

Commercial fishing and Maritime Safety Week 2020

News story

Inspector of marine accidents and ex-commercial fisherman Sean Friday shares his views on the challenges facing commercial fishing and his journey to the MAIB.



To mark this year's Maritime Safety Week and the launch of the [Home and Dry Campaign](#) by the Fishing Industry Safety Group, Sean Friday, an inspector of marine accidents for 8 years, talks candidly about his journey to the MAIB and what can be done to make commercial fishing safer.

Tell us about your career to date and your journey to the MAIB?

Although I had always wanted to go to sea, on my father's insistence my career began with an engineering apprenticeship as a civilian in the British Army. With this providing a good grounding I went to sea as a deckhand in the fishing industry and progressed to the role of skipper of one the UK's largest fishing vessels.

In 2006, I decided I needed a new challenge and left the sea for a full-time role with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) delivering safety advice and safety interventions to commercial fishermen.

In 2012, I began as nautical inspector and commercial fishing lead at MAIB and after an intensive two-year training and accreditation period I have investigated many accidents, not just to fishing vessels but also merchant and leisure craft.

What made you want to become an inspector of marine accidents?

In 1986, 3 years before the creation of the MAIB, my father, along

with two of his crew, was lost at sea when his trawler capsized. I remember being frustrated by not knowing how, why or if this could happen again to another fishing crew. From this tragedy I became interested in accident investigation and prevention.

How has your background helped your work as an inspector?

My career at sea and personal experience of what drives fishermen and the reasons why they can be less risk averse gives me a valuable insight. This insight combined with the safety delivery work during my time at the RNLi puts me in an ideal position to be able to understand why accidents happen and develop recommendations to prevent a reoccurrence.

Fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations in the UK, what are the main safety challenges the industry is facing?

The industry has many safety challenges, not least the struggle to recruit, train and retain seafarers. The fishing industry is often seen as a place for itinerant workers and as such training and professionalism sometimes take a back seat.

What can be done to make commercial fishing safer?

Aside from all the good work that the MCA are doing to regulate and raise vessel standards, I believe that if the fishing industry is promoted as an exciting career path and deckhands are developed into conscientious, qualified, and professional skippers then better safety will follow and become ingrained.

What more can be done to change behaviour and ensure that PFDs are worn?

The introduction of the [ILO Work in Fishing Convention 188](#) requires that fishermen wear lifejackets and subsequently we are seeing an increase in wear rates. However, there is no 'quick fix' and all the organisations involved in the Fishing Industry Safety Group (FISG) are determined to keep working hard to change fishermen's behaviour and ensure that we don't continue to lose lives unnecessarily. That's why it is so important that behaviour change campaigns such as the FISG's [Home and Dry campaign](#) target the fishermen and skippers directly to remind them to be safety aware.

Published 7 July 2020