

SAFETY FLYER TO THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Two men overboard, resulting in one fatality, from the fishing vessel *Reul A Chuain* (OB915) in the Sound of Rùm, Scotland, on 24 June 2021

Image courtesy of [Fishing News](#) (published 2019)



Reul A Chuain

Narrative

At about 1900 on 24 June 2021, the senior deckhand of the wooden fishing vessel *Reul A Chuain* (OB915) fell overboard during the recovery of a trawl net that had slipped over the stern while the vessel was returning to harbour. The skipper subsequently also fell overboard as he attempted to rescue him. Neither crew member was wearing a personal flotation device (PFD) or safety harness and lifeline. The remaining deckhand was able to recover both men, but the skipper did not survive.

Reul A Chuain was on passage from its fishing grounds west of the Isle of Rùm to Mallaig, Scotland. While the vessel was transiting the Sound of Rùm, the wind veered from south-westerly force 4 to northerly force 6, creating a short steep swell. The vessel rolled heavily and the trawl net, which was stowed on deck behind the wheelhouse and had not been lashed down, slipped overboard.

The vessel was immediately stopped, and the net was partially recovered. The retrieval gear then failed and the crew attempted to haul the rest of the net in by hand. The vessel rolled heavily and more net went over the stern, this time taking the senior deckhand, who was standing on the net on the deck, with it. The skipper leaned over the stern and tried to pull him back on board, but also fell overboard when the vessel again rolled heavily. With only 4 months' experience, the junior deckhand managed to recover both men and radio a "Mayday" message. Despite the efforts of the vessel's crew and search and rescue personnel, the skipper was declared deceased at the scene.

Safety lessons

1. *Reul A Chuain's* risk assessments identified the hazard from loose gear and listed securing and tying down as control measures. With the worsening weather and the low bulwark height at the stern, the trawl net could have been prevented from going overboard had it been lashed down following a final trawl of the day. The risk assessment's control measures were ineffective because they were not implemented.
2. Ignoring safe practices can have serious consequences. By not wearing fall restraint harnesses or PFDs, the crew put themselves at risk by hauling in the net by hand when the net retrieval gear failed.
3. Adverse weather conditions and a man in the water without a PFD was a serious emergency. The instinctive action of the skipper to try and pull the senior deckhand back on board had tragic consequences. He was not wearing a PFD, which limited his ability to help himself. A PFD can keep a casualty afloat sufficiently long enough to allow time for an effective recovery to be conducted that does not put others at risk.
4. Training and drills are meant to provide a coordinated and practised response when action is needed. *Reul A Chuain's* crew had not undertaken man overboard drills, and although the vessel was equipped with man overboard recovery equipment, the crew were unaware of its existence on board and had never practised with it. Their reactions to the emergency were therefore instinctive rather than well thought out, tried and tested. With no plan or training, the inexperienced junior deckhand's rescue of both men is commendable. The only way to prepare for an emergency is to undertake regular training and drills, and become familiar with on board equipment.

This flyer and the MAIB's investigation report are posted on our website: www.gov.uk/maib

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NOTE

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