

The principal purpose of the Transport Accident Investigation Commission shall be to determine the circumstances and causes of accidents and incidents, with a view to avoiding similar occurrences in the future, rather than to ascribe blame to any person.

GROUNDING COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED

Fishing charter vessel, *Pursuit*, with five passengers and two crew aboard, was lying at anchor when it grounded on rocks close to its anchored position.

In a report on the incident, which occurred at about 1910 on the south-western side of Murimotu Island North Cape, on Sunday April 13, the Transport Accident Investigation Commission identified three safety issues involved.

The issues identified were:

- Selecting a suitable anchoring position in inclement weather.
- The danger of not maintaining an anchor watch during adverse weather, and
- Compliance with manning requirements.

Pursuit, which is owned by White Island Marine Charters, was later towed off the rocks by another vessel. There were no injuries to passengers or crew but *Pursuit* sustained considerable damage to its hull, drive train and steering.

The vessel was anchored during foul weather. After it grounded the Police and New Zealand Rescue Coordination Centre mounted a rescue operation using the Northland Emergency Services Trust helicopter but the helicopter was unable to winch anyone to safety owing to the weather conditions.

At about 0930 on the morning of the incident *Pursuit* left Mangonui on a six day fishing trip and, once clear of the harbour, commenced trolling for marlin. After reviewing weather conditions the previous evening the five passengers, all seasoned fishermen, had elected to head north, shelter behind North Cape and then make for the Three Kings area.

The vessel arrived off North Cape at around 1500 and was anchored at an anchorage known as “under the light” in about 8m of water. They then ran out an amount of anchor line that placed *Pursuit* in about 12m of water with the bow heading north east into the prevailing wind.

Over the next few hours the fishermen relaxed, talked and fished. The skipper and crew regularly checked the vessel’s location on the global positioning system (GPS) and, after it started getting dark, began cooking the evening meal. From that time no one kept an anchor watch. At about 1900, just as the meal was being served, they felt the vessel hit an object. As previously agreed, the skipper moved to the wheelhouse while the crewmember moved forward to stand by the anchor winch.

The crewmember began heaving the anchor and cable in the hope of pulling *Pursuit* off the rocks as the skipper started the engines and put them into gear. On engaging the engines the skipper heard and felt the propellers hitting rocks and stopped them immediately. The complete scope of the rope, chain and anchor was hauled into the boat but *Pursuit* remained aground,



The Pursuit



bow into the rocks.

The skipper then ensured that all passengers and crew were wearing lifejackets and, realising that help could be some time away, decided to increase the draft of the vessel by shifting equipment aft and filling as many aft spaces as possible with water. This was done to prevent the boat being driven further ashore by wind, sea and tide.

At 1905 the skipper realised he could not move the vessel unaided and called the Far North Coastguard Radio requesting immediate assistance. At about 1920, the skipper of *Outer Limits* contacted to advise that he would be leaving to assist from Houhora Harbour and departed about 20 minutes later with one crewmember and two other experienced local boatmen on board. Once clear of Houhora heads they gave an estimated steaming time of three hours.

At about 2120, a rescue helicopter which had been despatched from Whangarei, arrived at the scene but the helicopter crew decided that weather conditions were too extreme to lift anybody off *Pursuit*. The helicopter then left for Kaitaia to wait for the weather to ease. By this time, members of the Kaitaia Police and the Far North St John ambulance service had arrived at Te Paki Field Centre to set up a forward base.

The skipper of *Outer Limits* reported his arrival at 2240 and was preparing to tow *Pursuit* off the rocks. A line was connected and by 2257 *Outer Limits* was ready to take up the strain. The skipper of *Pursuit* then ordered all passengers to the bow while he and his crewmember drained and bailed as much water as they could to lighten the stern. At about 2311 *Pursuit* was pulled free of the rocks. Once clear, but still in the relative shelter of North Cape, the crews of the two vessels rearranged the towline for the tow to Houhora Harbour where they arrived at about 0530 the next day.

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