

LOSS OF THE FISHING VESSEL BLUE PEARL J163

ON MONDAY 30TH JULY



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GLOSSARY

- VHF Very High Frequency radio
- RIB Rigid hull inflatable boat

1.0 SYNOPSIS

A 6.25m open fishing vessel left its berth in La Collette St Helier at approximately 10:30 for a day's fishing in the area of the Violet Bank south east of the island. The vessel was crewed by a single person and was engaged in potting. He began hauling and resetting 9 strings of pots starting just off of Demie des Pas lighthouse and working his way slowly eastwards. On hauling the tenth string located just NW of Taxe Rock the skipper set course at slow speed away from the rocks and began banding lobsters from the recent catch. Shortly after that the vessel grounded on a small rock SE of Taxe Rock. The vessel immediately listed on the falling tide and began to swamp. Within seconds it capsized throwing the occupant into the water. Initially he climbed on top of the upturned hull to attract attention. As the vessel sank beneath him, he swam to nearby Taxe Rock. This rock began to cover on the rising tide and after an exhausting 45 minute swim to a large cluster of rocks where he was picked up cold and suffering hypothermia, by a passing commercial RIB.

2.0 THE VESSEL

2.1 The vessel is a 6.25m Loftus Bennett called **BLUE PEARL J163**. It is an open fishing vessel with a forward console. It was fitted with a 100hp Yamaha outboard fitted new in December 2017. It was used mainly for potting.

2.2 Records show this vessel first entered service locally in 2013 and was bought by the present owner in September 2017. It was surveyed by the Assistant Registrar at that time. Because of its age it was not provided with a SeaFish compliant hull certificate. The earliest records for this vessel date back to 2013 but the actual build date is unknown.

2.3 The vessel was observed to be in good condition and all required safety equipment, including lifejackets, were found in good order. The vessel was issued with a Safety Equipment Certificate in September 2017. Although not mandatory the vessel carried a portable VHF radio stored in the cuddy along with the only life jacket carried.

3.0 THE CREW

3.1 The vessel was operated single handed by a skipper in his mid 20s with seven years' experience in the fishing industry. At the time the vessel was inspected at purchase the skipper held a valid Small Craft Basic Sea Survival Course issued in March 2015. He was booked to go on a First Aid Course in September 2017 but no evidence was produced of having attended a Fire Fighting Course.

3.2 When the skipper entered the water he was not wearing a life jacket. He did attempt to swim under the upturned hull to retrieve it from the stowage locker but fumes in the air pocket prevented him from doing so. Initially he removed his oilskins to attract attention. When no vessels were seen in the vicinity, he took the decision to strip to his underwear to swim some distance to the nearest drying rocks about 800-900m away. (La Conchiere)

4.0 THE AREA OF OPERATION

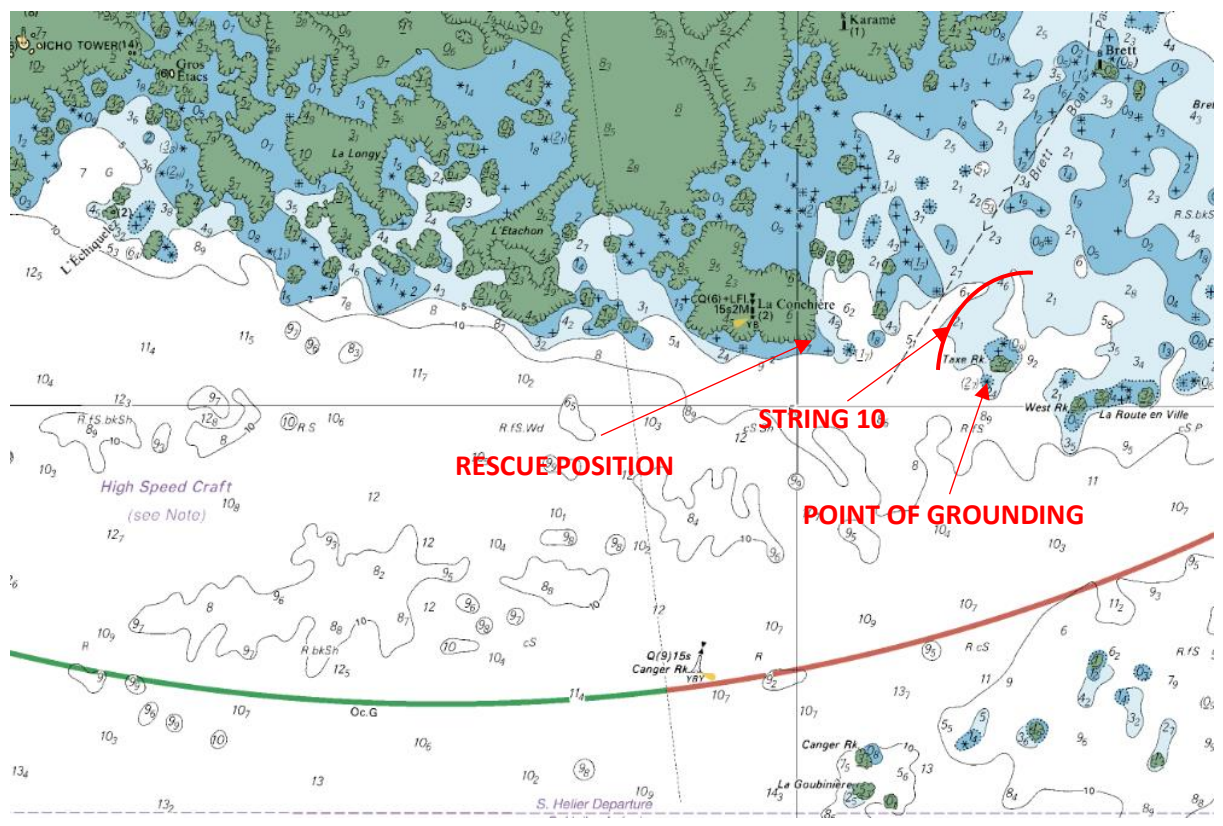


FIG 1 Extract from chart BA 1138

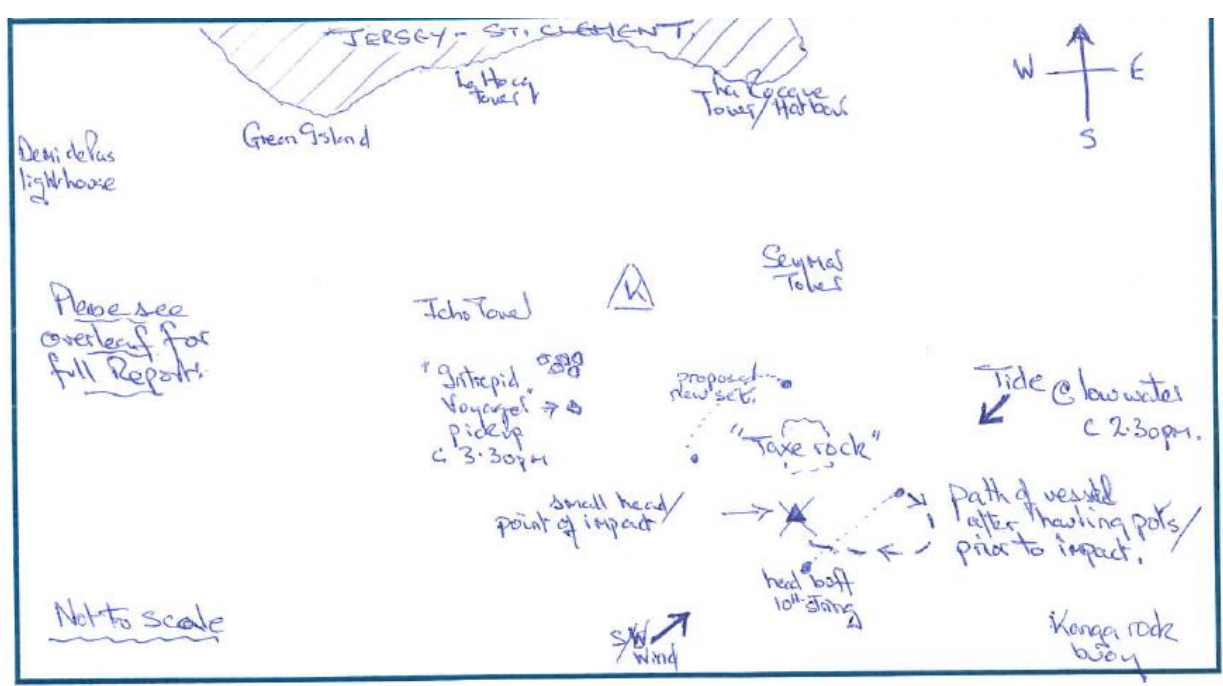


FIG 2 Drawing of area where vessel sank provided by skipper.

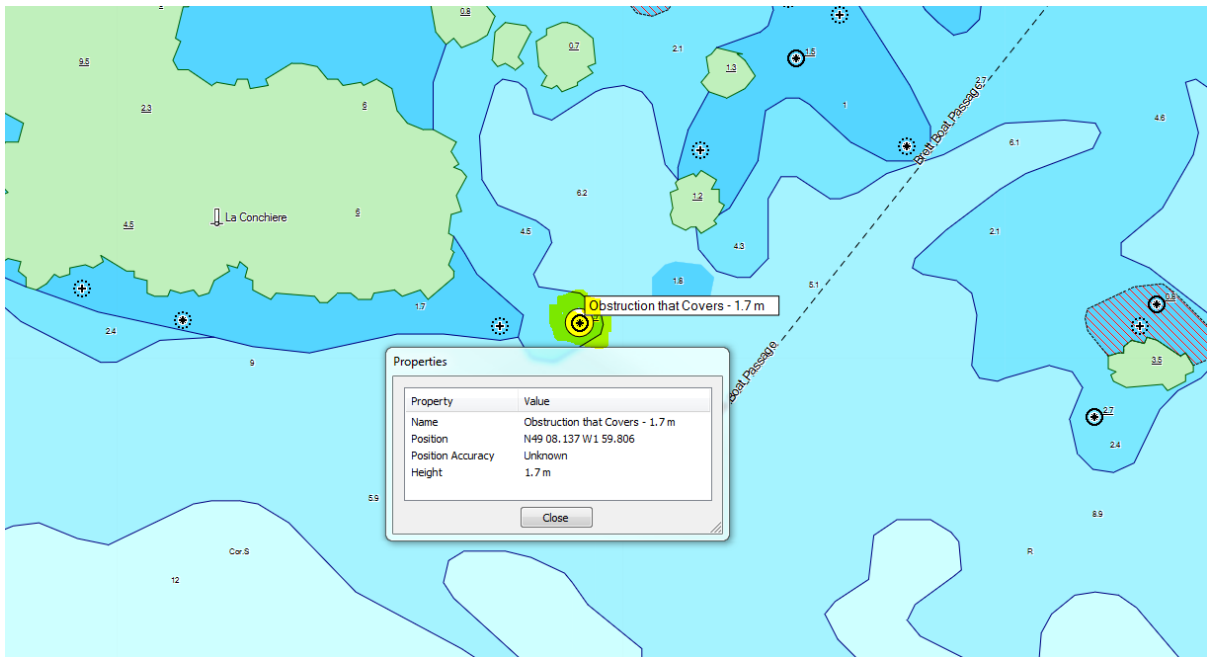


FIG 3 Print off from the chart plotter of INTREPID VOYAGER showing the position the casualty was recovered.

6.0 FINDINGS

6.1 It can be seen from **Fig 3** that the distance between the point of capsizing to where the casualty was recovered is approximately 800m. The casualty embarked on this swim almost naked in sea temperature of 18°C and without a life jacket. By the time he left the Taxe Rock was becoming awash the tide was flooding and his nearest drying rock, La Conchiere (2m High) was 1000m away and up tide from him. His swim against the tide covered 800m in 45 minutes and left him exhausted and hypothermic. By his own admission he lacked the strength to complete the final 20m to La Conchiere rock, which indicated the advanced state of exhaustion he was in. The position from which he was recovered would have covered at half tide. If he hadn't been picked up when he was it is very likely that he would have succumbed to hypothermia. Survival rates for an exhausted person in the water with a temperature of 18°C is approximately 1-2 hours

6.2 The vessel was in good order having been inspected on transfer of ownership in September of 2017. A life jacket was provided on board for the single occupant.

6.3 The occupant was not wearing his lifejacket at the time of capsizing and had little chance to retrieve it and don it before the vessel turned over and he was thrown into the water.

6.4 Although not mandatory for vessels under 7m in length the vessel carried a portable VHF radio. This was also stowed in the cuddy and inaccessible due to the sudden capsizing. The occupant had no other means of communication.

6.5 Potting can be a hazardous operation on a small open boat as instant snagging can be a problem. Often this causes the vessel to take a severe list and in some cases capsize. Lives have been lost in this manner here in Jersey previously.**6.0 CONCLUSIONS:**

6.1 The **BLUE PEARL** was appropriately equipped for the voyage being undertaken and the skipper suitably qualified and experienced.

6.2 The **BLUE PEARL** struck a charted rock SSW of Taxe rock at a time when the skipper, the only person aboard, was occupied with banding lobsters. The vessel quickly capsized and sank by the stern.

6.3 The skipper was wearing suitable waterproof clothing but was not wearing his lifejacket. The lifejacket was stowed in a location that was not immediately accessible. Consequently, when the skipper found himself in the water, he was faced with the need to abandon his protective clothing in order to swim. This shortened the time before he became susceptible to hypothermia and he was exhausted by the time he reached the rock from which he was rescued.

6.4 Whilst **BLUE PEARL** carried a portable VHF radio this was also not immediately accessible. In the absence of a Personal Locator Beacon or a vessel EPIRB it was not possible for the alarm to be raised when the fishing vessel sank.

6.5 The actions of the skipper of the commercial RIB **INTREPID VOYAGER**, in manoeuvring his vessel to rescue the **BLUE PEARL'S** skipper from the rock on which he had taken refuge, and providing appropriate first aid on passage were key in preventing the incident from having more serious consequences.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 A copy of this report should be sent to local Fishermen's Associations.

7.2 A Safety Bulletin should be produced for all fishermen, especially those operating single handed drawing attention to lessons learned from this incident and to similar incidents investigated by the UK MAIB. This should include a recommendation on the wearing of suitable lifejackets and Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs).

7.3 Ports of Jersey should consider opening a similar consultation to that being carried out by the MCA in the UK to amend the Approved Code of Conduct to make the wearing of lifejackets and of PLBs compulsory for single-handed fishermen.

7.4 Jersey should consider adopting any regulatory or guidance changes made by the UK in a way that ensures equivalent standards of safety are maintained for local vessels