

**MARINE OCCURRENCE REPORT**

**MAN OVERBOARD AND DROWNED**

**FROM THE FISHING VESSEL "LUC I"  
APPROXIMATELY 5 MILES NE  
OF CAP LUMIÈRE, NEW BRUNSWICK  
12 AUGUST 1996**

**REPORT NUMBER M96M0090**

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) investigated this occurrence for the purpose of advancing transportation safety. It is not the function of the Board to assign fault or determine civil or criminal liability.

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### **Summary**

On 12 August 1996 at approximately 1230, the fishing vessel "LUC I" was laying lobster traps in Northumberland Strait when the deck-hand was dragged overboard by the lobster traps and associated gear, and drowned.

Ce rapport est également disponible en français.

**Other Factual Information**

**Particulars of the Vessel**

Name	"LUC I"
Official Number	155396
Port of Registry	Moncton, N.B.
Flag	Canadian
Type	Lobster boat
Gross Tonnage	Under 15 GRT
Length	Approximately 13 m
Propulsion	Caterpillar, diesel, 157 kW
Owner	Mr. R. Boucher Richibuctou Village, N.B.

The "LUC I" is a Northumberland Strait-type fishing vessel designed to be operated from the port side. She has a pronounced bow flare and an afterdeck approximately 1.13 m in length and approximately 83 cm high.

The vessel departed Bouctouche, N.B., at approximately 0430 on 12 August 1996, with a crew of two, namely the owner/operator and one deck-hand. The purpose of the trip was to re-lay strings of metal lobster traps from which lobsters had been harvested earlier.

The atmosphere on board was casual and comfortable with the owner/operator standing at the controls. The door to the port side of the wheel-house was open, and through the doorway, the owner/operator could see the deck-hand working on the well-deck, throwing lobster traps over the side.

The traps which had been stowed on the port side of the well-deck had been laid, and the deck-hand was engaged in working with the traps on the starboard side when the accident occurred.

Each wire lobster trap, which is approximately 1.2 m long and weighted by approximately 25 kg of stone ballast, is tethered to a common 16 mm polypropylene line with approximately 18 to 20 fathoms of line between each trap. Between the last trap of the string (trap No. 8) and the marker buoy, there were approximately 23 to 25 fathoms of similar line which was being deployed in a water depth of approximately 10 fathoms.

The vessel was in the process of laying a string of eight traps. Seven traps and the marker buoy, which was secured at the inboard end of the string, had been thrown into the water. The deck-hand picked up trap No. 8, presumably in an effort to throw it over the side. The owner/operator heard the deck-hand call his name and saw

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<sup>1</sup> All times are ADT (Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) minus three hours) unless otherwise stated.

the deck-hand, sitting on the afterdeck, facing forward, clutching the lobster trap to his chest. As the vessel moved forward, the deck-hand was dragged backward on the afterdeck by the stationary trap attached to the seven traps and the marker buoy already deployed. The owner/operator immediately put the engine astern.

The owner/operator witnessed the deck-hand being dragged aft over the stern and into the water, but apart from taking the way off the vessel, he was unable to assist him. The deck-hand entered the water backward still holding the weighted lobster trap to his chest.

At the time of laying these traps, the vessel was mainly drifting with the tide at a speed over the ground of approximately one knot, while the engine was idling. Although the owner/operator knew that the deck-hand was a non-swimmer, he fully expected him to resurface. There was little wind, calm seas and good visibility.

The owner/operator, using channel 7 on the VHF radiotelephone, called for assistance from other nearby fishing vessels. He then used channel 16 to alert the Marine Communications and Traffic Centre (MCTC) at Charlottetown. The string of eight traps was retrieved from the water, but the body of the deck-hand did not come to the surface.

At 1225, the Fisheries patrol vessel "ARCADIE", which was in the area and had overheard the radio broadcast from the "LUC I", reported a man overboard situation in position 46°44.5'N, 064°41.3'W, to the Rescue Co-ordination Centre (RCC) at Halifax.

At 1235, a Labrador helicopter from 413 Squadron, Canadian Forces Base Summerside, was tasked and was airborne shortly afterward. A Canadian Forces Hercules aircraft which was already airborne at that time and approximately 15 miles away, was also tasked.

Despite the efforts of the searchers from the air, and by other fishing vessels and Canadian Coast Guard vessels, the deck-hand was not found. At 1845, the aircraft search was discontinued, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) assumed responsibility for the search.

The RCMP dive team, assisted by the owner/operator of the "LUC I", located the body of the deck-hand the following day within approximately 15 m of the position originally reported by the owner/operator of the "LUC I".

The deck-hand was wearing high-bib waterproof trousers and steel-toed rubber boots. Reportedly, he had been in good health, and as he had not been working the day before the occurrence, was well rested. He was neither wearing a flotation device nor was he attached to a lifeline.

The coroner confirmed that the cause of death was by drowning. There was no indication that drugs or alcohol were involved.

This was the deck-hand's second season working on the "LUC I", but he had served the previous seven years on other vessels.

The owner/operator had three years' experience being in charge of this and other similar vessels, and approximately a further 10 years' experience on lobster and other types of fishing vessels.

### **Analysis**

The vessel was moving ahead at approximately one knot only, but the drag on the line from the seven traps already laid was considerable.

From the manner in which he was dragged from the vessel, it is likely that the deck-hand was standing in the bight of the line attached to the string of traps.

Apart from the weight of the lobster trap, the deck-hand was further encumbered by his long waterproof trousers and heavy steel-toed boots. Because he was a non-swimmer, the shock of falling into the water under these circumstances may have disoriented him and hindered his ability to free himself once in the water.

It is unknown why the deck-hand threw the end marker buoy over the side before the last trap was set, but it is likely that he miscounted the number of traps laid and thought that the string of eight traps had been deployed.

### **Findings**

1. The deck-hand was dragged into the water by the line joining the lobster traps and the marker buoy.
2. It is likely that he was outboard of the line and in its bight and was unable either to extricate himself from the line or to throw the last trap over the starboard side.
3. The deck-hand, who was a non-swimmer, was neither wearing a flotation device nor was he attached to a lifeline.
4. He was encumbered by his long waterproof trousers and heavy steel-toed boots.
5. The shock of falling into the water may have disoriented the deck-hand and hindered his ability to free himself once in the water.

### **Causes and Contributing Factors**

The deck-hand was likely caught in the line joining the lobster traps and was pulled backward on the afterdeck and over the stern of the

vessel by the considerable force exerted by the seven lobster traps and the marker buoy already deployed.

The deck-hand, who was not wearing any form of flotation device, was encumbered by his inability to swim, his heavy boots and his long waterproof trousers.

*This report concludes the Transportation Safety Board's investigation into this occurrence. Consequently, the Board, consisting of Chairperson Benoît Bouchard and members Maurice Harquail, Charles Simpson, and W.A. Tadros, authorized the release of this report on 19 June 1997.*