeper and other crew members in the event of incapacitation, although were not to be solely relied upon as the sole means of maintaining a safe watch.

Merchant Shipping Notice 1884 (F) Amendment 1⁵

Requirements relating to hours of work and rest for fishermen were set out in MSN 1884 (F) Amendment 1, which implemented the International Labour Organization (ILO) Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188). The MSN established minimum rest periods of at least 10 hours in any 24-hour period and 77 hours in any 7-day period. It also required daily rest hours to be divided into no more than two periods, one of which was to be at least 6 hours in length.

This MSN also required that work and rest arrangements be planned and recorded, and that exceptions to minimum rest may be authorised for operational reasons, or emergencies, if safety was not compromised.

EFFECTS OF ILLNESS ON FATIGUE

The NHS published guidance⁶ on treating flu symptoms and how to speed up recovery. The guidance advised that flu was a viral infection with rapidly developing symptoms, including exhaustion, which reduce a person's ability to function as normal and impair their capacity to undertake routine tasks or maintain usual performance levels.

WINDOW OF CIRCADIAN LOW

The window of circadian low is the period, typically between about 0200 and 0600, when human alertness is naturally reduced and there is increased propensity to sleep⁷.

PREVIOUS ACCIDENTS

On 16 November 2023, the prawn trawler *Sustain* grounded at the entrance to Loch Broom, Scotland, after the skipper fell asleep while on watch. The investigation (MAIB report 9/2025⁸) found that routine fishing operations had led to the accumulation of a significant sleep debt, reducing the skipper's resilience to extended periods of wakefulness. The skipper was also not compliant with hours of work and rest requirements at the time of the accident.

⁴ MGN 313 (F): Keeping a Safe Navigational Watch on Fishing Vessels.

⁵ MSN 1884 (F) Amendment 1: ILO Work in Fishing Convention, Working Time.

⁶ [NHS Conditions A to Z: Flu](#)

⁷ Visit [What Is Circadian Rhythm?](#) for further information about the sleep-wake cycle.

⁸ [MAIB report 9/2025: Sustain](#)

On 6 June 2025, the prawn trawler *Crystal Stream* grounded on Barmore Island, Scotland after the skipper, who was alone in the wheelhouse, fell asleep. The investigation (MAIB report 11/2026⁹) found that the skipper was likely severely fatigued due to accumulated sleep debt, and that the risks associated with lone watchkeeping had not been identified in the vessel's risk assessments.

ANALYSIS

Overview

Silver Cloud II grounded on rocks at Rubha Rodha, near Lochinver, Scotland after the skipper fell asleep, while on watch, during a night passage to fishing grounds. The vessel, which was on autopilot, missed a planned waypoint and continued on its course until it struck the shoreline. The skipper, who had a flu-like illness, had worked extended hours with insufficient and fragmented rest during the previous days' fishing operations. Although a watch alarm was fitted, its design provided no function beyond the wheelhouse and was ineffective in preventing the grounding.

Illness and fatigue

In the 3 days leading up to the accident the skipper's rest was fragmented and limited, with multiple short rest periods and extended working days. Similar to the circumstances identified in the *Sustain* investigation, these patterns were inconsistent with the required 10 hours of rest per day stipulated in MSN 1884 (F) Amendment 1. Full records were unavailable for the 4 days before *Silver Cloud II* departed; however, based on the pattern observed in the 3 days before the accident (see **Table 1**), it is highly likely that the skipper's rest did not meet the minimum requirement of 77 hours over 7 days.

The skipper's flu-like illness is likely to have increased their sleep need and further lowered alertness. Despite the crew facilitating additional rest for the skipper, it is likely that the symptoms they were experiencing reduced the quality and restorative value of these rest periods.

The timing of the accident fell within the window of circadian low. In an individual already affected by fragmented rest and illness, the circadian effect would have been expected to further increase the likelihood of drowsiness or unintentional sleep.

The skipper very likely fell asleep because they were operating with an acute level of fatigue, exacerbated by illness and a level of rest below statutory requirements. These combined factors, occurring in a period of circadian low, substantially increased the likelihood of impaired alertness and unintentional sleep.

Watchkeeping

Watchkeeping on board *Silver Cloud II* was routinely conducted by one person, with responsibility passed informally between crew dependent on operational demands. This approach, while not prohibited for the vessel's size, differed from the MGN 313 (F) guidance highlighting the risks associated with lone watchkeeping and emphasised the need for an effective lookout at all times.

Although not a requirement on board *Silver Cloud II*, a watch alarm was fitted. However, the system did not provide a visual alarm or audible repeater in the vessel's accommodation spaces. It is also highly likely that the watch alarm was masked by the music playing in the wheelhouse, reducing its effectiveness in alerting the skipper.

The circumstances of this accident are consistent with previous MAIB investigations into fishing vessel groundings involving fatigued skippers who have fallen asleep while maintaining a lone watch. In the case of *Crystal Stream*, limitations in the effectiveness of the watch alarm also reduced the opportunity for recovery. This recurrence indicates that the risks associated with fatigue and lone watchkeeping were well established but not effectively mitigated on board *Silver Cloud II*.

⁹ [MAIB report 11/2026: Crystal Stream](#)

Together, these factors resulted in the crew being unaware of the skipper's incapacitation until the grounding.

Although fitted, the watch alarm system did not provide effective redundancy, limiting the crew's ability to mitigate the consequences of watchkeeper incapacitation.

Vessel abandonment

Following the grounding the crew acted promptly to abandon the vessel and alert the coastguard. Essential equipment was gathered, and PFDs were collected from a dedicated easy access stowage location within one minute. The crew were able to safely evacuate to shore, without injury, and remained together until recovered by the RNLI.

It is highly likely that the regular onboard safety drills prepared the crew for such an eventuality, equipping them with the knowledge and experience to increase their chances of survival.

CONCLUSIONS

- *Silver Cloud II* grounded after the skipper fell asleep while maintaining a lone watch during a night passage, allowing the vessel to continue on autopilot to the shoreline.
- The skipper very likely fell asleep because they were operating with an acute level of fatigue, exacerbated by illness and a level of rest below statutory requirements. These combined factors, occurring at a period of circadian low, substantially increased the likelihood of impaired alertness and unintentional sleep.
- Although fitted, the watch alarm system did not provide effective redundancy, limiting the crew's ability to mitigate the consequences of watchkeeper incapacitation.
- It is highly likely that the regular onboard safety drills prepared the crew for such an eventuality, equipping them with the knowledge and experience to increase their chances of survival.

ACTION TAKEN

MAIB actions

In view of the safety lessons published in previous safety flyers, including both *Sustain* and *Crystal Stream*, no safety flyer has been produced for this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the recurrence of similar findings identified in previous MAIB investigations, no new recommendations have been made. The safety issues identified are considered to be well understood and existing guidance remains directly applicable.

VESSEL PARTICULARS

Vessel's name	<i>Silver Cloud II</i>
Flag	UK
Classification society	Not applicable
IMO number/fishing numbers	WK 80
Type	Prawn trawler
Registered owner	Silver Cloud Shellfish Ltd
Manager(s)	Silver Cloud Shellfish Ltd
Year of build	1972
Construction	Wood
Length overall	16.55m
Registered length	15.58m
Gross tonnage	42
Minimum safe manning	Not applicable
Authorised cargo	Shellfish

VOYAGE PARTICULARS

Port of departure	Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, Scotland
Port of arrival	Not applicable
Type of voyage	Coastal
Cargo information	Prawns
Manning	3

MARINE CASUALTY INFORMATION

Date and time	14 October 2025 at about 0238
Type of marine casualty or incident	Very Serious Marine Casualty
Location of incident	Rubha Rodha, near Lochinver, Scotland
Place on board	Wheelhouse/hull
Injuries/fatalities	None
Damage/environmental impact	Vessel holed, flooded, and partially sank
Vessel operation	Underway (on way to fishing grounds)
Voyage segment	Mid-water
External & internal environment	Dark; slight seas; moderate to good visibility
Persons on board	3