



Transporta nelaimes gadījumu un incidentu izmeklēšanas birojs

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Final report

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Fatal man overboard from fishing trawler VARITA on August 28, 2022



**Marine Accident Investigation Unit
Brivibas 58, Riga, LV-1011**

2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of marine accident investigations is to improve shipping safety and prevent similar accidents in the future. An investigation by the Transport Accident and Incident Investigation Bureau is not about determining individual fault or responsibility.

This report is not intended to be used in legal proceedings in terms of content and presentation.

On August 28, 2022, the Transport Accident and Incident Investigation Bureau (hereinafter referred to as the Bureau) received a report by phone from MRCC Latvia, that a person fell overboard into the sea from the trawler VARITA.

As a result of the search and rescue operations, the casualty was not found.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACCIDENT

On August 28, 2022, the vessel VARITA sailed from Skulte port, South of Riga Bay, at 06:30 LT to return to fishing grounds 7 nm from the coast. The weather conditions were good, calm sea, good visibility, temperature +30C, sea temperature +7C.

VARITA was steel hulled stern trawler equipped to use single net trawl gear. The vessel normally spent up to 12 hours at sea before returning to port, when the crew would take a 2-day break.

When at the fishing area on August 28th, the crew shot the net, the skipper was in the wheelhouse. They start trawling and the crew was given some rest for three hours. At 11:00 LT the skipper called the crew to prepare for hauling the net.

At 11:20 the crew began hauling the net (Figure 3), which was controlled from the stern deck. The crew donned their oilskin long trousers, fisherman's boots and went onto deck. None of the crew were wearing PFDs or safety harness. Soon later, the trawl doors were recovered and secured, and the sweeps and bridles were (Figure 2) then disconnected and the trawl was connected onto the forward (Figure 4) crane, in the front of wheelhouse, where the trawl was in the water on starboard side. The construction of the trawl contains rope 8-10 meters, connected to the end of trawl with the floating buoy at the end of the rope, which marks the end of the trawl when trawling.

The engine was stopped and the crew prepared to release the fish from the trawl on deck. This is done in segments. Part of the trawl 2-3 tons of fish is hoisted by crane on deck and the fish is released (Figure 1). Then the empty segment of the trawl is disconnected from the cranes hook and released again into the sea, to prepare to hoist next segment. The rope connected to the cod end of the trawl is on the deck when the segment is on deck where the buoy remains in the water.



Figure 1. Fish released on deck

In this situation the rope was under the fish. Taking empty segment from the hook and releasing it to the water the trawl was going down fast under the weight of fish. The rope appeared between the lags of fisherman pressing his one leg to the railing and pooled him into the water. He just shouted “STOP” and was pooled out into the sea. Crewmembers tried to rescue him, but no one saw him on surface. As from testimonies of the crewmembers, it happened within one second.

At 12:50 the skipper reported man overboard to MRCC Latvia. MRCC initiated SAR operations. At 13:49 coastguard ship is at site and started SAR operations. At 14:45 VARITA reported that trawl is on board and they will join SAR operations. At 18:18 SAR operations completed by means of three ships, with no result.

Since the body wasn't found, the casualty is considered as missing.

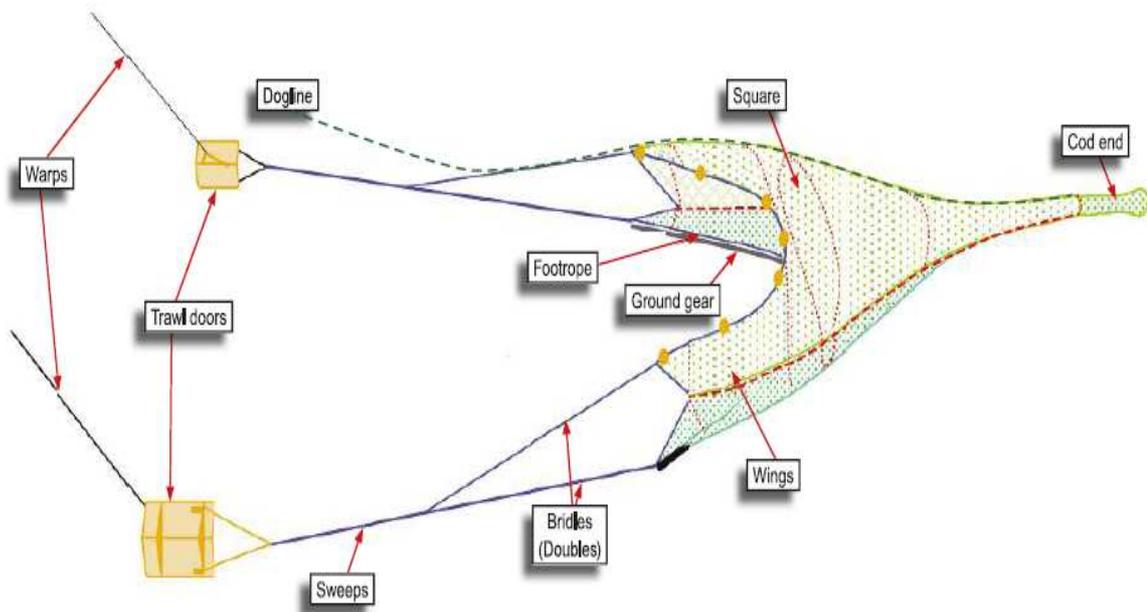


Figure 2. Trawl overview

3. FACTS

Vessel name:	VARITA
Call sign	YL2132
Flag country	Latvia.
Main characteristics	gross tonnage 80 tons; Length:27,1 m., width:5,5 m.; draft 1,93 m.; main engine: 1 diesel 162 Kw.
Owner and actual manager	VARITA, LTD, registered in Riga.
Construction data	construction material-steel,1983
Minimum safe manning certificate	4 people
Vessel type	Fishing vessel, trawler
Ports visited	Skulte, Latvia, 28.08.2022.
Type of work	Coastal fishing in the Baltic Sea, Riga Bay
Cargo information	4 tons of fuel on board.
Crew information	4 people were on board at the time of the accident.
Position	Lat:57.11,2N Lon:024.04,6E



Figure 3. Trawl winch

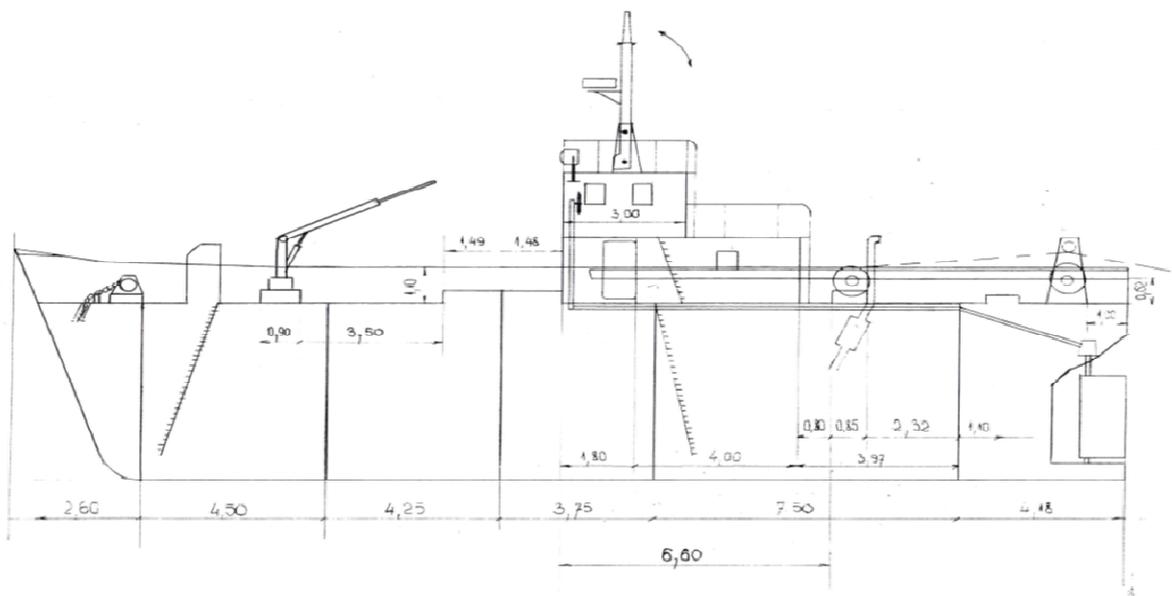


Figure 4. Plan of the ship

4. ANALISYS

Circumstances and environment of events related to the marine accident:

The vessel VARITA has been working under the Latvian flag since 1990. The company Varita SIA is the sole registered owner, operator, manager of the vessel. The ship is under the technical supervision of the Inspectorate of the Latvian Maritime administration. All the crew members have long-term work experience on ships of a similar class, practically all the crew members have 20-30 years of work experience in trawling the fish at sea. Crew competency documents/certificates meet Latvian and conventional requirements.

Casualty was dressed in T-shirt, long fisherman's oil skin trousers and fisherman's boots. Outside temperature that day was +30C. None of the crew were wearing PFDs.

On immersion in cold water the sudden lowering of skin temperature causes a rapid rise in heart rate, and therefore blood pressure, accompanied by a gasp reflex followed by uncontrollable rapid breathing. The onset of cold shock occurs and peaks within 30 seconds and lasts for 2-3 minutes. If the head goes underwater during this stage, the inability to hold breath will often lead to water entering the lungs in quantities sufficient to cause death. Cold shock is considered to be the cause of the majority of drowning deaths.

Internal organization and management of the ship:

After analysis of the ship's documentation, it is concluded that all instructions, documentation, equipment certification procedures related to the operation of the ship, emergency situations, rescue and fire/water management are controlled, recorded and meet the national requirements. There were four crew on board VARITA at the time of the accident, all Latvians. They all came for the work early in the morning the day of the accident after well rested at home.

Human misconduct and inaction	Crew misconduct/inaction cannot be detected.
Events related to hazardous substances	none
Environmental impact	none
Malfunctions in the operation of the equipment	none
External influence	Weather conditions were not a factor affecting the accident.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The casualty most probably had shock from the effects of immersion in cold water. His chances of survival would have been improved had he worn his PFD.

The effects of cold-water incapacitation and the way he was dressed resulted in him being unable to hold on surface.

Conclusions are based on investigators assumptions.

6. SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the National safety legislation (Regulations of Cabinet of Ministers Nr.248 Safety of the fishing vessels) and other guidance currently promulgated to the fishing industry, no recommendations have been made.

The investigation was conducted by:
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